THE DIALECTICAL TRADITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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You have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting your conduct to criticism; but I say that the result will be just the opposite.

- Plato, Apology 39d.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines a specific current of political thought in South Africa, which is sometimes identified - in a way which obscures its character and development - as Afrikaner liberalism. This current of thought has as its core a defence of free speech in its classical, rather than modern liberal, sense as a precondition for a good society, rather than an individual right. The study traces this current from its sources in the uneven development of Western political thought in the 18th and 19th centuries, and through its development in South Africa from the mid-19th century to the present. I argue that this current of thought extends beyond Afrikaner political and intellectual life, that it is best interpreted as a tradition of dialectical thought, and that it represents the most distinctive and enduring form of dialectical thought in South Africa.

In the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions, the central concepts in Western political thought were transformed, and in the process the classical republican idea of freedom - including freedom of speech - as the collective power of an active citizenry was displaced by the liberal idea of freedom as an individual right, which each could choose to exercise or not. By examining the ways in which the legacy of Socrates was re-interpreted in this time, and assimilated into liberal political thought, we can see how the dialectical capacities of that legacy came to be blunted in the process. In the Netherlands, however, the republican legacy of Socrates lived on, and a distinctive dialectical tradition emerged - especially within liberal Protestantism - which had considerable influence on intellectual life in the Cape Colony during the middle decades of the 19th century.

The characteristic ideas and arguments of the dialectical tradition in South Africa emerged in the major intellectual conflict of that time - the so-called 'liberalism struggle' in the Dutch Reformed Church. Theological liberalism had been defeated by the 1870s, and its defeat cleared the way for a more conservative appropriation of the classical legacy - in which leading Cape liberals were prominent. But that legacy also served as a source for a dissenting view of history articulated by individuals of diverse political convictions - J.W.G. van Oordt, Olive Schreiner, Gandhi and others.

This tradition found a more enduring institutional base in the academic discipline of philosophy at Stellenbosch, in the aftermath of the du Plessis case of 1928-32. The Stellenbosch philosophical tradition came to be transformed in the 1940s by a younger generation, largely through the assimilation of themes from Kierkegaard. Its themes were developed further in the work of Johan Degenaar, which led during the years of apartheid conformity to a vigorous critique of dogmatism and a dialectical account of the moral tasks of the individual. Sometime after 1970, however, as the apartheid regime began its attempts at pragmatic reform, this tradition reached the limits of its call for oop gesprek.

Central themes from this tradition were to be re-invented in the dialectical thought of Breyten Breytenbach, after the collapse of his venture into revolutionary politics in 1975, drawing on the dialectical capacities of Western Marxism, but seeking to deploy them in a more open-ended and dialogical way. Breytenbach's project had strong parallels with the work of Richard Turner, the major figure in the assimilation of Western Marxist ideas within the trade union and student movements in South Africa, which are also explored here. The most immediate context in which the future direction of this tradition is being decided is that of the new politics of Afrikaans, which has drawn on the legacy of Afrikaner opposition to apartheid and on Breytenbach's dialectical critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa, but has at the same time failed to develop a collective alternative to the liberal capitalist model of freedom whose dominance threatens cultural and linguistic diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The earliest parts of this study - or at least the earliest in which I can recognise its main themes and argument - were written in 1986, when André du Toit invited me to contribute to a collection of essays to mark the 60th birthday of Johan Degenaar. In the relatively limited time available, I proposed to write an account of Degenaar's early philosophical work, in which I hoped to discover how the Socratic spirit of enquiry had taken root at Stellenbosch, in an apparently hostile climate, while it had proved so vulnerable elsewhere. By the time the collection was ready to go to press, it was clear that this was a larger question than I had anticipated, and I would have to delay completion of this study until another time.

I hope that I have now - fifteen years later - found a large enough context in which to acknowledge my sense of indebtedness to both Johan Degenaar and André du Toit. My debt to them extends back to the early 1970s, when I was an undergraduate at Stellenbosch. Degenaar introduced me to Plato's Apology. Du Toit introduced me to the history of South African political thought and to Hegel's Phenomenology. Recording their endeavours in historical rather than personal terms has helped me realise how fortunate I was to have them as teachers and mentors.

The long delay between my first attempt to grapple with this topic and the completion of this study is partly explained by my move from the University of Stellenbosch, where I taught from 1977 to 1986, to the very different context of the University of the Western Cape. UWC, then under the leadership of Jakes Gerwel, presented absorbing political and intellectual challenges. The work which most occupied me there - especially in the Marxist Theory Seminar from 1988 to 1995 - was aimed at developing a capcity for Marxist analysis, and for dialectical thinking in particular. It does not form part of this study. But it was crucial in forming my belief that a capacity for thinking dialectically is an essential precondition for any body of political thought - and for any political movement - which is capable of imagining a radically different future, and at the same time basing itself on rational argument, open debate and clear analysis rather than dogma or simple rejection of the injustices of the present. For their part in forming the political and theoretical questions which I try to pursue historically here, I am indebted to Fred Hendricks, Jack Lewis, Saliem Patel, Dale Forbes, Yolisa Pikie, Lulama Lobi, Aaron Amaral and many others beside. Among comrades outside of UWC, I am especially aware of my longstanding and ongoing indebtedness to Lungisile Ntsebeza.

I have never thought of the Socratic commitment to critical enquiry and the Marxist commitment to human emancipation as being in opposition to each other. But they came jointly to inform this project through the need to reflect on the political and intellectual reversals of the 1990s. After the decline of the activist culture which had sustained Marxist ideas in South Africa during the 1980s, it seemed necessary to think more historically about the continuity of the dialectical tradition itself, and the conditions in which it could take root.

In writing this thesis, I have been made newly aware of my debt to those who have sustained my sense of the role and necessity of critical thought in the current context. For almost twenty years, Michael Nupen has played a major role in forming my philosophical perspectives, and relating them to political and historical questions. More recently, Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood's work on Western Political thought has been crucial in forming my sense of what is involved in examining the history of political ideas in South

African history. Their visit to South Africa during March 1999, funded by a grant from the Council for Science Development, gave me the opportunity to hear Ellen Wood presenting her work to a range of audiences, and to discuss common interests with both of them.

I have also accumulated debts which are more specific to the writing of this thesis. I am grateful to André du Toit who has been the supervisor of this thesis, and his given advice and solidarity, and the benfit of his remarkable grasp of South African intellectual history.

In 1996-7, I spent four months in the United States, and more briefly in England and the Netherlands, researching the legacy of ancient Greece in the political thought of the modern West. I am grateful to our generous hosts abroad: Jennifer Roberts of the City University of New York, Carol Thomas of the University of Washington in Seattle, Robert Todd of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Mike and Gaelle Graham in London and Suzan Klaver in Utrecht.

I was able to spend a further ten days at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands during April 1998, and am grateful to Robert Ross for getting me access to library and other facilities. I also had the opportunity to discuss my work with colleagues from the Department of Philosophy at Erasmus University at Rotterdam, and am very grateful for the comments and questions of Professor M.J. Petry, Henri Krop and Siebe Thiessen.

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My family have been constantly supportive throughout the many twists and turns of research and writing. My wife, Tana Abrahams, and our son, James, have been essential to this in more ways than I can describe or even remember. My brother Paul and my mother gave me financial assistance at crucial times, which made overseas travel possible in spite of a weakening South African currency.

I am grateful to librarians at the Universities of the Western Cape, Cape Town and Stellenbosch, Washington, Leiden and Utrecht, the South African Library in Cape Town, the Public Libraries of New York and Boston, and the British Library in London. Also, to the editors of the South African Journal of Philosophy, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and the proceedings of the conference of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities, held in Pretoria in May 1997, for permission to include material here which they first published. I have drawn in more incidental ways - indicated in footnotes - on articles which I have published in Theoria, English in Africa, Comment, and Monthly Review, and am grateful to editors who accommodated me in their pages. I am grateful also to the University of the Western Cape, the Mellon University Fellowship, and the van Ewijck Foundation of Cape Town for study-leave and financial support.

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CHAPTER ONE

IS THERE A DIALECTICAL TRADITION IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Dramatis Personae

This study examines a complex continuity in South African political and intellectual life, and is at the same time concerned with the extent to which this continuity is real or significant. The core of this continuity is a defence of active and ongoing discussion - of freedom of speech, in the classical sense - as a precondition for a good society, as distinct from the liberal defence of freedom of speech as an individual right. It has been characterised by a distinctive commitment, in the phrase of Socrates, to `following the argument where it leads' (Pl. Resp. 394d).[1]

To describe this continuity in South Africa, it is necessary to locate it in the development of Western thought during the 18th and 19th centuries. In particular, it is necessary to see how the Socratic commitment to `following the argument where it leads' came to be assimilated into liberalism, in the century or so which separates Voltaire from Mill. This process is traced in Chapter Two below. Once the specific conditions are understood in which made the liberal interpretation of Socrates became possible, we can also see how a second, republican interpretation was developed in the context of Dutch political and intellectual life during the first half of the 19th century. The peculiar character of dialectical thought that resulted in the Netherlands is examined - in the work of Johan Luzac, Paulus van Hemert and the Groningen school of liberal theology - in Chapter Three.

Developments in liberal theology in the Netherlands provide the starting-point for the South African continuity examined here. The configuration of ideas which came to define this continuity emerged in the so-called `liberalism struggle' in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in the Cape Colony. This division within Cape intellectual life became apparent around 1850, as increasing numbers of Cape-born graduates returned from their studies in the Netherlands; and culminated in the DRC Synod of 1862, at which several ministers were removed from their positions. The first major spokesman of theological liberalism at the Cape was Dr A.N.E. Changioun, headmaster and proprietor of the leading local school, elder of the Groote Kerk, and leading opponent of the proposed establishment of the theological seminary at Stellenbosch. But the distinctive continuity I wish to examine emerges more fully only with the establishment of the theological monthly De Onderzoeker, which appeared in Cape Town from 1860 to 1884. After the defeat of the theological `liberals', the main themes of this current were kept alive by a handful of isolated and contrary individuals: the historian J.W.G. van Oordt, the Catholic theologian F.C. Kolbe, more ambiguously Olive Schreiner, and at some remove, M.K. Gandhi. These developments are examined in Chapter Four.

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[1] Plato, The Republic, tr. D. Lee (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974). References to classical texts are given in the body of the text, using the standard abbreviations given in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford, New York, 1996) and the Stephanus page number. When a classical text is quoted or cited for the first time, the translation used is indicated in a footnote.

After the unification of South Africa in 1910, the same characteristic themes re-emerged in the disputes around the theological journal Het Zoeklicht, which led to the removal of its editor, Professor J. du Plessis, from the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch, and then in the academic discipline of philosophy, which expanded rapidly in the 1930s and 40s (Chapter Five). The Stellenbosch tradition itself was transformed by a generation of students - most conspicuously, Daantjie Oosthuizen and James Oglethorpe, but also Johan Degenaar - whose adaptation of existentialism came to maturity around the time of the National Party election victory of 1948 (Chapter Six).

As apartheid's project unfolded, a distinctive critique of dogmatism was most fully developed by Johan Degenaar, in the increasingly hostile environment of apartheid triumphalism in the 1950s and 60s. This critique drew on a project for Afrikaans literary renewal by N.P. van Wyk Louw and others, which had its roots in the Afrikaner nationalism of the 1930s and 40s, but at the same time provided some basis for alternative perspectives. Degenaar's work gave rise to an increasingly explicit politics of oop gesprek (open-ended discussion) articulated in his collaboration with Martin Versfeld and W.A. de Klerk in a joint work, Beweging Uitwaarts, published in 1969 (Chapter Seven).

Although its influence was often felt beyond the limits of white politics, this was always a current of dissent within the racially-defined white ruling class in South Africa. For that reason, its basic thrust was impeded once it became clear - most evidently, after the uprising which began in Soweto in June 1976 - that the fundamental challenge to white rule in South Africa would come not from dissenting intellectuals, but from the oppressed majority. In that sense, its moment of implosion was the disastrous attempt to draw dissenting intellectuals into the politics of revolutionary armed struggle, which ended with the trial and conviction of Breyten Breytenbach in 1975. Some of the characteristic themes of this tradition have become more widespread since then, but in a more diffuse and unfocused form. At the same time, however, there has been a fundamental revival and transmutation of dialectical themes in the work of Breytenbach, in his prison writings and his work since his release from prison in 1982 (Chapter Eight).

In the decades since the 1970s, the continuity of dialectical thinking in South Africa must be assessed within a broader context. Accordingly, this study examines the relation of the tradition examined here to Marxist forms of dialectic in South Africa during the 1970s and 80s. The thought of Richard Turner and the politics of the independent trade unions on the one hand, and Jeremy Cronin and the South African Communist Party on the other, also provide a context in which to assess Breytenbach's interventions in the politics of the new South Africa (Chapter Nine). A preliminary assessment of the prospects of dialectical thinking in South Africa is made on the basis of a discussion of the area of contestation around the status of Afrikaans, which has emerged in the last few years (Chapter Ten).

The continuity of this current is political, I wish to argue, but it often requires a broad sense of the political in order to interpret it in this way. As will be apparent from this brief sketch, at different times it has been most conspicuous in different areas of South African life - in theological controversy, in literary creation and criticism, in academic philosophy and political engagement. The characteristic form of its political engagement has been critique and commentary, rather than ideological mobilisation; its vehicles journals and discussion groups, rather than political organisations and campaigns. It has been concerned with political reflection rather than political action, but also with arguing that political reflection is a necessary condition of autonomous political action.

This, in bare outline, is the continuity which I wish to describe here as the dialectical tradition in South Africa - a tradition of thought, that is, which seeks to follow the movement of contradiction with arguments, ideas and realities, rather than locating itself outside of its object, and holding onto its own presuppositions. The continuity I describe has not always been sufficiently self-aware to be described as a philosophical tradition, in the strict sense, although it is often necessary to see it in that aspect. Its premises are too definite and deliberately-chosen for it to be regarded as no more than an implicit form of consciousness, although those on its margins have probably experienced it in that way. It has often been more clearly identified by its enemies than its friends. It has not been the only mode of dialectical thinking in South Africa. But it is the only continuity sufficiently sustained, sufficiently reflective on its own distinctive premises, and sufficiently embedded in the conditions of our history, to be described as the dialectical tradition in South Africa.

This study is not intended as a complete or exhaustive description of this tradition. Any intellectual tradition must be interpreted in order to be described, and there is almost always room for disagreement about quite where its boundaries are drawn. The interpretation offered here is not arbitrary, and must be tested against the meaning of the texts it analyses, the arguments it traces, the contexts in which they are located. But it would be possible to describe it differently, to choose a somewhat different cast of characters, and given different dimensions to each of their roles. The thought of N.P. van Wyk Louw might have been discussed in greater detail, for example, and that of the Stellenbosch philosophy students of the 1940s in less. Sometimes the choice of focus reflects the accidents of time, curiosity and circumstance. But there are also more deliberate criteria which I have used in the process.

First, I have emphasised the development of philosophical ideas - primarily as they relate to politics and history - rather than political analyses, strategies and the like. Part of the distinctiveness of this tradition is its commitment to philosophical clarity, and its internal continuity is lost from sight if that commitment is not taken seriously. Second, I have sought to show the connections of this tradition with other currents of thought in South Africa. It is a tradition which has most conspicuously been upheld by Dutch-speaking colonists and white Afrikaners, for historical reasons which I try to explain below but not to explore at every turn. Despite the divisions of race and ethnicity which characterise South African political thought, how political ideas often extend across conventional boundaries. Third, I have concentrated relatively more attention on recent - even incomplete - developments within this tradition, rather than on its early beginnings; on its capacities to criticise racial and class domination, rather than its collusion with it. It would have been possible to have told this story as if it ended in 1976, or with the end of apartheid in 1994. I have tried instead to see this tradition not as a chapter which can now be closed, but as a potential resource for our own times, and for times that lie ahead.

Two Traditions in the Politics of Free Speech

The central and defining political concern of this tradition is a specific articulation and defence of the ideals of critical enquiry, rational argument and freedom of speech. These ideals are most often - although not exclusively - associated with liberalism. From Locke's Letter on Toleration to Mill's On Liberty, liberalism has placed freedom of speech at the centre of its politics. It will be useful, then, to contrast its defence of these ideals with the liberal defence

of freedom of speech. Despite the dangers of setting out abstractly what must be developed historically, it is possible to set out twelve related points of difference between the liberal defence of free speech and what I shall call, for the moment, the rival tradition.

(i) The most basic point of difference is that the liberal tradition defends freedom of speech as an individual right, which each individual can choose to exercise or not just as they prefer. Put differently, there is no fundamental contradiction between the liberal state and an apathetic citizenry. Nor is there any violation of freedom of speech, in this liberal sense, if the individual citizen expresses opinions which are insincere, calculated to advance their own interests, or arbitrary. For the rival tradition, in contrast, freedom of speech is a precondition for a good society. Within this perspective, it is the duty of the citizen (or member of another community[2]) to speak their mind freely and honestly, according to their real convictions, without fear of the consequences.

(ii) The liberal defence of free speech treats the beliefs of the individual as if they were external to the self; often, as if they were simply the possession of the individual concerned. The right to freedom of speech is often justified, on these lines, as an extension of the right to property. For this possessive individualist conception of freedom to be made coherent, it is also necessary to think of the self as a fixed point of reference which remains unchanged by new beliefs, acquired as a property owner might acquire new items of property. For the rival tradition, in contrast, beliefs and opinions are not external to the self but constitutive of it. Nor is the self itself a steadily fixed point of reference. Central to the politics of this tradition is a conception of individual identity as constantly in the process of its own formation. It is the task of the citizen (or member of a community) constantly to test and clarify their own beliefs through discussion and engagement with others. Freedom, by implication, comes to exist in this process of self-realisation.

(iii) The liberal defence of free speech is consistently cast in the language of individual rights, and interpreted primarily according to the legal status of these rights. The primary test of the reality of free speech in a given context is the extent to which it is justiciable. Whether individuals speak their minds fully and sincerely or refrain from doing so is a secondary question, if it is a question at all. The rival tradition sometimes draws on the language of rights, but it plays a less central role in its account of free speech. It never equates freedom with statutory enactment of individual rights. There is greater emphasis on the virtues which must be developed in order to speak up in the face of hostility, to engage with the real point made by your interlocutor rather than seek easy victory, and to accept the need to abandon dearly-held beliefs when these cannot be sustained.[3] Often, this emphasis is conceptualised by

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[2] The classical idea of the state as a form of moral community has its roots in Aristotle (e.g., Pol. 1252-3), and is a feature of the rival tradition for most of its history. The focus of this tradition has often been on other forms of community, constituted by religious belief, language and ethnicity, intellectual discipline or political commitment.

[3] On this and other points, the rival tradition shares common ground with what has been described - particularly since the publication of J.G.A. Pocock's The Machiavellian Moment in 1975 - as classical republicanism. However, central features of the republican tradition - for

viewing the question of free speech within the context of acquiring the lewenshouding (attitude to life) appropriate to your context or calling.

(iv) The liberal defence of free speech is characterised by an irreducible instrumentalism. In the extreme case, this takes the form of arguing that a `free market' in ideas will provide greater choice for the consumer, and eliminate less `competitive' ideas.[4] Within a longer historical perspective, John Stuart Mill and others have argued that freedom of speech makes it possible for truth to emerge, and avoids the suppression of views which will later be regarded as true. The argument assumes a consistent historical increase in discoverable truth, and takes consensus as its outcome and hallmark. For the rival tradition, in contrast, free speech, in the fuller sense, is its own reward: the index of ethical growth of the individual or society concerned. This is not to say that the rival tradition is indifferent to the discovery of truth; but its concern with truth is less practical in orientation. The discovery of truth is not linked to the growth of consensus. It does not embrace a purely propositional concept of truth, often holding that truth cannot be possessed but must be lived.

(v) Another way of putting the previous point is to say that the liberal tradition has a narrower, more utilitarian conception of the relationship of theory and practice. Within this conception, theory is `applied' in order to produce measurable, practical results, and a problem is pre-eminently `practical' when it can be measured, and potentially met by a state or other bureaucracy. Within the rival tradition, there is often a more complex and mediated conception of the relationship of theory and practice. The sphere of `practice' is expanded in such a way as to include, and even give a central place to, self-knowledge and moral insight. One expression of this difference is the peculiar institution - belonging distinctly in the rival tradition - of the discussion circle (gesprekskring) which often includes individuals with considerable power to take decisions, without the institution necessarily becoming a lobbying or decision-taking forum.

(vi) The philosophical differences set out above are expressed also in a clear difference in literary style. In the South African context at least, liberalism has often been empirical, even utilitarian, and committed to a broadly positivist conception of the facts. The fact-gathering achievements of the liberal tradition run from the Cape Almanac in the 1820s to the annual Survey of Race Relations which has documented South African society ever more monumentally for more than 50 years.[5] At various points in their history, South African

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example, arguments for citizen militias - have formed part of a conservative ideology of white domination with little in common with the rival tradition. The historical relationship of the rival tradition to classical republicanism is examined in Chapters Two and Three below.

[4] Ronald Coase, `The Market for Goods and the Market for Ideas,' American Economic Review 64:2 (1974), pp. 384-91.

[5] The slogan `forward to freedom with facts and figures' was `not an inaccurate pointer to the mindset of South African liberals' at the time of the establishment of the South African Institute of Race Relations (1929), according to David Welsh, `The Liberal Inheritance,' in R.W. Johnson and D. Welsh, eds., Ironic Victory: Liberalism in Post-Liberation South Africa (Cape Town, Oxford

liberals have valued highly that which is scientific - including a 'scientific native policy'[6]. It has been important for them to demonstrate that their arguments are impartial, and do not depend on subjective or emotional responses. The rival tradition, by contrast, is less concerned to distinguish between the literary and the political. Among its most consistent historical characteristics are a willingness to disregard norms of respectability, a love of irony and allusion, anonymous or pseudonymous publication, an orientation towards speculative philosophies of history rather than empirical social science, and towards dialectical modes of thought.

(vii) In the South African context, liberalism has consistently depended on a relatively linear conception of historical time - a conception of historical time, that is, according to which the new supersedes what went before it; historical advance can be clearly separated from regress, so that one need never be a condition for the other; and the general direction of history is progressive. Historically, South African liberalism has seen freedom in the colonial context as the result of the 'spread of civilisation', and concerned itself with the removal of racial obstacles in the way of the progress of the majority into the institutions representative of this progress.[7] It would be too much to say that the rival tradition has developed a clear alternative to this linear conception of history. But it has constantly questioned the self-evident status of linear concepts of historical time, and related ideas of progress, destiny and the like. On occasion, it has sought to use the linear conception of historical time against the justification of British imperialism. It has sometimes pointed out the contradictory elements in such a conception. In this sense, the rival tradition has consistently moved in the direction of a dialectical philosophy of history, without perhaps ever clearly establishing itself on that ground.

(viii) In the South African context, the liberal tradition has often found its main focus in critique of the existing racial order. But it has taken on the activity of critique with a certain reserve; it has tempered its critique with a concern to be realistic in its demands, constructive in tone and to put forward practical alternatives. Among the most celebrated figures in this tradition are those who have demonstrated their responsibility in holding high governmental or judicial office: John X. Merriman, W.P. Schreiner, Jan Hofmeyr, Chief Justice de Villiers, Chief Justice Rose-Innes. The rival tradition is far more at ease with the role of negation, concerned not with the exercise of state power but with ensuring that power is constantly subjected to critique. Its main figures include no cabinet ministers, members of parliament, party officials, or judges. Instead, poets and philosophers are over-represented in its ranks - those whose occupation requires them to speak in no capacity but their own. The theologians most prominent in it are those who have contested the right of church hierarchies to decide what they should believe.

University Press, 1998), p. 10.

[6] J.D. Rheinallt Jones, 'The Need for a Scientific Basis for South African Native Policy,' South African Journal of Science 23 (1926).

[7] Cf., in particular, Chapter Four below.

(ix) It may seem paradoxical, in the context of this difference in attitude towards critique, to say that the liberal tradition has almost always been more forthright in its political stance - and, in particular, in its opposition to apartheid since 1948. This has helped to strengthen the misleading impression that the rival tradition is, in fact, a timid or ambiguous form of liberalism. But this difference in attitude to the power of a racist and repressive state is in some measure explained by the difference between the two traditions in their attitude to forms of local community (whether religious, linguistic, ethnic or geographical). The liberal tradition has been characterised by an individualism which has often been easily cosmopolitan. In contrast, a crucial part of the rival tradition's conception of free speech is that such local forms of community provide the natural and necessary context for debate, discussion and the contestation of views. It has been far more protective of such local forms of community. In particular, it has been more ambiguous in its relation to Afrikaans language and culture, and to Afrikaner nationalism - an ambiguity which has on occasion, most conspicuously in the case of N.P. van Wyk Louw, become a sacrifice of the critical intellect itself.

(x) All of the differences outlined so far can also be related - although some more directly than others - to the differing social bases on which the two traditions have drawn, and whose interests and vision they have articulated. Trapido has shown how a `small' (peasant-based) liberal tradition existed alongside the `great' tradition of Cape liberalism before 1910.[8] But liberalism has always represented, in important measure, the outlook and interests of the capitalist class. The rival tradition has been largely an ideology of the intellectuals - or, as we shall see, a particular stratum of intellectuals with a less coherent mode of affiliation to capital. It has represented the hope - perhaps I should say, the illusion - that petty bourgeois intellectuals, by exemplifying the commitment to truth and reason, can speak for all classes in society.

(xi) The difference between the two traditions which has stood out most conspicuously in all discussions of the individuals and contexts involved is that of language and what is sometimes described as `nationality'. The liberal tradition in South Africa has been dominated by English-speaking whites; the rival tradition by Dutch- or Afrikaans-speaking whites. Perhaps the one individual who has had a foot in both traditions - Olive Schreiner, writing in the time when the rival tradition was least clearly distinguished from liberalism - did not fit easily into either part of the white population. This difference is related to many of the philosophical, political and social differences outlined above. English-speaking whites have been part of an international, and even global, community of discourse; their interests have been tied to that of a world empire; acceptance of international norms has come easier to them, and often been without significant cost; theological dispute has played a less significant role in the formation of their identity. British intellectual life has been more empirical in temper than the Dutch and German developments on which Afrikaners have drawn; English-speaking South Africans have had a less definite interest in the formation of a literary or philosophical culture in South Africa. Dutch and Afrikaans-speaking whites have both had the opportunity to address and

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[8] Stanley Trapido, `The "Friends of the Natives": Merchants, Peasants and the Ideological and Political Structure of Liberalism in the Cape, 1854-1910,' in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, eds., Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa (London, Longman, 1980), pp. 247-74.

influence a more definite local community, and the temptation to conform to their norms and expectations in doing so. Conformity to the needs of capitalism has been more complicated for them. But none of this is to say that the difference between English and Afrikaans should be taken as the defining feature of these two traditions. The case of Gandhi - failing to fit the racial norms of British imperialism, developing a defence of free speech closer to the rival tradition that to that of liberalism - provides an interesting illustration of the point.

(xii) The liberal tradition in South Africa has been based primarily in the major cities, and especially those with a large English-speaking population: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg. The rival tradition, in contrast, has to a large extent been a regional tradition. For more than a century, its major representatives have had significant links with the Western Cape - not only with Cape Town and Stellenbosch, but also Darling, Hanover, Wellington, Clanwilliam, even Sutherland. These are the oldest urban centres in South Africa - perhaps the only ones whose local networks and customs clearly pre-date capitalism. The links between country and town, in a region where the transition from one to the other has been less abrupt and violent, have also preserved a link between past and present, tradition and modernity.

The contrast between these two traditions is necessarily a somewhat artificial exercise. It may be objected that within the liberal tradition, critical enquiry and rational argument are not in themselves political terms, or not in the same way. For liberals, the freedom of speech is more readily associated with freedom of association, due process and the like. This is a significant difference, but does not prevent the contrast between the rival traditions from being made. Or rather, it can prevent the contrast only if we are willing to accept in advance the liberal conception of the politics of free speech, and use it to disqualify the rival tradition from the sphere of the political.

The contrast sketched here is intended to indicate in what ways the rival tradition is sufficiently coherent, distinctive and enduring to be worthy of historical examination. It is not intended to establish the dialectical character of the rival tradition, although it might indicate - in a preliminary way - the meaning which I wish to attach to that term. The other ways of naming this rival tradition, or important moments of it, must first be examined, before further justifying the way it is to be interpreted here.

The Rival Tradition Interpreted as Afrikaner Liberalism

As far as I know, no attempt has yet been made to describe comprehensively the tradition which I wish to examine here. But many specific moments of what I describe as a relatively continuous tradition have, in fact, been noticed and interpreted in different ways by historians, commentators and those who have defended or attacked it. The most enduring interpretation describes that tradition, or substantial parts of it, as a variant of liberalism.

The starting-point for that interpretation is what became known as the `liberalism struggle' in the DRC in the 1860s. `Liberalism' was a name that came to be widely used during the course of that conflict, but seldom explained. At that time, it was not generally linked to the political ideas of `Cape liberalism', but indicated a specific theological direction.

Several features of the orthodox account of liberalism are already present in the first extensive polemic against it at the Cape, N.J. Hofmeyr's Over het Hedendaagsche Liberalisme

in de Gereformeerde Kerk in Holland (1854). Hofmeyr begins with an account of rationalism as `the unbelief of the 18th century', which has since come to be known by four different names: deism, neology, new light and liberalism. The last of these, he says, `has become general in our century, which boasts more than any other of its freedom and tolerance'. And yet it is a `lie become truth', as this whole revolution of ideas is no more than a `return to heathendom under the beautiful names of enlightenment and progress'. According to Hofmeyr, political rationalism, `the twin brother of religious rationalism', has been discredited by the excesses of the French Revolution, forcing this current into the domain of religion; `alas! the spirit of the century remains rationalist in principle'.[9]

Hofmeyr had reason to be cautious in his use of the term `liberalism'. The central source of confusion in this usage arose from its intention to identify a specific current within contemporary theology while identifying that current with the `spirit of the century' attacked without distinction by Isaac da Costa in his influential Bezwaren tegen den Geest der Eeuw. But the usage became common in the Netherlands, and then at the Cape. Those whom it was used to identify never really accepted it, but also never succeeded in shaking it off.

The editorial of the first issue of De Onderzoeker, the theological monthly that was the major mouthpiece of the `liberal' direction from 1860 to 1884, simply claimed for the `liberals' the mantle of orthodoxy: `Will our religious direction be orthodox or liberal?[10] ... `We treat as orthodox every religious view, every doctrine that corresponds with the Bible, regardless of whether or not that doctrine has already been included in any ecclesiastical confession. Liberal, in our view, is all that is in conflict with the Bible, even if it corresponds to one or other ecclesiastical formulary. Having attached these meanings to the words used in your question, our response to it is that it will be our aim to give our journal an eminently orthodox direction.'[11]

De Onderzoeker subsequently related this inversion of the conventional terms to a point of logic: they rejected the description of themselves as `liberal' because the very division into opposing parties already presupposed an answer to the question which they sought to raise, concerning the extent to which religious truth could be known with certainty. They argued that the orthodox representation of their position `is based solely on what they call our "liberalism", by which they understand: our deviation from their views of Christian truth.' To this, they added their objection to the orthodox party's claim that `even if it is untrue that we support the views attributed to us, there are liberals in the Netherlands, Germany or elsewhere who teach such things, and that all liberalism must arrive at these extremes.'[12]

The term `liberalism' has long been established in the context of the theological conflicts of the 1860s, and it is not my aim to contest its use in that specific context. But the account of liberalism adopted by the orthodox party in the 1860s was to be revived in the 1940s, and

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[9] N.J. Hofmeyr, Over het Hedendaagsche Liberalisme in de Gereformeerde Kerk in Holland (Cape Town, no publisher, 1854), pp. 2-3.

[10] The Dutch words rechtzinnig and vrijzinnig are literally translated as `right-minded' and `free-minded'. But the English terms `orthodox' and `liberal' became established at that time.

[11] `Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 1:1 (January 1860), p. 1.

[12] `Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 4:37 (January 1863), p. 1

extended into a hostile account of an enduring current of Afrikaner thought. The resulting account of liberalism became a crucial part of Afrikaner nationalist ideology.

T.N. Hanekom's Liberale Rigting in Suid-Afrika played a major part in this process. Hanekom argued that the conflicts of the 1860s were not limited to theological issues alone, and tried to convey the scope of the issues involved by insisting on the unity of the diverse phenomena he described as `liberalism'. Liberalism, he says, was a `widely-branched intellectual current which made its influence felt in State and Church, culture and society'.[13] Its `foundations and spiritual mark ... are not to be found in its striving for freedom, but in its rejection of authority'. It is `not a freedom movement, but a revolutionary agitation ... a movement in which man's spirit of freedom has taken a wrong turning' (x-xi).

There is a clear continuity between da Costa's characterisation of the `spirit of the century', the polemics of the orthodox party of the DRC in the 1860s and Hanekom's historical analysis.[14] In each case, all forms of critical enquiry are lumped together into `a common front against the existing order in state, church and society' (189; cf. 58, 64, 163). An attitude of openness to new ideas (vrijzinnigheid), with its roots in pre-capitalist society, is equated with a specific commitment to a political order structured around the protection of individual rights, on the model of the capitalist right to property.[15] But da Costa's catch-all term is now more narrowly specified as `liberalism', the polemical usage of the 1860s is given the status of historical analysis, and where da Costa sought to defend the rights of believers to simple items of faith, Hanekom's account forms part of the Afrikaner nationalist polemic against liberalism as a threat to the existence of the Afrikaner and natural ally of communism. Nor did he allow norms of evidence or logic to stand in his way.

First, this account of liberalism requires Hanekom to view such pillars of respectability as Dr Changuion (for thirty years the proprietor of the Cape Town school at which most of the colonial elite were educated) and T.F. Burgers (DRC minister at Hanover, and later an ineffectual President of the Transvaal Republic) as having a hostility to religion and lust for revolution for which not even the most far-fetched evidence is available. Second, it requires him to discover implausibly political motives for phenomena for which more innocent explanations are easily available. Thus, the threat of Enlightenment and liberalism is discovered in Adam Tas's irregular church attendance (92), the tolerant spirit of ds. Borcherds of Stellenbosch (106; cf. 112, 118, 152), Samuel de Beer's naming his son after Bonaparte (113), horse-races and dancing (132-4), and sarcasm about the 1837 ordinance on Sabbath observance (171). Third, Hanekom constantly has to equivocate on the real meaning of freedom. On the one hand, he regards the call for popular representation of the Patriot movement at the Cape, and the Graaff-Reinet rebellion of 1795, as a sign of `exaggerated

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[13] T.N. Hanekom, Die Liberale Rigting in Suid-Afrika (Stellenbosch, Christen-Studentevereniging, 1951), p. ix; cf .p. 57. Hanekom's preface is dated 1948. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

[14] The line of continuity also runs through A. Dreijer, De Strijd onzer Vaderen tegen het Liberalisme (Cape Town, Jacques Dusseau, 1898), which has a similar ideological tendency to Hanekom's work, but a more modest purpose.

[15] On the distinction between these two meanings of `liberalism', cf. Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London, Fontana, 1976), pp. 148-50.

revolutionary opposition to all authority' (83) dictated by `an American spirit' (89; cf. 124). On the other, he applauds the resistance of humble, uneducated people in the Netherlands to the liberal church (59, 66), and cannot quite make up his mind about whether such people have a right to be heard at the Cape (103, 165).

In a 1965 series of radio talks, Hanekom extended this account of liberalism as a unified outlook in all spheres of life, continuing into the present. These talks relied even more heavily on the discovery of hidden motives: `Liberalism seldom, if ever, sails under its own flag'; instead, its `revolutionary character' must be discerned from such things as `clandestine meetings in the night under the cover of study-groups'.[16] G.D. Scholtz echoes Hanekom in his depiction of liberalism as a `threat to Christendom', but at the same time describes this threat almost entirely in terms of the liberal denial of the `natural order' of the races.[17] In 1977, a collection of essays on Afrikaner-liberalisme sought to counter `a liberal onslaught from the ranks of Afrikaners themselves.' In effect, these essays undid Hanekom's implausible account of liberalism as an alien current within Afrikaner political and intellectual life, turning instead on verligtes within the National Party.[18]

By then, however, Hanekom's theme had also been turned in another political direction. Drawing on the same catch-all conception of liberalism, A.H. Murray argued in 1947 that the Afrikaner's `whole view of life is born out of liberalism,' and sought to dissociate the `traditional liberalism of the Afrikaner' from `the typical 19th century statement that all people must become alike ... the doctrine of the "black European" which has caused so much trouble in South Africa.' Historical liberalism - which Murray traces back to Calvin, and distinguishes from the atomistic liberalism of Hobbes and Locke - `is found in the policy known as segregation or apartheid'.[19] Murray's political writings in this period have a peculiarly rootless and opportunistic quality, always producing glib conceptual resolutions to conflicts whose concrete meaning he skirts over.[20] But his argument was taken up by Johan Degenaar in the 1960s, although without Murray's self-justifying defence of apartheid.

Degenaar responded initially to an attack on liberalism made by B.J. Vorster at the opening of the 1962 academic year at the University of Stellenbosch. Under various

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[16] T.N. Hanekom, Die Liberalisme in Ons Land (Cape Town, SABC, 1965), pp. 3, 16.

[17] G.D. Scholtz, Die Bedreiging van die Liberalisme (Pretoria, Voortrekkerpers, 1965), pp. 73-5.

[18] P.S. Dreyer, ed., Afrikaner-Liberalisme (Pretoria, Boekenhout, 1977), pp. 56-7, cf. 68.

[19] A.H. Murray, `Die Twee Liberalismes,' Die Huisgenoot, 20 June 1947, pp. 15, 68. A much more serious - and ultimately pessimistic - assessment of the dogmatic and humanist strains in Afrikaner intellectual life was made years earlier in N.J. Brümmer, `Afrikaner-Humanisme,' Die Soeklig 13:4 (May 1935), pp. 113-9.

[20] Cf. A.H. Murray, `Wat is Liberalisme?,' Die Huisgenoot 8 May 1953; `Wat is `n Afrikaner?,' Die Huisgenoot 15 April 1957. This mode of political argument by superficial analogy led to disastrous results when Murray, as the state's expert witness on communism during the treason trials of 1956-60, identified extracts from his own writings as those of a Marxist; cf. Stephen Clingman, Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary (Cape Town, David Philip, 1998), pp. 249-51.

pseudonyms, and then finally under his own name, Degenaar conducted a `debate' on the topic in the local weekly newspaper, Eikestadnuus, then edited by W.A. de Klerk. Liberalism, he argues, is `the view of life which takes freedom and autonomy as its point of departure, and defends them against domination by the state, which overestimates itself, the church which indoctrinates and ideology which limits thought through emotion.'[21] He claims Socrates as the founding figure in this tradition.[22] However liberalism is defined, he calls upon the conservative `at least to appreciate it dialectically ... that is, to see that free rebellion against his own conservative standpoint can be essential to give new life and a more realistic character precisely to his own conservatism.'[23]

In an address to the Stellenbosch Debating Society in 1965, Degenaar developed further this interpretation of liberalism as an `attitude of openness towards life' which should not be `ideological or dogmatic'.[24] Whoever accepts liberalism `on ideological grounds', he argues, denies it. `Liberalism rests precisely on your accepting, autonomously and as part of the evolutionary development of your personality, the values of freedom and autonomy as central values of political society' (30). Once again, Socrates is the exemplar of this liberalism (31, 38).[25] In this sense, liberalism is a habit of mind which does not imply support for any policy, and can be cultivated by members of any party (35, 40). He contrasts this with `ideological liberalism ... which does not take the historical growth of situations into account' (35).

This modest defence of liberalism is probably best explained by the violence of the attacks then being directed against unnamed academics at Stellenbosch - among whom Degenaar himself was surely to be counted - `who abuse their position to indoctrinate students in subtle ways in order to create liberal or "thinking" nationalists, who use the lecture-hall as a podium for their perverse ideologies, and who thereby commit treason against their people.'[26] Degenaar himself was to shift his loyalty from this Socratic form of liberalism to a pluralism orientated towards similar values. Liberalism, he was later to argue, `denies that the individual can be autonomous while remaining an Afrikaner'.[27] His own work called upon the `morally critical Afrikaner' to respond to the racial and other dogmas of South African

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[21] Denker [pseud. J.J. Degenaar], `Liberalisme', Eikestadnuus, 2 March 1962.

[22] F.N. [pseud. J.J. Degenaar], `Liberalisme (3),' Eikestadnuus, 16 March 1962.

[23] J.J. Degenaar, `Liberalisme,' Eikestadnuus, 30 March 1962.

[24] J.J. Degenaar, Sekularisasie (Pretoria and Cape Town, Academica, 1967), p. 29. Further references to this address are given in the body of the text.

[25] Degenaar's image of Socrates came closer to conventional liberalism in later years; cf. Ideologies: Ways of Looking at South Africa (Cape Town, UCT Extra-mural Studies, 1983), p. 19.

[26] A.R., `Liberalisme: Die Vyand in Ons Midde,' Die Pieke (publication of the Stellenbosch student branch of the NP) 7:1 (May 1963), p. 1.

[27] J.J. Degenaar, Voortbestaan in Geregtigheid (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980), p. 5.

politics.[28]

The response of the mainstream of South African liberalism has effectively been either to ignore the existence of this rival tradition, or treat it somewhat patronisingly as a more cautious, less articulate version of its own position. Above all, English-speaking liberals (and Marxists) have been prone to hail the `courage' of dissenting Afrikaners in ways that, taken cumulatively, suggest that the moral achievement of breaking the ethnic mould makes it unnecessary to ask about the political ideas which led them to do that.[29] The first attempt by a liberal historian to clarify the relationship of the theological liberalism of the 1860s to liberalism as a political ideology was that of Leo Marquard - the grandson of the editor of De Onderzoeker, and the son of a minister in the DRC.[30] Marquard tried to rescue the liberal politics of the 1960s from the odium of the theological controversies of the 1860s. The theological `liberalism' of that period, he argued, `had practically no political significance', and the term liberaal was better translated as `latitudinarian', that is, `one who, though not a sceptic, regarded creeds and forms as of little or no importance and tolerated free thought on religious matters'.[31] Marquard's claim is not based on any examination of the ideas and arguments of the period. But it has been uncritically accepted by later historians.[32]

If Marquard's argument was to suggest that Afrikaner liberals were as close to the conventional stereotype of Afrikaner religious and social conservatism as any other, then G.H.L. le May's argument in his recent book, The Afrikaners, merely reverses the formula, suggesting that Afrikaners became liberals by becoming English, or at least by becoming well-established within English-language institutions. His prototypes - Jan Hofmeyr, Jr., Professor J.S. Marais of Wits University, and F.S. Malan - are `in the mainstream of the Cape liberal tradition' - quaintly defined as `an attitude which favoured equality in public, if not in private matters'. In le May's account, there remain only two alternatives for Afrikaners, even in the 1990s: either `the old Cape tradition' of liberalism, or `Kruger's insistence on racial

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[28] J.J. Degenaar, Moraliteit en Politiek (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1976) pp. 92-109; J.J. Degenaar, Keuse vir die Afrikaner (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1982), pp. 1-28.

[29] This claim is not easy to document. It is made on the basis of a many cases, none of which demonstrate it decisively when taken on their own. Cf. the discussion of G.H.L. le May's views on Afrikaner liberalism below. A recent and interesting example is Dan O' Meara, Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party 1948-94 (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1996), pp. v-vi, 124-9.

[30] C.C. de Villiers and C. Pama, Geslagsregister van die Ou Kaapse Families (Cape Town and Rotterdam, A.A. Balkema, 1981), vol. 1, p. 539.

[31] Leo Marquard, Liberalism in South Africa (Johannesburg, SA Institute of Race Relations, 1965), p. 20.

[32] E.g., James Leatt, Theo Kneifel and Klaus Nürnberger, eds., Contending Ideologies in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1986), pp. 57-8.

exclusiveness'.[33]

The exception to this pattern is André du Toit's important study of the `Cape Afrikaner's failed liberal moment', which draws a line of continuity from Dutch colonial support for the rule of law, representative government and a relatively inclusive franchise at the Cape, based on a modest property or income qualification, to the theological struggles of the 1860s. Du Toit describes very tellingly how `the battle for public opinion shifted to the realm of education and above all the church', and how liberal discourse `was diverted to a different context'.[34] These continuities were undoubtedly real, but du Toit never questions the actual identity of the liberalism which was at stake in the DRC struggles, nor does he take note of the divisions between the theological liberalism of the period and the better-known `Cape liberalism'.

Once properly examined, the idea of Afrikaner liberalism as a rival tradition to the more individualistic, primarily English-speaking liberal tradition in South Africa does not stand up to scrutiny. Hanekom and his followers rely on an unseen conspiracy, rather than historical evidence, for their account of it. In Murray's case, the defence of Afrikaner liberalism rapidly became a defence of apartheid, and then an exercise in anti-communism. Degenaar's account of `two liberalisms' captures an aspect of the difference between the two traditions (the provisional and open-ended attitude to knowledge and enquiry of the rival tradition, as against the more instrumental relationship of `ideological liberalism'). But his account of ideological liberalism as the corrupted version of true liberalism is as essentialist, and misleading, as the English-speaking historians' version of Afrikaner liberalism as an undeveloped form of their own commitments.

At the same time, there has been a good deal of common ground between liberals in South Africa and what I have described as the rival tradition. There have also been important differences. Many Afrikaner opponents of apartheid have supported liberal positions on racial issues without doing so on liberal grounds. Many of those in the rival tradition were sympathetic to liberalism, often in ways which puzzled them. Van Wyk Louw, for example, describes liberalism as `the demand for justice - economic and social - for the non-white groups in South Africa,' while at the same time warning that liberalism amounts to `national suicide and individual destruction' for Afrikaners.[35] Within the rival tradition, Breytenbach has been most hostile towards liberalism as `the panacea found by Whites who have twinges of doubt and bad conscience ... disdain with a patronising mask', and as `elitism kow-towing

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[33] G.H.L. le May, The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), pp. 6-8, 95, 44, 262.

[34] André du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' Failed Liberal Moment, 1850-70,' in Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick and David Welsh, eds., Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), pp. 36, 48. Du Toit argues that `there is no tradition of Afrikaner liberalism', but that `for a brief period, there were the makings of a definite liberal tendency among Cape Afrikaners' (pp. 35-6).

[35] N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde Prosa vol. 1 (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1986), pp. 503, 505.

before the idea, the chauvinistic altar, of the state'.[36] The rival tradition cannot be described without taking account of this complex and troubled relationship to liberalism. But that is not to say that it is no more than a local or ethnic variant of liberalism.

The Rival Tradition Interpreted as Loyal Resistance

A second interpretation of this rival tradition has focused not so much on the ideas which it stood for, but rather on those which it opposed, and the cultural or ethnic basis from which it did so. This interpretation has been most substantially developed in Hermann Giliomee's article on the theme of `survival in justice' in Afrikaner debates over apartheid. The article treats recent moments in that tradition as instances of loyal resistance or volkskritiek within Afrikaner political and intellectual life.[37]

The central terms which Giliomee uses to describe this tradition - loyal resistance, volkskritiek, survival in justice - are taken from the writings of N.P. van Wyk Louw, whom he treats as its founding figure. But Giliomee's understanding of these terms is heavily influenced by the work of Michael Walzer, who argues that criticism is most effective when practised essentially `from within' by `connected critics' - that is, on the basis of commitments explicitly shared with those who are the object of that criticism.[38]

Walzer's account of social criticism is limited by his consistent focus on its effectiveness. Even his choice of examples suggests that the effective critic is the one whose criticism has come to be seen as legitimate, and who has been recognised in this light. Once the critic has been recognised, and attained a certain eminence, it is then very easy to discover that they share a common identity with those whom they criticise. But at the time they make the criticism, questions of the legitimacy of the criticism and the meaning of the identity to which they appeal are still undecided. Unless the critic is (uselessly) pointing out something with which everyone agrees, their criticism is precisely a contestation of the commitments shared by those who are criticised, the priority they should enjoy over other commitments, and even the existence of the shared identity of those addressed by the critic. In this sense, Walzer's theory is retrospective; it depends on the wisdom of selective and pragmatic hindsight, and can only function once the issues which are undecided in any genuine context of criticism have largely been decided.

This defect undermines Walzer's political purpose, but does not necessarily invalidate his historical analyses. It is to some extent remedied by the comparative nature of the historical

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[36] Breyten Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist (London, Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 74; cf. 355; Breytenbach, End Papers (London, Faber, 1986), p. 228.

[37] Hermann Giliomee, '"Survival in Justice": An Afrikaner Debate over Apartheid,' Comparative Studies in Society and History 36:3 (July 1994), pp. 527-48. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

[38] Michael Walzer, The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century (London, Peter Halban, 1989); cf. Walzer, Interpretation and Social Criticism (Cambridge, Ma.; Harvard University Press, 1987). Giliomee also refers to Gramsci's idea of `national-popular' criticism, but without any serious examination of its meaning in the context of Gramsci's thought.

examples on which he depends. The eleven social critics examined in his Company of Critics are 'connected' by affiliations of ethnicity, nationality, class, vocation, and gender to those they criticise, and Walzer is often aware of their cross-cutting affiliations. But Giliomee narrows the terms of Walzer's argument by specifying in advance that 'connected critics ... speak the language of the cultural group to which they belong, casting the people, their troubles and the possible solution to their troubles, within the framework of a national history and culture' (527). For him, cultural group, people and nation all have the same ethnic boundaries.

This is not to deny the continuities pointed out by Giliomee - from van Wyk Louw to Breytenbach to F.W. de Klerk's decision to negotiate with the ANC. His argument identifies an enduring feature of Afrikaner dissent - the dissent of the andersdenkende (differently-minded), which is made with a claim to common identity - although it does not capture its deliberate and self-conscious character.[39] But a certain amount is lost from sight or distorted by stressing these particular continuities, and by drawing them together around the theme of loyal resistance.

First, while acknowledging the essentially moral thrust of Louw's call for 'survival in justice' rather than mere ethnic survival, Giliomee constantly reduces moral argument to a particular kind of strategy. The challenge of 'exceptional individuals', according to Giliomee, is to reconcile ethnic survival with 'universal values and prevailing international norms' (527). This formulation narrows the range of Louw's moral argument on two counts. For Louw, ethnic survival was not the precondition of moral argument, but an outcome which might or might not be justified by such argument. Giliomee ignores the dialectical turn of Louw's argument that a people could only emerge from this 'dark night of the soul' by resolving 'rather to perish than survive through injustice'.[40] Nor did adherence to 'prevailing international norms' exhaust the possibilities of moral argument for Louw. On the contrary, those norms were themselves subject to moral assessment, and in at least one important context he explicitly defended South African practices against those of contemporary Europe.[41] Giliomee's interpretation constantly depends on a narrower, more instrumental conception of moral argument. Thus, the connected critic is 'someone who exploits their connection to the group'. Without this, 'there is little chance that people will listen to him' (528). Moral argument comes to be assessed in terms of its strategic purchase alone each time Giliomee indicates what Afrikaners 'rightly or wrongly' regard as essential for their survival (534), discovers the 'hard reality' of global reluctance to support minorities (540), or raises the question of why people would listen to criticism which 'single-mindedly focused on what was evil and hateful' (545). This conception of moral argument is designed to exclude any distinctively moral - rather than strategic - norms of right and wrong.

Second, Giliomee deprives Louw's argument of its residually populist, or even democratic, character. He emphasises Louw's concern with the 'creators of culture' who must be persuaded that 'within the fold of the volk there is room for a complete life to be

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[39] The historical meaning of andersdenkende dissent is examined in Chapter Four below.

[40] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 463.

[41] N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde Prosa vol. 2 (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1986), p. 5; Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 13.

lived' (541; cf. 542, 545). But he overlooks Louw's dialectical sense of cultural creation as dependent on popular will and sentiment - the `nameless people on small farms'.[42] Giliomee does this also in interpreting the moral critique of apartheid as the product of the embourgeoisment of the Afrikaner. Only after the Afrikaners `had become a relatively secure middle-class' did `the need for a morally defensible and politically feasible alternative become compelling' (547, cf. 530). Louw's arguments could then be expressed in the idiom of `individual rights and other liberal values' (542). For Louw, in contrast, this process of Afrikaner embourgeoisment was nothing to be celebrated: his contempt for the `cocktail parties and directors' meetings', the `small but advantageous transactions' of this rising class is there for all to see in Nuusberigte: 1956.[43] The moral achievement Giliomee celebrates is, in large measure, the pursuit of a re-defined class interest.

At least as problematic as his rendition of Louw's moral role is Giliomee's mode of locating Breyten Breytenbach within the line of loyal resistance to apartheid. Giliomee argues that Breytenbach emerged from jail in 1982 as `the most radical, vociferous and eloquent critic of the establishment's survival thinking' (543). But to support his claim that Breytenbach `did not become totally alienated', he then quotes his statement from 1972 that he cannot dissociate himself from Afrikanerdom (544). He overlooks Breytenbach's own assertion, after his release from prison, that he is `not an Afrikaner any more'.[44] Breytenbach's position on this question has itself changed over time. But still more seriously, Giliomee's account of the continuity of this line of criticism is also undone by the continuity in Breytenbach's critical role after the end of apartheid.

Giliomee holds that the debate over survival in justice, initiated by these critics, was a `contributing factor' in the demise of apartheid.[45] In this vein, he quotes F.W. de Klerk on the need for a moral basis for government policy (548). If Giliomee is right, then the line of volkskritiek should come to an end at that point. But for Breytenbach, the key turning-point in his political thought was not the end of apartheid, but his experience of prison. Before the end of apartheid, his focus shifted from critique of the apartheid state to the state itself, seen itself as essentially a prison.[46] His treatment of the state has become less tense, less cathartic since his prison memoir, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist. But what changes is the tone rather than the essential argument. There is a sense in which Breytenbach's actual political arguments are most fully developed in the years after 1990, in the form of a critique of the negotiated settlement.

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[42] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 56; cf. Versamelde Prosa, vol. 2, pp. 16-9.

[43] N.P. van Wyk Louw, Versamelde Gedigte (Cape Town, Tafelberg/Human & Rousseau, 1981), pp. 316-9.

[44] B. Breytenbach, `I am not an Afrikaner any more,' Index on Censorship 3:83, pp. 3-6.; this theme is discussed in Neil Lazarus, `Longing, Radicalism, Sentimentality: Reflections on Breyten Breytenbach's A Season in Paradise,' Journal of Southern African Studies 12:2 (April 1986), especially pp. 178-82.

[45] Cf. also Hermann Giliomee, `Surrender without Defeat: Afrikaners and the South African "Miracle",' Daedalus 126:2 (Spring 1997), pp. 113-46, especially 123-5.

[46] E.g., B. Breytenbach, Memory of Snow and of Dust (London, Faber, 1989), p. 71.

The threads of continuity that run from Louw (or earlier) to Breytenbach are not drawn into a final knot by F.W. de Klerk in 1990, as Giliomee suggests. Nor should this be surprising. For the fundamental logic of negotiation is at odds with the most basic assumptions of the tradition to which Giliomee relates it. In the context of negotiation, 'bargaining makes no pretensions to be an objective enquiry into the truth of a matter ... In negotiations, opinion about what is true, or convictions about what is believable, are not centrally at stake, and may even be contravened by a good negotiator ... The objective is always self-interest in "making a good deal".'[47] The rival tradition was often explicitly elitist, but the elite it sought to foster was justified by the search for a universal truth, rather than by the techniques of manipulation. The actual bases of continuity are not to be found in 'connected criticism', nor in the liberal values in which this continuity supposedly finds its culmination.

The Rival Tradition Interpreted as 'Oop Gesprek'

In the South African context, N.P. van Wyk Louw is the archetype of 'connected criticism'. He coined the term 'loyal resistance', and came to embody it as well. That is why he plays the central role in Giliomee's interpretation of the rival tradition. Once this conceptualisation of the rival tradition is called into question, however, it becomes apparent that Louw was in some ways not so much a representative figure for this tradition as one who stands at its borderline.

Since his death in 1970, Louw has almost certainly been the Afrikaner intellectual whose work is most extensively discussed and cited, and whose authority is most widely-acknowledged . This is in some part the result of his considerable literary achievement and his gifts as an essayist and commentator. But it is not easy to say to what extent his legacy is interpreted and claimed on all sides because of the stature of his work, and to what extent the stature of his work is so widely-acknowledged because it lent itself so readily to being claimed on all sides. The process certainly works in both directions. For Afrikaner nationalists, his example demonstrates that even someone of Louw's undogmatic and dissenting turn of mind could stay true to their cause. For critics of Afrikaner nationalism, it demonstrates that even as loyal an Afrikaner as Louw could question the tenets of Afrikaner nationalism.

Although he certainly shares many central concerns and arguments of the rival tradition discussed here, Louw is unlike any other significant figure in it in his sustained - even if critical - support for apartheid. He never broke with Afrikaner nationalism, nor with the idea that Afrikaner identity could only be maintained within the National Party. Even when attacked by Dr Verwoerd in 1966, Louw never questioned the way in which nationalism framed the basic choice for the intellectual: either to be with your people or against them. 'No politician will make me become a Sap,' he responded.[48] In this respect, he cannot be seen as

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[47] Douglas N. Walton, Informal Logic: A Handbook for Critical Argumentation (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 7-8; for the South African parallels, cf. Patti Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa (London, Viking, 1997), pp. 226-32.

[48] J.C. Steyn, van Wyk Louw: 'n Lewensverhaal (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1998), vol. 2, p. 1043. A 'Sap' is a supporter of the South African Party - later the United Party - with a support base dominated by English-speaking whites.

representative of the rival tradition. The massive literature on Louw emphasises either his complicity with apartheid or his dissent from some aspects of it.[49] His thought is deeply ambivalent, however, and elements of complicity and dissent in it are not easily disentangled.

In spite of that ambivalence, there is a central theme in Louw's work which provides, I believe, a more illuminating approach to the continuity examined here: that of oop gesprek (open-ended discussion). To the limited extent that any single theme in this tradition has been made to stand in for the whole of it, this is the theme which has perhaps done so most adequately. A brief examination of its characteristic features might place the ideas emphasised by interpretations of the rival tradition as Afrikaner liberalism or as loyal resistance in a different light.

A commitment to discussion is in itself fairly empty. It can all too easily be a device of rhetoric, or a stalling tactic, and it says nothing about what is to be discussed, or on what basis, if any, discussion might be concluded. And it could quite plausibly be argued that no discussion is, in any case, genuinely and completely 'open-ended'; that its participants necessarily have a point to prove, and that if they did not, no discussion would be sustained for any length. It is easy to see why historians should be reluctant to give any analytical weight to a commitment of this sort. But in the context examined here, it turns out to have characteristics which do not match the picture of it as mere device. And there is a quite specific way in which the historical context of oop gesprek allows for an unusual flexibility in the roles occupied by its participants.

Louw coined the term oop gesprek in introducing his regular column in Die Huisgenoot, which appeared weekly under this title from July 1951 to December 1953, in order to describe what he considered a long-established and enduring cultural practice in South Africa. He contrasted the South African practice with that of contemporary Europe. Such discussion, he writes from the Netherlands, is 'one of South Africa's good things, which one never stops wishing for ... Discussions in which you could talk about everything; where no point of view was too "extreme", where you could approach all possible forms of life - even the strangest - from every angle, and where the discussion still never degenerated into insult, dispute or anger ... Older people here tell of this spirit existing before 1930, or was it before 1914?, the "world of yesterday". Did it make way for war and misery? And did it migrate to South Africa? May it be preserved there ... And may it return again to Europe.'[50]

In a later column, he tells of the frustrating view that it is 'bad manners, in occasional contact with someone who thinks differently, to raise matters which will lead to a difference of opinion.'[51] In a letter, he complained along these lines of this aspect of Dutch life: it was 'as if there is no such thing as two people sitting and talking for an afternoon and an evening (or for

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[49] For Louw's complicity with apartheid, cf. Gerrit Olivier, N.P. van Wyk Louw: Literatuur, Filosofie, Politiek (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1992) and Mark Sanders, '"Problems of Europe": N.P. van Wyk Louw, the Intellectual and Apartheid,' Journal of Southern African Studies 25:4 (December 1999), pp. 607-31; for emphasis on Louw's dissent, cf. Steyn, van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, pp. 639-42, 784-8, 906-8, 953-8, 1074-7.

[50] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 2, pp. 3, 5.

[51] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 415.

both together)'.[52] From the time of his arrival in the Netherlands, his commitment to oop gesprek was consciously contrasted with prevailing convention.

The idea of oop gesprek captures many of the characteristic ways in which the rival tradition stands in contrast with classical liberalism. Louw insists that oop gesprek depends not only on each person honestly setting out their own opinion, but also on their listening carefully to the other, and investigating their own assumptions in the light of the exchange. Its essential features are captured more programmatically in the opening editorial of the journal Standpunte,[53] and again in W.E.G. Louw's Naggesprek, a long poem in memory of his brother. In particular, the poem makes clear that thought is not only to be permitted, but held in `honour and respect ... as long as it is honest'; it acknowledges the violent disruptiveness of new ideas, and treats that as compatible with firm commitment to one's own most fundamental beliefs.[54]

The complex meanings of this idea must be explored not only in the context of Louw's own thought, but also within the larger tradition of which, I wish to argue, it forms a part. Within that tradition, Louw occupies an unusual political position, more closely identified with Afrikaner nationalism than any other of its major figures. At the same time, however, the idea of oop gesprek also implies a potentially radical conception of democracy as `government by persuasion', on the basis of which he argues that there is `very little government conduct that is democratic in the world today'.[55] It is a conception which is also compatible with a more aristocratic tendency, visible in Louw's earlier cultural writings.[56] Whatever its ambiguities, it is clear that Louw's argument for oop gesprek was not specific to liberal opposition to apartheid.

Nor is oop gesprek specific to Afrikaner political and intellectual life, although this is the context which Louw has in mind. Its ideals and arguments, broadly interpreted, bear marked resemblances to other currents of political thought - Gandhi's critique of the claims of the British Empire to uphold norms of `civilisation', the appeals to a pre-colonial democracy by African nationalists, the practices of worker control within the independent trade unions of the 1970s and 80s - which are examined in this study. Some of these also seek to draw on pre-capitalist discursive practices, in real or idealised form, in ways which are similar to Afrikaner nationalism. The trade union democracy of the 1970s was consciously informed by a radical critique of the politics of capitalist societies.[57]

Louw links the idea of oop gesprek to Afrikaner nationalism partly through relatively

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[52] Steyn, van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, p. 620.

[53] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 2, pp. 504-7.

[54] W.E.G. Louw, Naggesprek en Ander Gedigte (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972), p. 14.

[55] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 415-6.

[56] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 80-2.

[57] Gandhi's thought is discussed in Chapter Four below; the African nationalist idea of an indigenous democracy is in Chapter Seven; the philosophical bases of worker control in the independent trade unions in Chapter Nine. In each case it will be apparent that there are widely contrasting political traditions share surprisingly similar assumptions.

unthinking acceptance of the ethnic politics of his time, and partly through a specific conception of the role of language. He argues that language is crucial for the free exchange of opinion, and relates the absence of revolution in English history to the existence of a common language. The good fortune of Afrikaners, in contrast, is that circumstances have forced them to learn other languages, and to be open to the ideas expressed in them.[58] Although he does not take this line of argument very far, it indicates that he was able to see the idea of oop gesprek as the product of certain structural features of Afrikaner intellectual life, rather than being an essential and unchanging attribute of Afrikaner 'nationhood'. It stands in a more complex relationship to Afrikaner identity than is captured in Giliomee's account of 'loyal resistance', or indeed in Louw's own writings.

The idea of oop gesprek is the product of conditions which give rise to an ongoing enquiry about the character of Afrikaner identity, rather than the product of a nationalist response to these conditions after 1902, 1914, 1948 or some other date. The conditions for the idea and practice of oop gesprek were present in the debate about the cultural future of Dutch-speaking colonists even before the emergence of a viable Afrikaner nationalism. The debate itself was premised on the need for a cultural identity to be decided - English, Dutch or Afrikaner; traditional or modern; liberal or conservative - by conscious argument and choice. In a context in which Dutch-speaking colonists could no longer rely on the cultural resources of a distant and declining Netherlands, self-knowledge was a practical and not simply a philosophical imperative.

The space for oop gesprek is kept open to the extent that such an identity can still be chosen. Of course, the question of whether an identity could still be chosen was itself open to dispute. H.F. Verwoerd's attack on Louw in his Republic Day speech of 1966 was concerned with precisely this issue: it was no longer necessary, according to Verwoerd, for Afrikaners to ask 'what is a people?', rather than singing the praises of their people.[59]

The questions of identity which sustained the idea of oop gesprek were inextricably tied to a historical context of racial conquest, dispossession and domination. Differences between liberal and conservative Dutch colonists or Afrikaans-speaking whites were consistently - although not exclusively - cast in terms of the calling and responsibility which followed from their Christianity. For as long as Christianity remained essential to the legitimation of racial domination, the political identity of the Afrikaner could not entirely displace the moral identity of the Christian, and the role of the Christian believer was always potentially separable from that of the Afrikaner nationalist, state official and the like. The kring whose members met for prayer or discussion - in which each was conceived as equal before a power greater than any of them wielded in their official roles - could never be entirely displaced by the hierarchies of institutional power.

This is not to say that oop gesprek was genuinely open-ended, or that any discussion could be. But in the context of racial domination in South Africa, and for as long as the legitimation of racial domination required discourses other than the bureaucratic, individual Afrikaners could not pre-empt discussion by an appeal to bureaucratic necessity. They could be expected to take on the role of willing discussant, 'following the argument where it leads', even if this caused them deep discomfort. To refuse that role would be to refuse the

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[58] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 416-7.

[59] Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, pp. 1034-45.

discursive context essential to the legitimation of domination. For as long as racial domination could not be justified on purely pragmatic grounds, there was no certain way of limiting discussion to the pragmatic questions of ensuring its continuation.[60]

To this picture other elements might be added: the habits of protracted conversation in rural life, where long distances must be travelled and small talk cannot be resumed in the encounters which make up daily life in the city; the isolation of South African students abroad, never quite able to take on the identity of their host country; the rural roots of an intelligentsia which, particularly in the Western Cape, retained its real and imaginative links with the land even after moving to the cities; the huge quantities of alcohol which lubricated the all-night conversations of that intelligentsia.[61] In these ways also, the capacity for dialectic comes about.

Socratic Dialectic and the Dialectical Tradition in South Africa

In what sense can the mode of thought captured in Louw's idea of oop gesprek be seen as dialectical? If it is to be seen as dialectical, then it is dialectical in a sense which owes more to Socrates than to Hegel and Marx. It treats the process of open-ended discussion and debate, and critical reflection on basic moral assumptions, as vital to the well-being of society. It seeks to promote this process in such a way as to enable people to hold clear, consistent and rationally-defensible moral beliefs, to realise a self for which it would be 'better that the mass of mankind should disagree with me and contradict me than that I, a single individual, should be out of harmony with myself' (Pl. Grg. 482B[62]; cf. Resp. 443E), and a society based on deliberation informed by that aspiration. In short, it takes seriously the Socratic dictum that an unexamined life is not worth living (Pl. Ap. 38A).[63]

This tradition reflects also the tensions and contradictions of Socrates: the 'naive' failure to suspend moral questions when they conflict with the needs of the system; scepticism about politics and the professionalised hypocrisy of politicians; the ambiguous temptation to believe, with Plato, that 'there is no existing form of society good enough for the philosophic nature'

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[60] The argument that Afrikaner nationalist ideology is essentially pragmatic was first developed in Heribert Adam, Modernizing Racial Domination (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971). This pragmatism was closely linked to the changing class character of Afrikaner nationalism. Its implication was that, once the pragmatic grounds for apartheid were exhausted, Afrikaner nationalists would reconsider their racial ideology.

[61] In these material respects, there are considerable parallels between Afrikaner intellectual life before the mid-20th century and the vivid portrayals of 'those interminable arguments of which only Russians are capable' in such Russian novels as Turgenev's Home of the Gentry (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970); cf. p. 102.

[62] Plato, Gorgias, tr. W. Hamilton (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971).

[63] Plato, The Last Days of Socrates, tr. H. Tredennick (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969). The debate about which version of Socrates is historically most accurate is of little relevance to my argument. The fullest argument for accepting the version of Plato's early dialogues, without entirely rejecting the testimony of Xenophon, Aristotle and Aristophanes is Gregory Vlastos, Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 45-106.

(Resp. 497b; cf. Grg. 521D; Ap. 31D).

Nor are these parallels unconscious or accidental. The figure of Socrates occupies a central place in this tradition. Not all of its main representatives have drawn on the legacy of Socrates. They have often, but not always, praised Socrates. They have sometimes, but not often, developed scholarly interpretations of his life and work. The most conspicuous exception to this rule is Breyten Breytenbach. But many of the central themes of Socratic argument are developed in Breytenbach's work, and attributed to other ancient pasts - in China or Africa. Breytenbach's idea of dialectic is more consciously historical, and provides a crucial test for the capacity of this tradition to overcome the limits of Socratic dialectic.[64]

But the limitations of Socratic dialectic should not cause us to lose sight of the ways in which it provides the foundation for the historical dialectic of Hegel and Marx.[65] The method of Socrates was dialectical in at least three senses which are essential for any form of dialectical thinking. First, Socratic dialectic is a form of immanent critique - that is, it proceeds by questioning an interlocutor, discovering the contradictions involved in their beliefs, and enabling them to overcome those contradictions through a revision of their earlier beliefs. Second, Socratic dialectic is a form of determinate negation - that is, its discovery of contradiction is never an obstacle to enquiry, but rather a way of focussing it more sharply, and establishing what direction it must take. Third, Socratic dialectic is a form of rational historical agency - that is, it seeks to make the active exercise of human reason the basis for a social order which reflects the conscious and considered purposes of its members.[66]

The fundamental limitation of Socratic dialectic is that it is unable to locate the contradictions it discovers in any historical process. The historical dialectic of Hegel and Marx is founded on its recognition that contradiction occurs not only in thought, but also in reality. There is considerable disagreement among those who seek to grasp the dialectical movement of history about the character of its contradictions, the degree to which their movements conform to `laws', and much else besides. These disagreements often come to be reinforced by political and ideological divisions.[67] In the process of defending specific models of dialectic as `correct', it is all too easy to lose sight of the larger continuity of the dialectical tradition.

To speak of the continuity examined here as the dialectical tradition in South Africa is a kind of shorthand for an argument to be developed in the remaining chapters of this study. It is not to claim that it conforms to a `correct' model of what dialectical thought should be. That which is dialectical is, in any case, distinguished - in Brecht's words - by being `always

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[64] As far as I am aware, there is only one invocation of Socrates in Breytenbach's writings: his dying words, as recounted in Plato's Phaedo, are repeated (as the culmination of a `useless dream') in Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een) (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1987), p. 184. The context of Breytenbach's shift of interest from the classical Mediterranean to Chinese antiquity is described in Chapter Eight below.

[65] Cf. Andrew Nash, `Method and Object in Dialectical Thought,' Comment 20 (Summer 1996), pp. 33-51.

[66] A clear and generally reliable account is given in Richard Robinson, Plato's Earlier Dialectic (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1941).

[67] Cf. Chapters Eight and Nine below.

more lively, more diverse, more naive' than thought which conforms to an abstract model.[68] Nor is to claim that all forms of dialectical thinking which have occurred in South Africa can be subsumed within it. To speak of this continuity as the dialectical tradition is, first of all, to say that other ways of describing the same continuity - such as those examined in this chapter - are less adequate.

To speak of it in this way is, secondly, to place on an historical rather than ideological footing the question of the historical character of dialectical thinking in South Africa. It is to raise historical questions not only about the development of conceptions of dialectic - often incomplete or inconsistent - but also about their relations with other currents of thought, their social bases, and their capacity to interpret their own times. It is to refuse to take at face-value the abstract models of dialectic, and to take account of their location in the concrete processes of history. For when we examine more fully the relationship of this tradition to other forms of dialectic in South Africa - above all, those informed by Marxism - we find that they are closer to each other than the abstract models would lead us to expect.

Taken as a whole, the tradition examined here is as much an anomaly as the idea of oop gesprek: a conversational mode of dialectic developing in an age of historical awareness; a moral reflection on virtue, in an age in which virtue is no longer the central moral category; a dialectical tradition which never develops a systematic conception of dialectic; a tradition defined by its political engagement, which always keeps its distance from politics. This uncertain political identity - located always on the borderline of the political - is perhaps one reason why this tradition has been able to endure through so many political and ideological developments, each with its own very different demands and idioms, while other forms of dialectic have proved less enduring in South Africa.

To describe it as the dialectical tradition is as much a term of blame as of praise, as much a recognition of what dialectical thought has failed to do, as what it has done. A living practice of dialectic can only develop on the foundation of a clear assessment of the resources at its disposal. But it is an old dialectical insight that, by becoming aware of our limitations, we are already beginning the process of overcoming them.

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[68] Manfred Wekwerth, 'Discovering an Aesthetic Category,' in Hubert Witt, ed., Brecht as They Knew Him (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), p. 145.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCRATES, FREE SPEECH AND LIBERALISM

The Two Legacies of Socrates

The tradition examined in this study is dialectical in a sense which owes more to Socrates, than to Hegel and Marx. It is concerned with keeping open discursive space for the movement and collision of ideas and arguments, rather than locating them within a larger historical process, or examining the movement of that process. It looks back to an ancient past, rather than foretelling the future. On the face of it, the existence of such a tradition in the modern world is an anomaly, in need of explanation. It is in conflict with our conception of dialectic, which is primarily associated with the legacy of Hegel, and above all of Marxism. It is in conflict with our conception of politics, which has at its core power and persuasion rather than virtue or self-knowledge.

We tend to assume that more recent forms of thought supersede what went before them, and that the processes of modernisation are even and ineluctable. In this case, at least, these assumptions are misleading. The legacy of Socratic dialectic was kept alive and developed in a distinctive way in South Africa at a time when that legacy had been effectively assimilated into liberalism in many other contexts. This was not because South African intellectual life lagged behind a supposedly universal trajectory, but rather because the uneven development of Western political thought made various, and conflicting, paths of development possible.

Above all, the political thought of the modern West was shaped by capitalism. Concepts drawn from ancient Greece and Rome - freedom, democracy, property, the state, politics itself - came to be given a new meaning in the century or so from about 1750 to 1850. Before that, political concepts had been re-interpreted in philosophical texts. In that time, their new meanings came to be embodied in the social relations of the capitalist West. Benjamin Constant's famous address of 1819 set out the basic contrast between ancient and modern ideas of freedom, which was at the heart of that transformation: `We can no longer enjoy the liberty of the ancients, which consisted in an active and constant participation in collective power. Our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence.'[1]

The writings of Gordon Wood, J.G.A. Pocock and others have given historians a new awareness of how recent the transition from the classical republican to the modern liberal idea of freedom has been.[2] According to their argument, the retreat -during the 1780s - from the

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[1] Biancamaria Fontana, ed., Benjamin Constant: Political Writings (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 316.

[2] Gordon Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1969); J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1975). For an overview of the resulting literature, cf. Daniel T. Rodgers, `Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,' Journal of American History 79:1 (June 1992), pp. 11-38.

principles of the American Revolution 'represented the end of classical politics'.[3] But they have implicitly gone along with Constant's sense that the liberty of the ancients - however memorable or stirring - has been superseded, and can no longer be recreated in the modern world. The weakness of this assumption is made apparent, however, by the historical work of Ellen Meiksins Wood, who has located this transformation of political meaning within the historically specific context of capitalism, and thereby shown its historical ambiguity.

Wood explains how 'capitalism, by shifting the locus of power from lordship to property, made civic status less salient' in a social order in which extra-economic coercion was no longer the basis of exploitation. Where classical republicanism had proposed 'an active but exclusive citizen body', capitalist or liberal democracy could 'permit the extension of citizenship by restricting its powers'. Once political power was no longer a necessary means of exploitation, the political sphere could be democratised without endangering class inequality. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, 'the framers of the Constitution embarked on the first experiment in designing a set of political institutions that would both embody and at the same time curtail popular power'. Capitalism made possible the redefinition of democracy and freedom, and their 'reduction to liberalism', in which 'the whole new sphere of domination and coercion created by capitalism' was left untouched.[4]

This transition from classical republicanism to liberalism transformed every sphere of Western political and moral thought. Where republicanism had conceived of human life as essentially located in a community and deriving its meaning from the community, liberalism introduced an atomistic conception of the individual as sole proprietor of the self. Where republicanism required a shared sense of historical purpose for the exercise of freedom, liberalism gave priority to the infinitely changeable purposes of the individual. Where republicanism openly acknowledged the class basis of the state, and defended it on the grounds of the virtues of the ruling-class, liberalism disguised its own class basis and removed the need for its moral justification. Where republicanism placed limits on the material inequality which could be endured, liberalism treated the right to property as if it had no limit. For Machiavelli, those 'called gentlemen who live idly in abundance from the returns of their possessions' are 'pernicious in every republic', so that 'he who wishes to make a republic where there are very many gentlemen cannot do it unless he first eliminates all of them'.[5] For liberalism, it was the first duty of the state to protect property. This transformation of political meaning legitimated and naturalised capitalist state power.

This transformation could not have been completed if it had not included the concept of freedom of speech, which occupies so central a place in modern liberalism.[6] And the liberal

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[3] Martin Thom, Republics, Nations and Tribes (London, Verso, 1995), p. 326, n. 64.

[4] Ellen Meiksins Wood, Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 208, 214, 234. For a more extensive account of Wood's work, cf. Andrew Nash, 'Ellen Meiksins Wood's Re-interpretation of the History of Political Thought,' Theoria 91 (June 1998), pp. 34-44.

[5] Niccolo Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, tr. H. Mansfield and N. Tarcov (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 111-2.

[6] 'Freedom of speech' or 'free speech' is not used here to exclude the many cognate terms - freedom of enquiry, or thought, or conscience, intellectual freedom, press freedom, and others.

concept of free speech could not have been made credible while Socrates remained the symbol of commitment to a fundamentally different conception of free speech. In some respects, Socrates symbolised the freedom of the moderns even before the transformation of classical political concepts had taken place. In Diderot's account, for instance, it was Socrates who upheld the principle responsible for the overthrow of ancient ties of custom: `that the actions of men were not good because they pleased the gods, but pleasing to the gods because they were good.'[7] The modernity of Socrates is in part the product of his ambiguous relation to his own time; but it is in part also a modern creation, and a stage in the making of the modern world.

Our contemporary image of Socrates was formed, in its main outlines, by about 1850. In the writings of Grote, Zeller and even Kierkegaard, we recognise at least four features of it which would not have been discernible a century or even a half-century before. First, Socrates is seen as distinctively Greek, and an integral product of the Athenian polis. Second, he is primarily a philosopher, rather than a moralist or a religious teacher. Third, his philosophy is characterised by its distinctive method of enquiry, involving irony and dialectic, rather than by its metaphysical doctrines. Fourth, he is most fully portrayed by Plato in his early and middle dialogues, rather than by Xenophon, Cicero or other ancient writers.[8]

These features did not establish themselves all at once. But they were most decisively integrated into a single image in the 68th chapter of George Grote's History of Greece, which appeared in the eighth volume of that work in 1850.[9] That image was most fully assimilated into modern liberalism in John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, published in 1859.

The political inspiration of ancient Greek studies in Britain after the American Revolution in 1776 has been widely recognised.[10] The pioneering work of William Mitford and John Gillies sought to prove the folly of the American (and later, French) experiment

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[7] J.H. Mason and R. Wokler, eds., Denis Diderot: Political Writings (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 211.

[8] Grote's History of Greece was first published in 12 volumes in 1846-56. In this chapter, it is cited in the ten volume edition of 1888. Zeller's Philosophie der Griechen was first published in three volumes in 1844-52; his Socrates and the Socratic School (1877) is a translation of part of that work. Kierkegaard's Concept of Irony, with constant reference to Socrates was first published as an M.A. thesis in Copenhagen in 1841.

[9] Frank M. Turner, The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 283-94; Kyriacos Demetriou, `Grote on Socrates,' Dialogos 3 (1996), pp. 36-43.

[10] Cf. Kyriacos Demetriou, `In Defence of the British Constitution: Theoretical Implications of the Debate over Athenian Democracy, 1770-1850,' History of Political Thought 17 (1996), pp. 280-97; Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, Athens on Trial (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 238-46; Momigliano, `George Grote and the Study of Greek History,' in G.W. Bowersock and T.J. Cornell, eds., A.D. Momigliano: Studies on Modern Scholarship (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994).

with democracy on the basis of the `ancient barbarities' of their Athenian forerunners.[11] Grote's work was intended as a response to Mitford and a rehabilitation of Athenian democracy. This rehabilitation was at the same time part of a larger re-interpretation of the meaning of democracy, and the idea of freedom which it embodied.

The new interpretation of Socrates, which took shape in the writings of Grote and Mill, gave new content to his emblematic status as a martyr in the cause of freedom of speech. The legacy of Socrates was transformed in such a way as to reconcile his martyrdom with a distinctively modern conception of free speech which would have been unintelligible to him. The re-interpretation of Socrates was an essential moment in the process in which the classical idea of free speech as a way of life embedded in a concrete community and sustained by the virtues of its members, was displaced by the liberal idea of free speech as an abstract and formal right to which anyone and no-one might appeal, and which serves essentially as an extension of the right to property.

Once we see how specific were the conditions which made possible this liberal appropriation of Socrates, we can also see how it has happened that an older Socratic legacy was displaced, in which Socrates was the exemplar of the classical republican virtues. But this republican legacy was not transformed all at once, nor through a linear process of intellectual advance. In particular, it took different forms in different national contexts, in which the larger transformation of political meaning was contested.

This republican image endured and was developed, above all, in the political and intellectual life of the Netherlands, for reasons described in Chapter Three. In that context, the republican interpretation of Socrates became increasingly well-defined at precisely the point at which the rise of Britain and France to global power ensured the end of classical republicanism as a real alternative to liberal capitalism. In time, the distinctive features of Dutch republicanism were hidden from sight, or absorbed into less overtly political domains of philosophy and theology. But they provided an enduring framework of thought for Dutch colonists at the Cape. In the peculiar conditions of colonial intellectual life in South Africa, this other legacy remained distinct from liberalism and provided the foundation for a distinctive tradition of dialectical thought.

Free Speech Ancient and Modern

The distinction between free and unfree speech dates back to classical Athens.[12] The freedom of the Athenians to speak their minds is praised by Aeschylus (Pers. 591-4), Euripides (Hipp. 421-3; Supp. 438-42), Pericles (Thuc. 2.40) and Demosthenes (fr. 226D), and acknowledged, with mixed sentiments, by Plato (Grg. 461E) and Aristotle (Eth. Nic. 1124B). But the idea of free speech was never explicitly theorised in ancient political thought, and it was never upheld as a universal right. In the Athenian democracy, the freedom of citizens to speak in

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[11] Momigliano, `George Grote and the Study of Greek History,' p. 17; on Mitford, cf. Roberts, Athens on Trial, pp. 231-4; Ellen Meiksins Wood, Peasant-Citizen and Slave (London, Verso, 1988), pp. 10-16.

[12] A. D. Momigliano, `Freedom of Speech in Antiquity,' in P. Wiener, ed., Dictionary of the History of Ideas (New York, Scribner, 1973). References to secondary literature in this section are not intended to be exhaustive.

the Assembly was not conceived separately from their freedom to govern themselves, and was no more conspicuous in their imaginations than the frankness with which they spoke (parrhesia) or the equality with which their opinions were considered (isegoria). In Rome, free speech was tied to the larger ideal of the autonomy of the republican citizen. In imperial times, its significance declined until allowing poets or historians to criticise the Emperor sometimes became little more than a stratagem for avoiding unseemly pettiness.[13]

In the ancient context, praise for free speech did not imply the existence of a right to speak without fear of consequences. On the contrary, the distinctive feature of the ancient conception was its acceptance of the unavoidable risks of free speech. Such practices as ostracism and the graphe paranomon make it clear that in the context of classical Athens, at least, there was no contradiction between praising the city for its freedom of speech and accepting that speaking your mind could have the most serious consequences. A city praised for its free speech was praised not for its protection of an individual right, but for its promotion of a way of life which developed among its citizens the virtues which enabled them to accept the risks of free speech: above all, courage, wisdom, moderation, justice.

Suppression of dissenting opinion is sometimes treated in modern times as if it was a survival from an earlier age. On the contrary, it is in many respects a response to distinctively modern conditions. There are three historical developments which gave the question of free speech its relatively independent significance in modern political thought. First, new divisions within European intellectual life represented by the Reformation and the emergence of humanist and scientific world-views threatened the established sources of political and economic power. Second, the technology of printing and the rise of vernacular languages made the dissemination of arguments and opinions possible on an unprecedented scale. Third, the growth of cities, the development of urban culture, and the emergence of a stratum of intellectuals independent of church and state meant that traditional controls of heterodox opinion were less effective.[14] New ideas, new technology and new intellectuals threatened not only established opinions, but ultimately the forms of property which they helped to keep in place.

For roughly three centuries - from the Spanish Inquisition in 1480 until the American and French Revolutions - harsh punishments were enacted and imposed for unlicensed printing, blasphemous opinion and seditious utterances in Europe and in colonial America. By the end of the 18th century, the tide had turned; the prosecution of the English printers of Paine's Age of Reason in 1794 came after 25 years of turning a blind eye to deism.[15] In 1812, the death penalty for unlicensed printing was revoked in Spain.[16]

In these centuries, the problem of free speech began to be defined in different terms.

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[13] Cf. L. Robinson, Freedom of Speech in the Roman Republic (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1937); G.J. Patterson, Free Speech and a Free Press (Boston, Little, Brown, 1939), pp. 17-8.

[14] Cf. Robert Mandrou, From Humanism to Science, 1480-1700 (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978).

[15] Leonard Levy, Blasphemy: Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 330-6.

[16] Patterson, Free Speech and a Free Press, p. 22.

Machiavelli argued that individuals should be free to accuse their fellow-citizens in a republic, but still held that calumnies were to be punished. His reluctance to think of this freedom as an individual right is indicated by the way in which he distinguished calumnies from accusations, on the basis of the adequacy or inadequacy of the evidence for them.[17] This means that the right to make the accusation can only be decided after the evidence for it has been tested, and affords no protection until the point when it is no longer necessary. Machiavelli, and the republican tradition more generally, never gave individual rights - including the right of property - priority over the good of the whole republic.[18]

There are new emphases in Bacon's defence of intellectual freedom, although it remains limited to a defence of the cause of learning. But it is only in the work of Milton, and then Spinoza and Locke, that the characteristically modern attempt is made to justify it in its own terms. The contest over property is at the heart of the modern argument about free speech.

Milton's Areopagitica (1644), for example, puts forward an idea that is implicit in classical thought, but which is never defended in quite the same terms: the idea of truth as a living process, rather than something which can be possessed. He writes: `Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolised and traded in by tickets and statutes and standards. We must not think to make a staple commodity of all the knowledge in the land, to mark and license it like our broadcloth and our woolpacks'. The licensing of books, he argues, will `bring a famine to our minds again, when we shall know nothing but what is measured to us by their bushel'.[19]

But there is an ambiguity to this contrast which is already evident in Milton. It is not clear whether his defence of free speech rejects the idea of truth as property, or only that of truth as the kind of property which may remain idly in its owner's possession - i.e., feudal or pre-capitalist property. This ambiguity is apparent in a metaphor which points towards the second interpretation: he describes `the incredible loss and detriment that this plot of licensing puts us to; more than if some enemy at sea should stop up all our havens and ports and creeks, it hinders and retards the importation of our richest merchandise, Truth'.[20]

The question of whether truth can be anyone's property (or possession, or monopoly) is crucial for the development of the distinctively modern problem of free speech after Milton. For Spinoza, the defence of free speech turns on whether one can cede or transfer reason and judgement in the same way that, in forming a state, the right of free action is ceded. In the work of Locke, the entire question of freedom comes to be tied up with the disposal of property - including your person, your conscience and your salvation. `Unlike Milton', says Cranston, `who called for liberty in the name of liberty, Locke was content to ask for liberty in the name of trade; and unlike Milton, he achieved his end.'[21] Insofar as speech is seen as a kind of property, the problem of free speech comes to be interpreted as one of providing

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[17] Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, pp. 23-8.

[18] E.g., Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, pp. 79, 111-2, 130.

[19] John Milton, Areopagitica, ed. J. Suffolk (London, University Tutorial Press, 1968), pp. 96, 124.

[20] Milton, Areopagitica, p. 110.

[21] Maurice Cranston, John Locke: A Biography (London, Longmans, 1957), p. 387.

security for it, in the same way that the state protects the right of property.

Free speech was linked to the rights of property by liberals and republicans alike, although they held different conceptions of the moral and political significance of property. But for both currents of thought, freedom of speech, as argued in Cato's Letters, 'is so essential to free government that the security of property and the freedom of speech always go together; and in those wretched countries where a man cannot call his tongue his own, he can scarce call anything else his own'.[22]

For as long as the defence of free speech was primarily concerned with laws prohibiting unlicensed publishing, or prior censorship in other forms, the republican and liberal traditions were not clearly distinct. What republicans and liberals had in common was opposition to the political domination of those pre-capitalist forms of property which depended on restrictions on religious and scientific opinion for its maintenance. But they differed in their assessment of the role of free speech in a society in which feudal power had been overcome. Each of them saw it as essential to the ordering of a free society, but the republicans saw that freedom as dependent on civic virtue, and liberals as dependent on the market.

Defenders of free speech - republican and liberal alike - admired Socrates for speaking his mind in defiance of Athenian convention, insisting that he would continue to do so regardless of consequences, and then paying the ultimate price for that stand. His martyrdom was given force by his moral and intellectual eminence. By invoking his name, they gave their cause an ancient and illustrious ancestry. His insistence on the incomplete character of human knowledge, his claim to 'know that he did not know', made him attractive in other ways as well: it could easily be seen as a premonition of the progress in knowledge which lay ahead, leading either to Christian revelation, civic virtue or scientific truth.

In this way, Socrates provided a crucial bridge between the ancient and modern ideas of free speech. It is not difficult to understand why in the 18th century Enlightenment - a context in which freedom of speech became central to political thought - Socrates was a figure of intense significance.

The Enlightenment Image of Socrates and its Contradictions

It was perhaps unavoidable that an age that had such need for Socrates would project its own hopes and illusions onto him, and produce an image of him which was abstract and often contradictory. Socrates was the token of the Enlightenment's modernity: its determination to question everything, and to disregard established authority and convention.[23] But the image of Socrates which emerged in the Enlightenment was in many ways pre-modern, and probably less easily recognisable to us today than that of Montaigne or Milton, say.

Voltaire's preface to his play on Socrates, which he claims to have adapted from a draft

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[22] J. Trenchard and T. Gordon, Cato's Letters: Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects (New York, Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 96. For an illuminating account - focused mainly on Locke - of the way in which capitalist property relations transformed Western political thought, cf. Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, A Trumpet of Sedition: Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism, 1509-1688 (London, Pluto Press, 1997), pp. 123-34.

[23] Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 81-2.

of Joseph Addison, provides a brief account of the needs which he met: `The famous Mr Addison was a long time in doubt as to whether he should make Socrates or Cato the subject of his tragedy ... Addison considered Cato as the victim of liberty and Socrates as the martyr of wisdom.' As `the subject of a dramatic piece should always be the reigning vice or foible of the nation where it is represented,' Addison had decided to write about Cato. In a context of religious persecution, Voltaire argues, Socrates becomes topical as the victim of such persecution himself.[24] Some writers were even more open about constructing the figure of Socrates to suit their needs: the author of a dramatic poem on Socrates announced in his preface that he has `avoided looking into either Plato or Xenophon, lest peradventure I should adopt when it was wholly my desire to invent'.[25] As a consequence, his invention was an adoption from this own time, instead of that of Socrates.

This conception of Socrates as a martyr for his religious beliefs raises the question of how those beliefs came to be seen. Since late antiquity, this had been a disputed question among Christian theologians. Some saw Socrates as faithful to the gods of ancient Greece; others as a monotheist announcing a proto-Christian doctrine to a world not yet ready to receive it.[26] This question was given new urgency by the rise of deism in the Enlightenment. Earlier deists had argued that, beneath the plethora of religious beliefs and rites, was a natural religion, common to all humankind. But by the 18th century this argument made way for what became known as the `twofold philosophy' - the argument that Socrates, Plato and others were monotheists, who hid their real views from the ignorant multitude. Conversely, according to Anthony Collins, the Old Testament prophets had pretended devotion to the traditional rituals, while really following in the steps of Socrates and other `free thinkers'.[27]

This image of Socrates was shared by deists and opponents of deism alike. Cumberland, for example, attacked those who extolled the virtue of Socrates. `By an audacious comparison with Christ,' he said, they were `disparaging the divinity of the world's redeemer'. He responded by contrasting the `corrupt example' of Socrates with the `purity of his doctrine', and by supporting Aristophanes' charges against him.[28]

The proof of Socrates' monotheism always tended towards circularity. On the one hand, its proponents argued for his monotheism on the basis of his persecution for it by corrupt and scheming priests and sophists. On the other, the corruption and scheming of the priests and sophists was proved by their persecution of Socrates. The circularity of the argument could only be obscured by presenting it in dramatic, rather than logical, form. And the parallel it

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[24] F.M.A. Voltaire, Preface to `Socrates', in T. Smollet et al, eds., The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version in 22 Volumes (New York, St Hubert's Guild, 1901), vol. 10, pp. 283-4.

[25] Andrew Becket, Socrates: A Dramatic Poem, written on the Model of the Ancient Greek Tragedy (London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1811), p. vi.

[26] An extensive account of this view of Socrates is given in E. Zeller, Socrates and the Socratic Schools (London, Longmans, Green, 1877), pp. 82-97.

[27] P. Harrison, `Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 86-91.

[28] R. Cumberland, The Observer: Being a Collection of Moral, Literary and Familiar Essays (Dublin, Byrne, Marchbank, Moore and Jones, 1791), vol. 4, p. 156; vol. 2, pp. 290-301.

suggested with the priests and courtiers of 18th century Absolutism gave it great dramatic force.

This image of Socrates could probably never have been a stable one. It was too dependent on the needs of theological controversy, too much at variance with the historical evidence that was already available, too riven by its own internal contradictions. Above all, it depended on making Socrates at the same time the paragon of truth and virtue and a dissembler who concealed his own deepest beliefs. According to the Enlightenment picture, the priests and sophists deceived the people. How did Socrates' deception of the priests and sophists make him different?

There were three basic responses to this dilemma. The first and most sweeping was to locate Socrates' deception in a distinctive theory of religious education: `He knew very well,' wrote Cooper, the first English biographer of Socrates, `that the first prejudices of education are not all at once to be eradicated from human hearts, especially from those of a people complexionally prone, as the Athenians were, to the grossest superstition. He therefore seemingly comply'd with all the external ceremonies of devotion, and often sacrificed to the Gods upon the common altars of the city. This occasional conformity sheltered him a while from the jealous hierarchy, and gave him frequent opportunities of conversing with the most eminent citizens, whilst their minds were warm with gratitude to heaven at the shrines of their imaginary Deities, and thereby converting, by his irresistable arguments, their zeal to the service of truth and religion.'[29] But this solution only makes the problem more glaring. It adds one more belief - a belief in this theory of education - that Socrates has to conceal. His instrumentalism is no less than before; it merely shifts to a new terrain.

The second response, and the one which allowed for the greatest dramatic variation, is to add to the tale an innocent young woman - a daughter, or ward - whose life is threatened if Socrates' beliefs are known. This has the effect of making Socrates' deception unselfish: a device to protect another, not to further his own aims. But it evades the dilemma, rather than resolving it, and leaves unanswered the question of how Socratic truth and virtue would come to light in the absence of such a hostage to fortune.[30]

The third response is the least developed, but perhaps most clearly shows what would be needed in order to overcome the dilemma, while remaining within the Enlightenment schema. It is to revise the history of Greek religion in such a way as to cast Socrates no longer in the role of critic of all established convention and authority, but rather as defender of the `true' Greek monotheism - inherited from the Egyptians - which had only recently been corrupted by his enemies.[31] This response reduces the onus on Socrates to meet the highest standards of integrity, insofar as it presents his persecutors as the usurpers of religious tradition. But it does so at the cost of making him a less interesting figure, conforming to the narrowest

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[29] J.G. Cooper, The Life of Socrates (London, R. Dodsley, 1749), pp. 29-30.

[30] Examples of this treatment of Socrates are Voltaire, `Socrates' in A. Bates, ed., The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilisation (London, Athenian Society, 1903), pp. 283-310; Becket, Socrates; A. Bushe, Socrates: A Dramatic Poem (Glasgow, Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1762). For some modern parallels, cf. Robert B. Todd, `Socrates Dramatised: George Kaiser and Others,' Antike und Abendland 27 (1981), pp. 116-29.

[31] Cooper, The Life of Socrates, pp. 120-4.

agenda of 18th century deism.

Each of these responses is designed to create an image of Socrates which is internally consistent, and at the same time consistent with the civic virtues of classical republicanism. Above all, republican citizenship required overcoming the fear of death; for the radicals of the Enlightenment, `death was worth admiring only if it resembled the death of Socrates'.[32] But the model of classical republicanism depended not only on a willingness to make sacrifices for the common good, but on the life of active citizenship as well. Socrates' commitment to his philosophical vocation always put him at odds with the republican model of citizenship in this respect. The Enlightenment admiration for Socrates can be seen, in this light, as an attempt to shift the republican tradition towards an acceptance of intellectual virtues which could not be given a central place in that tradition. For this reason, an Enlightenment figure such as Rousseau could paint a less flattering picture of Socrates, discovering in him the defects of the intellectual where the virtues of the man of action were called for, and questioning the extent of his sacrifice.[33]

As long as no lasting resolution of this dilemma was possible, the logic of the Enlightenment schema tended - even against its own intentions - to accentuate Socrates' role as an intellectual and a teacher, rather than a moral hero. It gave greater importance to his method than its proponents might have wished to do, but at the same time left the question of his method obscure. This was the weak spot in the Enlightenment image of Socrates: it could never get to grips with his method of enquiry, because it could never genuinely acknowledge his commitment to enquiry. It could appreciate Xenophontic didacticism, but not Platonic dialogue. Above all, it could not allow Socratic ignorance as anything more than a ploy, while insisting that Socrates - alone among his contemporaries - had true knowledge of God.

As the state came to be reconceived with the rise of capitalism and the decline of republican ideology, so the Enlightenment image of Socrates came also to be stripped of its republican features.

Socrates and the American Revolution

For all its historical and philosophical vulnerability, the Enlightenment image of Socrates had an extraordinarily wide purchase. It informed Mitford's account no less than that of Voltaire and Diderot. It had an influential proponent in Germany in J.G. Hamman.[34] How then did it come to be displaced?

An important part was played in this process by developments in German scholarship, and the larger context of German intellectual life in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[35]

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[32] Gay, The Enlightenment, vol. 2, p. 86.

[33] Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile, or On Education (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991), pp. 307-8; Discourse on the Arts and Sciences, in The Social Contract and Discourses (London, Dent, 1913), p. 129.

[34] J.G. Hamman, Socratic Memorabilia, tr. J.C. O'Flaherty (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

[35] A useful overview is given in W.R. Mann, `The Origins of the Modern Historiography of Ancient Philosophy,' History and Theory 35:2 (1996), pp. 165-95. Classical scholarship in Germany

When Grote sought to reply to Mitford's attack on the ancient Athenians, he did so by drawing on German scholarship, and integrating it for the first time into a single historical picture, based on clear norms of evidence.[36] But the legacy of Socrates was also transformed politically, and in this process the American interpretation of Socrates had a vital role to play.

The key to the reception of the classical tradition in colonial America was the absence of a feudal aristocracy. In Europe, classical models served as an alternative to absolutism. In America, the classical past was seen in a different light: as a kind of historical laboratory, from which practical lessons could be learned. In particular, antiquity was important for the interpretation of a cyclical theory of history, according to which republics rose and declined on the basis of the growth and corruption of the virtues which sustained them. The cyclical theory enabled Americans to place themselves at the beginning of such a historical cycle, and to look ahead to the prospects of delaying or even averting its end.

This cyclical theory of history required an account of the kind of virtue which sustained the life of the republic. The central exemplar in the American context was Cato, whose martyrdom in the cause of republican government in Rome could be depicted in a way which opposed virtue to sophistication, and which suggested that American cultural backwardness was the correlate of their moral superiority. This depiction made possible the astounding success of Addison's Cato in the American colonies; it was performed frequently, and published at least eight times before 1800.[37] Trenchard and Gordon's Cato's Letters were crucial also in forming American ideas of free speech. But if the figure of Cato dominated the American conception of classical virtue, the centrality of his martyrdom ensured that the Greek equivalent of Cato - despite their many differences - was Socrates.

The most influential version of the cyclical theory of history in 18th century America was Rollin's Ancient History, originally published in French in 1730-8. Rollin presented Socrates as a monotheist, and in this sense conformed to the Enlightenment image of him. Far from putting Socrates in the service of deism, however, Rollin judged him by the severe standards of Jansenist Christianity as culpable for his failure openly to defend the monotheism whose logical necessity he knew. Socrates was `the hero of the Pagan world with regard to moral virtues'. But the idea of virtue was made compatible with American puritanism in what Gribbin describes as `a synthesis of the most advanced political theory and the most orthodox theology', which `affirmed what most Americans already believed,

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is more fully discussed in an earlier version of this chapter, `Socrates in Western Thought, 1750-1850,' in J. Gericke and P. Maritz, eds., Plato's Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance to Contemporary Society (Pretoria, SASGPH, 1998), vol, 2, pp. 279-320.

[36] Grote's use of German sources is emphasised by Demetriou, `Grote on Socrates,' pp. 36-7. More attention is given to the political context of his work in Demetriou, `In Defence of the British Constitution,' History of Political Thought 17 (1996), pp. 280-97, and Roberts, Athens on Trial , pp. 238-46. Grote's norms of evidence are central to the assessment of Momigliano, `George Grote and the Study of Greek History,' in Bowersock and Cornell, eds., A.D. Momigliano: Studies on Modern Scholarship, pp. 20-2.

[37] F.M. Litto, `Addison's "Cato" in the Colonies,' William and Mary Quarterly (third series), 23 (1966), pp. 431-49.

that their faith in God and their hopes for their country were not really separable'.[38]

The American conception of virtue - in orthodox theology and Enlightenment deism alike - was peculiarly pragmatic. Tocqueville was to describe the American idea of virtue as `self-interest rightly understood'.[39] Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson frequently refer to the `utility' of virtue, of knowledge of its principles, and the like.[40] In this context, it is not surprising that the question of method should have come to the fore in discussions of Socrates. This is particularly conspicuous in the work of the young Franklin, who wrote Socratic dialogues for his newspaper, in which his Socrates argues that the `science of virtue' is `the most useful of all'.[41] Socrates was an exemplar of classical virtue insofar as he provided practical guidance to realising virtue in the present. But it was Joseph Priestley, in the aftermath of the American Revolution, who developed this American image of Socrates in such a way as to make it compatible with the liberal defence of free speech.

Priestley championed the causes of the American Revolution long before he arrived in America, as a refugee from the patriotic fervour of England during the wars against France, in 1794. In America, he was celebrated as a famous chemist, as a political theorist, but most of all as the leading proponent of Unitarianism. Early in 1803, Priestley published a booklet on Socrates and Jesus Compared which led to the most sustained debate on the legacy of Socrates in America until that time. In his dedication to his friend and fellow-Unitarian, Joshua Toulmin, Priestley explains the booklet as the product of his `leisure' during his American exile.[42] John Adams, then vice-president of the USA, had written to Priestley that the British people `are capable of persecuting a Priestley, as another people formerly persecuted a Socrates.'[43] The parallel may have been in his own mind.

Priestley remained politically active and engaged while in exile. After the passing of the Sedition Act in 1798, he attempted to move to France. He saw the French and American Revolutions as inextricably linked, and saw the Adams Administration as betraying the common principles of democracy in favour of renewed commercial and military links with

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[38] W. Gribbin, `Rollin's Histories and American Republicanism,' William and Mary Quarterly (third series), 29 (1972), pp. 617, 620.

[39] Alexis Tocqueville, Democracy in America (New York, Anchor Books, 1969), pp. 525-8.

[40] E.g., Leonard W. Larabee, ed., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1960), vol. 2, pp. 15-9; Julian P. Boyd, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1950), vol. 1, p. 76.

[41] R.M. Gummere, `Socrates at the Printing Press: Benjamin Franklin and the Classics,' Classical Weekly 26:8 (5 December 1932), pp. 57-9.

[42] Toulmin had himself written on Christ and Socrates in his Dissertations on the Internal Evidences and Excellences of Christianity, published in 1785. He had considered emigration to America, after suffering persecution for his radical political opinions. His son, Harry Toulmin, did emigrate and became Secretary of State for Kentucky in 1796.

[43] Quoted in Jenny Graham, Revolutionary in Exile: The Emigration of Joseph Priestley to America 1794-1804 (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1995), p. 40.

England.[44] He had been close to Jefferson, who first heard him preach in Philadelphia in 1797, and believed that Priestley's Unitarianism represented the type of Christianity which `was most consistent with American republican institutions'.[45] Priestley was a vocal supporter of Jefferson's struggle against the Federalists, and viewed his election as President in 1800 as `the permanent establishment of truly republican principles in this country' and a major step towards `the same desirable event in more distant ones'. Soon after that, he was to re-consider his support for France, which had established `the very reverse of everything that was intended at the commencement of the revolution', and to give his support to Jefferson's principle of protecting individual freedom by reducing government to a minimum.[46] He upheld the sovereignty of the people, while arguing that government should not seek to overcome social inequalities, nor to create virtue in its citizens.

Priestley's political thought was at the same time radically contractarian and radically providentialist. In his account, Providence shores up the divine mandate of peoples, rather than the divine right of kings. But Priestley's providence is by no means a law unto itself. Providence is at once Christian and rational. But it can only demonstrate its rationality and universality by illuminating the lives of those who belong outside the bounds of Christian belief, however defined. Who better to represent pre-Christian rationality and virtue - and thus the workings of Providence - than Socrates?

Priestley's Socrates is not the product of extensive or original scholarship. It is not difficult to see the continuity between his image of Socrates and that of the Enlightenment: earnestness, religiosity, distance from the culture of ancient Greece, closeness to Xenophon rather than Plato. But Priestley also removes two of the central features of the Enlightenment image, and introduces three new themes in his portrait of Socrates.

He begins by abandoning the claim of Socrates' monotheism. His own religious convictions meant that this claim was not essential to him, as it was for many deists. And the claim had never been easily tenable on historical grounds. He abandons also the claim that Socrates was an instrument - whether consciously or not - of the Judeao-Christian God. He has no need to argue, as was frequently done in the 18th century, that Socrates' daemon was the voice of God. He admits this as a possibility, but solely on the grounds that we cannot know God's ways with certainty, and God might have chosen to communicate with anyone he pleased. Similarly, without a theology of the afterlife, Priestley has no need for arguments about the destiny of Socrates' soul.

The most conspicuous theme which Priestley introduces to his discussion of Socrates is that of method - a theme which, as we have observed, was at least implicit in earlier American uses of his legacy. Priestley sees Socrates primarily as a religious teacher, and the method he seeks to reconstruct is one for the inculcation of virtue, not the discovery of truth. `Both of them [Socrates and Jesus] were the friends of virtue, and laboured to promote it; but Jesus expressed stronger indignation against vice ... whereas Socrates adopted the gentler

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[44] Graham, Revolutionary in Exile, pp. 102-3, 107.

[45] P.K. Conkin, `Priestley and Jefferson: Unitarianism as a Religion for a New Revolutionary Age,' in R. Hoffman and P.J. Albert, eds., Religion in a Revolutionary Age (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 291.

[46] Graham, Revolutionary in Exile, pp. 148, 159-60.

method of irony and ridicule ... What was peculiar to Socrates was his proposing to his hearers a series of questions, by means of which he made the conclusions he wished to have drawn seem to be their own; so that all objections were precluded'. He contrasts this with Jesus' use of parables, similarly `adapted to make a stronger impression on the mind, than a moral lesson not so introduced and accompanied'.[47]

Priestley's booklet drew two extensive replies from the Reverend John Blair Linn, the Presbyterian pastor of Philadelphia and the protege of Alexander Hamilton, the most conservative of the three authors of the Federalist.[48] Linn was particularly vigorous in denying Priestley's appreciation of Socratic method. `The Socratic method of teaching,' according to Linn, was `insolent and provoking ... In the intercourse of equals, no method can be imagined more unsuitable ... The conduct of Socrates is that of a man who not only believes himself able to confute our errors, but what is far more humiliating to our dignity, believes that he can make us confute ourselves.'[49]

Why should a defender of Christian orthodoxy be concerned to deny the value of Socratic dialogue? The answer lies in the relationship of truth and virtue in Linn's thought. Thus, in response to Priestley's claim that Socrates, like Jesus, `did good', he exclaims: `What, Sir, did Socrates point out to the Athenians the same being to whom Jesus directed the faith of his followers? Did Socrates like Jesus unfold the perfections of Jehovah? Did the discourses of Socrates, like those of Jesus, bring to light life and immortality?'.[50] The virtue of Socrates depends, in other words, on the truth of his religious teaching, and his method can have value only in conveying this truth. Linn is not willing to admit that there is a distinction to be made between method and content.

In response to this line of argument, Priestley elaborates a mode of historical relativism for the analysis and assessment of Socratic virtue. This relativism works at two levels. He begins by arguing that the contrast between Socrates and Jesus must be made in terms that will convince `unbelievers' who `consider them both equally as men'.[51] He persistently points out the circularity of demonstrating the superiority of Jesus on the basis of his divinity. But increasingly, the relativism which Priestley defends takes on not only a pedagogical, but also a historical cast. Thus Priestley reprimands Linn: `But what I object to the most, as most manifestly unfair in your censure of Socrates, is your judging him by rules that cannot, in reason or equity, apply to his case. You judge him not by the light, the knowledge or the maxims that he had, but by those that he had not, and which he had not the means of

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[47] Joseph Priestley, Socrates and Jesus Compared (Philadelphia, P. Byrne, 1803), pp. 33-5.

[48] C.B.B., `A Sketch of the Life and Character of John Blair Linn,' in J.B. Linn, Valerian, a Narrative Poem; Intended, in part, to Describe the Early Persecution of Christians and rapidly to Illustrate the Influence of Christianity on the Manner of Nations (Philadelphia, Thomas and George Palmer, 1805).

[49] J.B. Linn, A Letter to Joseph Priestley, L.L.D., F.R.S., in Answer to his Performance entitled Socrates and Jesus Compared (Philadelphia, John Conrad, 1803), pp. 19-21.

[50] Linn, A Letter to Joseph Priestley ... in Answer to his Performance, p. 18.

[51] Joseph Priestley, A Letter to the Reverend John Blair Linn, in Defence of the Pamphlet entitled Socrates and Jesus Compared (Philadelphia, P. Byrne, 1803), pp. 4-5.

acquiring ... What could Socrates know of the laws of Christ, when he lived near four hundred years before his appearance. Perfect as the rules of Christianity are, he will not be judged by them at the last day, tho' he is by you here.'[52]

This line of argument leaves Priestley vulnerable to the charge that he has abandoned all claims to moral judgement. `If I understand the meaning which you would convey,' says Linn, `it is simply this, that whatever may be the actions of a man, still, if his own principles justify him, we should justify him also'.[53] And it is this vulnerability which forces Priestley onto new ground. It forces him to defend Socrates not for the truth of his moral or religious teaching, but for upholding an idea, on which Priestley himself relies, that `free inquiry is all that is necessary for the discovery of truth'.[54] In Priestley's argument, Socrates comes to be represented - perhaps for the first time - as a martyr for the modern concept of free speech.

It would be possible to see Priestley's writings as no more than an interesting by-way in the transformation of the Socratic legacy. His writings had no direct influence on the course of classical scholarship. But they reflect more directly than the scholarship of the time the transformation of the idea of freedom taking place with the establishment of democracy in America. This transformation was to work its way into the far more complex structures of British scholarship in the decades to come. Nowhere else do we see as clearly how the re-deployment of major elements of the Enlightenment image prepare the way for the modern image of Socrates.

This process can be examined briefly as it works itself out in the thought of Jeremy Bentham. Bentham was by no means an admirer of the American Constitution and its Bill of Rights, nor was he an admirer of Socrates. It is all the more striking to see how he draws on the American experience to prepare the way for the assimilation of Socrates into the liberalism of mid-Victorian England.

The argument for democracy in late 18th century England turned largely on the example of the United States. Priestley, Price and others supported the struggle of the American colonists for `no taxation without representation' even before 1776. Bentham was always hostile to the philosophical arguments of the American Declaration of Independence. But he flirted briefly with the idea of democracy around the time of the French Revolution, when he hoped that the National Assembly in Paris would approve the building of his Panopticon prison. He was made an honorary citizen of France, together with Priestley, Thomas Paine and others, and responded that he was willing to become a republican in Paris on condition he remained a royalist in London.[55] It was only in 1808, after meeting James Mill, and after discovering that the British ruling-class could not be relied upon to build his beloved

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[52] Priestley, A Letter to the Reverend John Blair Linn, pp. 27-8; cf. Socrates and Jesus Compared, pp. 10, 50.

[53] J.B. Linn, A Letter to Joseph Priestley, L.L.D., F.R.S., in Answer to his Letter in Defence of his Pamphlet entitled Socrates and Jesus Compared (Philadelphia, John Conrad, 1803), p. 40; cf. pp. 16-8.

[54] Priestley, A Letter to the Reverend John Blair Linn, p. 58.

[55] E. Halevy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London, Faber, 1972), p. 173.

Panopticon, that Bentham came to more radical conclusions.[56]

Bentham's most extensive argument for freedom of speech is made in a series of letters in 1820 to the Spanish Cortes, which was then debating a `law regarding public societies', which purported to uphold freedom of speech while limiting it to meetings `authorised by law', and hence ensuring that it was exercised solely at the discretion of the ruling authorities.[57] Bentham is not concerned with the moral character of the ruling authorities who are to exercise this discretion, for they `will do what all men would do in their places: ... they will embrace every opportunity for sacrificing the interest of the whole community to their own particular interests' (2.282). The greatest danger is an alliance of `the monarchical with the aristocratical interest', as the aristocracy is `immutably adverse in its interest to the interest of the people' (2.283-4). Bentham's distance from the classical tradition can be measured, in part, by this denial of the possibility of civic virtue, whether among the `ruling few' or the `subject many'. The best that can be done is to establish such `securities against misrule' as a free press, freedom of assembly and representative government.

It is in this context that the example of the United States of America is held up for admiration and emulation: `In that only seat of real and established good government ... in which, for the forty years it has been in existence, public tranquillity has not known what disturbance is, there is no more restriction upon men's speaking together in public than upon their eating together in private'. The freedom which he admires in the United States is premised on public order, and pursued by each individual in their own way. The sacrifice of `the interest of the whole community' for individual interests, which makes representative government and freedom of speech a necessity, is in this sense the precondition of freedom, interpreted by Bentham as `the greatest happiness of the greatest number (a phrase for which, upward of fifty years ago, I became indebted to a pamphlet of Dr Priestley)' (2.277; cf. 279, 281, 283, 287, 288).

Free speech provides the most concrete test of this freedom. The validity of any government's claim to uphold freedom can be decided by their answer to one question: `Will you, sir, or will you not, concur in putting matters on such a footing, in respect of the liberty of the press, and the liberty of public discussion, that, at the hands of the persons exercising the powers of government, a man shall have no more to fear from speaking and writing against them, than from speaking and writing for them? If his answer be yes, ... his principles as to this matter are those of the Anglo-American United States' (2.288). Free speech, in this reversal of the classical concept, is speech which requires no particular virtues and has no real consequences.

If this is the idea of freedom which Bentham seeks to uphold, then it is not surprising that he finds little value in the legacy of Socrates. `Socrates and Plato,' he claimed in his

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[56] Cf. J.R. Dinwiddy, `Bentham's Transition to Political Radicalism, 1809-10,' Journal of the History of Ideas 36:4 (1975), pp. 683-700.

[57] Jeremy Bentham, Collected Works, ed. J. Bowring (Edinburgh, William Tait, 1843), vol. 2, pp. 284-5. Further references to this edition of the works of Bentham are given in the text, indicating volume and page number.

Deontology, 'were talking nonsense under the pretence of talking goodness and morality'.[58] Socrates, he declared, was 'insipid ... I could find nothing in him that distinguished him from other people, except his manner of putting questions' (10.583). In Bentham's eyes, Socrates is no more than the ancient alternative to Aristotle, whose syllogistic logic made possible precise argumentation. Bentham's Essay on Logic makes the contrast clear: 'The Socratic method employs not any such determinate mode and figure as that which is employed by the Aristotelian' (8.238). In contrast to the clarity with which single propositions can be isolated and examined in the logic of Aristotle, he complains in his Chrestomathia, Plato provides a 'vast wilderness of words' in which 'so many wits .. have been lost' (8.120). Bentham's charge is essentially that the Socratic dialectic depends on ideas being entangled with each other, it recognises that their meaning is established socially, and proposes collective strategies for the discovery of that meaning, which require of us moral change and not only intellectual assent.

There is a sense in which Bentham merely takes the devaluation of virtue which was already present in the writings of earlier philosophers of liberalism, such as Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu.[59] Part of the logic of Bentham's position is to be found, for example, in Kant's argument that 'the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding)'. Kant was perhaps enough of a republican - and capitalist relations of property too undeveloped in his German context - to have preferred a 'state of angels' capable of 'adhering to a constitution of so sublime a nature'.[60] But the experience of the United States gave Bentham confidence that freedom - in the liberal sense, at least - did not depend on virtue.

What Bentham sees in the United States is what Grote and John Stuart Mill later came to see in classical Athens. And their interpretation of Socrates - not as the alternative to Aristotle but as forerunner, anticipating his logical doctrines much as the Enlightenment held that he anticipated the revelations of Jesus - presents him as the ideal citizen not of a classical republic, but of a liberal democracy.

Grote and Mill differ from Bentham on the place of Socrates within the history of logic, in other words. But they accept Bentham's version of the kind of logic which he would have to practise, and the moral and social conditions it would reflect, which would make him the emblem of this modern concept of free speech.

Grote, Mill and the Liberal Socrates

Grote's work was to dominate the study of ancient Greece for decades after its publication in

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[58] H.O. Pappe, 'The English Utilitarians and Athenian Democracy,' in R.R. Bolgar, ed., Classical Influences on Western Thought, A.D. 1650-1870 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 295.

[59] Their views are cited in Mark J. Lutz, Socrates' Education to Virtue (Albany, SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 146-7, 194. Lutz describes Socrates as a model of liberal virtue, but understands liberalism in a special sense, drawn from the writings of Leo Strauss.

[60] Hans Reiss, ed., Kant's Political Writings (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 112.

1846-56. It provided a masterly synthesis of existing scholarship; introduced strict norms of evidence into the field, based on his separation of mythical and historical times; and gave an account of Athenian democracy which met the needs of the emergent ideology of bourgeois liberalism. His work was intended to defend Athenian democracy from the attacks of Gillies and Mitford, and at the same time to depict the ancient democracy along essentially liberal lines. In this sense, Grote's task was not only to defend the Athenian democracy, but also to transform its meaning, to displace Mitford and Gillies, but also Voltaire and Diderot, Franklin and Jefferson, Montaigne and Milton. The traditional idea of Socrates as a martyr for intellectual freedom - which Mitford had not hesitated to use to attack Athenian democracy[61] - had to be integrated into this depiction. Whatever else Grote may have borrowed from German scholarship, this task was his own.

Mitford had described Socrates as himself a sophist, without developing this idea at all.[62] Grote used it to locate Socrates more integrally within the life of democratic Athens.[63] For him, Socrates' political opinions were purely negative: `he approved neither of democracy nor of oligarchy' (139). He acknowledges the traditional account of the virtue of Socrates, but places his emphasis elsewhere: `It is neither from the virtue of his life nor from the goodness of his precepts ... that he derives his peculiar title to fame, but from his originality and prolific efficacy in the line of speculative philosophy' (124). Equally, while he acknowledges the religious mission of Socrates, the account of it he offers is substantially different from that of the Enlightenment, emphasising the oracle at Delphi rather than the daemon (90, 91, 95). This allows him - unlike the Enlightenment interpretation - to take seriously the Socratic conception of wisdom as knowledge of human ignorance (112).

Grote's Socrates is a moralist and a dialectician. In both respects, he is a logician; indeed, he is the founding father of the discipline of logic. Where his predecessors `had still present to their minds those vast and undivided problems which had been transmitted down from the old poets' (105), Socrates had taken the step of establishing ethics as a distinct field of enquiry. `To study Ethics, or human dispositions and ends, apart from the physical world, and according to a theory of their own, referring to human good and happiness as the sovereign and comprehensive end; to treat each of the great and familiar words designating moral attributes as logical aggregates comprehending many judgements in particular cases, and connoting a certain harmony or consistency of purpose among the separate judgements; to bring many of these latter into comparison, by a scrutinising dialectical process, so as to test the consistency and completeness of the logical aggregate or general notion, as it stood in every man's mind - all these were parts of the same forward movement which Sokrates originated' (107). The idea of ethics as the first stage in the development of logic is made still more explicit: `What was now begun by Sokrates and improved by Plato was embodied as part in a comprehensive system of formal logic by the genius of Aristotle' (108; cf. 133).

Socratic dialectic is seen, in this context, as the immature form of formal logic, which is superseded by Aristotle's discovery of the syllogism. But the continuity between the Socratic

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[61] W. Mitford, History of Greece (London, T. Cadell, 1838), vol. 4, pp. 132-5.

[62] Mitford, History of Greece, vol. 4, p. 131.

[63] George Grote, A History of Greece (London, J. Murray, 1888), vol. 7, pp. 31-7, 132-3. Further page references to this volume of Grote's work are given in the text.

and the Aristotelian method, denied by Bentham, can be asserted by Grote on the basis of a consistently upheld distinction between positive and negative dialectic - a distinction made in order to assert the essential role of each in the `attainment of truth' (97). Thus, `Sokrates fell as it were instinctively into that which Aristotle describes as the double track of the dialectic process - breaking up the One into Many and recombining the Many into One' (110-1). Even if the negative vein of Socratic dialectic was `most conspicuous', then, it was `only a part of the whole' (121), and it was `animated by the truest spirit of positive science' (167). `Though negative in his means, Sokrates is strictly positive in his ends.' In effect, negation is left with no dialectical work to do; it merely clears the mind of misapprehension, and forces it `into that path of inductive generalisation whereby alone trustworthy conclusions can be formed' (129).

A by-product of this assimilation of dialectic into syllogistic logic was Grote's reconciliation of Plato and Xenophon - whose conflicting authority had long plagued the interpretation of Socrates. For Grote, there was no essential conflict: Xenophon conveyed the positive and practical teachings of Socrates, which were the necessary outcome of the negative and analytical tendency in his thought recorded by Plato (85, 102, 104).

Grote's treatment of Socratic dialectic also provided the basis for a specific interpretation of its historical significance. He argues that Socrates' concern with ethics grew out of the limits of ancient Greek cosmology, and that these limits had been overcome by modern science. `In the present state to which science has attained, nothing is more curious than to look back at the rules which this eminent man laid down' (99) In `our own time', however, since the work of Bacon, `the development of the scientific point of view' has made negative dialectic redundant for any purpose but that of `purifying the mind' in such a way as to prepare it for Baconian induction (117, 127-8). In this vein, Grote praises Socrates for going to work `in the Baconian manner and spirit' (167).

In this account of his historical significance, the achievement of Socrates and his condemnation by the Athenians can be traced to the same root, discernible to the psychology of associationism. On the one hand, Socrates' achievement is made especially remarkable by the unquestioned nature of notions `got together by spontaneous, unexamined, unconscious, uncertified association' (169). On the other, so violent and disruptive was the process of disturbing these associations that his mission `could not but prove eminently unpopular and obnoxious' (141).

The mission of Socrates was indispensable, then, for the progress of science. Grote's Socrates is the emblem of free speech, in the sense that he upholds the need for it: scientific conclusions, according to Grote, `require to be kept in perpetual and conscious association with the evidences, affirmative and negative, by the joint consideration of which their truth is established; nor can this object be attained by any other means than by ever-renovated discussion, instituted from distinct points of view, and with free play to that negative arm which is indispensable as stimulus not less than as control' (131). And the city of Athens, despite the `grave and melancholy fact' (151) of the conviction of Socrates, is seen as upholding precisely that right to free enquiry which Socrates epitomised: `The truth is, that as history presents to us only one man who ever devoted his life to prosecute this duty of an elenctic or cross-examining missionary, so there was but one city, in the ancient world at least, wherein he would have been allowed to prosecute it with safety and impunity, and that city was Athens ... Liberty of speech was consecrated, in every man's estimation, among the first of privileges; every man was accustomed to hear opinions opposite to his own constantly

expressed, and to believe that others had a right to their opinions as well as himself ... It is certain that there was at Athens both a keener intellectual stimulus, and greater freedom as well of thought as of speech, than in any other city of Greece' (142-3).

Grote's work effectively severs the link between freedom and the virtues of the citizen body which lies at the heart of classical thought. It severs the link between virtue and truth on which Socratic dialectic depended. It treats dialectic as a stage in human thought which has been superseded, which might retain a certain educational value, but whose role in the discovery of knowledge has been taken over by empirical science. It presents Socrates as the proponent of an individual right which he never appealed to on his own behalf, or gave any other indication of recognising. And it locates him in an idealised Athens, in which that right was recognised until - `grave and melancholy fact' - it was too strenuously exercised. It provided an image of Socrates ready for assimilation into the ideology of liberalism - a task which was to be carried out most fully by John Stuart Mill.

Mill's Autobiography recounts his childhood admiration for Socrates.[64] He wrote extensive and admiring reviews of Grote's works, singling out his treatment of Socrates for especial praise. Mill's depiction of Socrates as martyr for intellectual freedom located the transformed image of Socrates in liberal politics and modern culture. `It is doubtful that any paragraph on Socrates from the entire philosophic literature of the nineteenth century has been as influential,' according to Levi, as Mill's brief interpretation of that martyrdom.[65] It was not only that Mill gave a clearer political meaning to the figure of Socrates; both the figure, and several of his most characteristic ideas, were given an essential role in the liberal defence of freedom, and of free speech in particular.

Mill's argument is characterised by a sharply ambivalent attitude to the place of virtue in the state. In the first chapter of On Liberty, Mill says that the aim of his essay is to assert `one very simple principle' as entitled to govern all restrictions of individual liberty - namely, that liberty can only be restricted in order to protect others from harm. He assumes that each individual is sovereign, and defines freedom as non-interference with that sovereignty. He specifically excludes the idea that society can restrict the freedom of the individual `for his own good'. Each individual is to be the judge of what is good for her or him, and society is to have no say in the matter, except where harm is done to others.[66] On this account, the state has no concern with the virtue of its citizens.

At the same time, however, Mill's argument for freedom of speech depends on a contrast between two human types. On the one hand, he argues that restrictions on free speech will produce unthinking conformism, cowardice and apathy. On the other, he praises the independence and courage of those `great thinkers' who have challenged the intellectual limits of their own time, and advanced human thought in the process (e.g., 34). In this sense, we can say that Mill's argument rests on a specific idea of what is good in human life. He holds

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[64] J.S. Mill, Autobiography (London, Longmans, Green, 1908), pp. 12-3.

[65] A.W. Levi, 'The Idea of Socrates: The Philosophic Hero of the Nineteenth Century,' Journal of the History of Ideas, 17:1 (1956), p. 95.

[66] J.S. Mill, On Liberty and Other Writings, ed. S. Collini (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 13. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

that society should not impose such an ideal on any individual. But he also argues that its conception of freedom should be such as to promote that ideal. Mill's treatment of Socrates is crucial in dealing with this tension between the argument that there can be no conception of good apart from that of each individual, and the argument for freedom of speech as essential for the promotion of the human type of most value to society.

If there is one historical figure who represents this ideal human type for Mill, then it is Socrates. The trial and death of Socrates is presented as an historical event comparable only with the crucifixion of Jesus, and Socrates as the supreme martyr for intellectual freedom. For Mill, the example of Socrates provides the essential proof that the accepted opinion of the age can be wrong, and that dissenting opinion should not be suppressed. `Mankind can hardly be too often reminded,' he writes, `that there was once a man named Socrates, between whom and the legal authorities and public opinion of his time, there took place a memorable collision' (27). Although the Athenians put Socrates to death as a criminal, says Mill, we can now see that he was `the head and prototype of all subsequent teachers of virtue'. The implication is that the Athenians could have avoided this historical mistake if they had acted on Mill's conception of freedom.

It is not only that the figure of Socrates is important for Mill. Without always mentioning him by name, he also draws on at least three ideas which are traditionally associated with him. The first of these is the idea of human fallibility - the idea, that is, of taking the necessity of your own ignorance as a starting-point in seeking knowledge of human affairs. The individual mission of Socrates was based on this idea; that is, he interpreted the pronouncement of the oracle at Delphi that he was the wisest of men to mean that true wisdom consisted in knowledge of your own ignorance, and questioned his fellow-Athenians about their moral ideas in order to test the meaning of the oracle and to make it clear to others. The idea was crucial to Socrates' conception of wisdom, and this conception, in turn, motivated his life's work. For Mill, human fallibility cannot be the basis of a way of life which should be adopted by mid-19th century Englishmen, for each individual must decide on that question for themselves. But it provides the basis for the protection of an individual right to free speech which anyone may choose to exercise or not, as they prefer (21).

Second, Mill adopts the Socratic idea that you should `follow the argument where it leads'. He constantly emphasises the moral qualities - especially the quality of courage - which are required for independent-minded enquiry. Freedom of speech is necessary, according to Mill, because we cannot decide in advance which conclusions are permissible and which are not. Again, he gives this Socratic idea his own twist: Socrates constantly discussed the ideas of ordinary Athenians, and did not regard moral truth as a field for intellectuals, in the first place; but Mill regards the willingness to `follow the argument where it leads' as the condition for being a `great thinker' (35-6).

Third, Mill gives an important role to the Socratic idea that truth emerges from the conflict of opinions. Even if we could be absolutely sure that some or other belief was true, Mill argues, we would still not be justified in suppressing the expression of beliefs which are in conflict with it. For once we repeat a belief because it is the only one we are allowed to hold, it becomes a `dead dogma' rather than a `living belief' (37). For `truth, thus held, is but one superstition the more, accidentally clinging to the words which enunciate a truth.' For this reason, he calls for freedom of discussion, so that all can defend their own ideas openly and passionately. As progress takes place, he argues, an increasing number of truths will no

idea of partial truth is drawn not from Socrates but from 19th century conservative thought - above all, from Coleridge.[67] It implies that the less fundamental is the conflict of opinions, the more rapidly can truth be established. In spite of Mill's acceptance of the need for open argument and debate, his very idea of progress (or `improvement') commits him to reducing disagreement wherever possible. In Grote's work, Socratic dialectic is reduced to an immature form of logic; in Mill's work, it is reduced essentially to a pedagogical ruse. Marx captured this failure to grasp the movement of contradiction in his comment that Mill 'is as much at home with absurd and flat contradictions as he is at sea with Hegelian "contradiction" which is the source of all dialectics' [68]

Mill draws not only on the example of Socrates, but on specific ideas which he initiated. But he does so in a context which Socrates himself would surely not have understood. For Socrates accepted that the aim of the state was to create virtue in its citizens, and had no conception of individual rights which could limit the state in achieving this aim. Mill, on the other hand, takes as a starting point the individual rights - historically, the right of private property, in the first place - established by capitalism, and adjusts his image of Socrates and his interpretation of his thought to match its needs. In this way, he makes Socrates the sponsor of a conception of free speech which he would not himself have recognised: free speech in a capitalist society.

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[67] Cf. S. Justman, The Hidden Text of Mill's Liberty (Savage, Md., Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), p. 18.

[68] Karl Marx, Capital volume one (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), p. 744.

CHAPTER THREE

DUTCH REPUBLICANISM AND THE DIALECTICAL TRADITION

Dutch History and the Character of Dutch Political Thought

The elements of the modern, essentially liberal image of Socrates - described in the previous chapter - developed unevenly in different national contexts. The process was most advanced in England, in part because the English philosophical tradition was most receptive to this interpretation of Socrates. In the later decades of the 19th century, the philosophy of Hegel had a major impact in Britain, to some extent as a conscious reaction to an empiricism which was felt to be overly narrow and calculating.[1] But even then, British Hegelianism treated dialectic not as an instrument of critique, but rather as a philosophical guarantee of the historical necessity of the world-historical role of the British Empire.[2] The rise of analytical philosophy after the First World War saw a return to the earlier tradition of British empiricism, concerned mainly with established facts rather than enquiry into the logical or historical necessity of those facts. The study of ancient thought became increasingly separated from contemporary political issues. In that context, the liberal assimilation of Socrates in the work of Grote and Mill was quite consistent with a deep-rooted disdain for dialectical modes of thought.[3]

Philosophical development in Britain is most often contrasted with that in France and Germany - the other two contexts in which a national tradition can most clearly be recognised. Marx's writings attribute the distinctive character of German thought to Germany's political and economic backwardness. Rather than reflecting real developments, `German philosophy is the ideal prolongation of German history'.[4] This analysis has been taken further by Lucien Goldmann, who has linked different patterns of class formation to distinctive philosophical traditions in each of these national contexts.[5] Lukacs makes use of a similar framework in his study of the young Hegel, and the emergence of historical dialectic

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[1] Cf. Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and his Age (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), pp. 168-71.

[2] Cf. Andrew Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy: R.F. Alfred Hoernlé in South Africa, 1908-11 (unpublished MA thesis, Stellenbosch, 1985), pp. 36-55, 106-19.

[3] This refusal of dialectical modes of thought is perhaps best exemplified by Karl Popper; cf., among many examples, his `What is Dialectics?,' in Conjectures and Refutations (London, Routledge, 1965), pp. 312-35.

[4] Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's `Philosophy of Right', ed. J. O'Malley (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 135; cf. Marx, Capital vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), pp. 95-8.

[5] E.g., Lucien Goldmann, Immanuel Kant (London, New Left Books, 1970), pp. 31-49. He comments that a full account would also include the Dutch philosophical tradition (p. 37, n. 6).

in Germany.[6]

But insofar as the transformation of the Socratic legacy was linked to the changing politics of free speech in this period, it might be argued that the real alternative to the direction of change in Britain was presented by the Netherlands. This is also the context which is especially important for understanding the Socratic legacy and the formation of a dialectical tradition in South Africa.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, two European countries were praised above all others for their tolerance of dissent and freedom of speech: England and the Netherlands.[7] These countries had in common a long-standing tradition of free speech, toleration of religious dissent, relatively unfettered scientific enquiry and willingness to provide asylum to intellectuals persecuted elsewhere. But the historical context of these freedoms differed significantly, in ways which also informed their meaning. First, Dutch history had no indigenous absolutism: the overthrow of Spanish rule was the overthrow of absolutist power, and independent nationhood took the form of `the first bourgeois revolution in history'.[8] Second, the Dutch bourgeoisie took on its own distinctive identity in a time when the bourgeoisie itself was not yet divided by national borders, and when capitalist markets did not yet take a predominantly national form. Its culture was primarily European, or local, rather than national in character. The Netherlands `presented a strange contrast of economic pioneering and political antiquarianism'. Economically it was `a highly urbanised mercantile community of immense wealth'; politically it `still seemed to be living in the Middle Ages'.[9] International trade was crucial to its economy, international traffic of ideas unhindered, and barriers of language and culture not pronounced. Third, the Dutch commercial advantage was soon lost to rivals who were able to expand globally, on the basis of the consolidated power of the nation-state - above all, Britain. During the 18th century, the Dutch economy shrank, and Dutch culture after about 1750 was informed by a sense of decline, of a `golden age' whose glories already lay in the past.[10]

This early bourgeois ascendancy and early national decline had tangible results for Dutch political and intellectual life. First, it meant that classical learning - the fruit of Renaissance humanism - could be absorbed into Christianity, and at the same time serve as harbinger of modernity. In this process, Erasmus was the exemplary figure, his legacy surviving long after that of his English counterpart, Thomas More, had been effaced. The Synod of Dort expelled

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[6] Georg Lukacs, The Young Hegel (London, Merlin Press, 1975), especially pp. 319-37.

[7] Mandrou, From Humanism to Science 1480-1700, p. 225. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to `the Netherlands' throughout, without thereby excluding the United Provinces, Batavian Republic, Kingdom of Holland, etc.

[8] Perry Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State (London, Verso, 1974), p. 75.

[9] Norman Hampson, The Enlightenment (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), pp. 56-7; cf. Colin Mooers, The Making of Bourgeois Europe (London, Verso, 1991), p. 10.

[10] Simon Schama, Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813 (London, Collins, 1977), pp. 24-34.

the Remonstrants from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in 1618.[11] But it created a division between free-thinkers and conservatives within Christianity, rather than a secular alternative to Christian thought. Philosophical and scientific enquiry never faced the declared hostility of Dutch Christianity, and was never forced to cut itself loose from that intellectual framework. Even the most radical politics were presented in a theological mode: `Jacobinism in Christian dress'.[12] The most enduring characteristic of Dutch philosophy, according to its leading historian, is its `theologising character'.[13] Dutch humanism opposed theological dogma, but developed a `philosophy of life' in which religious and secular concerns were not sharply distinguished.[14]

Second, the absence of an indigenous absolutism meant that the Dutch bourgeoisie had relatively little need to justify its view of life on the basis of abstract political or philosophical principle. Dutch political thought was consistently historical in orientation. At the same time - especially after the decline of Dutch power in the 18th century - this historical orientation did not produce a strong ideology of progress. Dutch radical politics were unlike any other in the age of democratic revolution in their `obstinate nativism', in `the role played by religious and moral doctrine as a medium for the legitimation of political views', in their habit of arguing from `precedents painstakingly discovered in archives or legal records'.[15] In this context, the historical focus of Hegelian dialectic was less of an innovation or disruption than it would have been if it had challenged a well-established contractarianism.

Third, and as a consequence, the Dutch bourgeoisie had little need for the distinctively bourgeois ideology of liberalism, or for a frontal confrontation with classical republicanism. The `only major republic which was formed and which survived in early modern Europe' - the Dutch republic during the 17th and 18th centuries - was a `mercantile and maritime republic', and its political theorists `thought it was this maritime and mercantile character of the nation which gave it its republican form'. Dutch republicans took Erasmus rather than Machiavelli as their guide, in their concern to preserve peace rather than waging war. Paradoxically, the most enduring experience of republicanism produced no distinctive theory of it.[16]

For all of these reasons, freedom of speech had different meanings in England and the Netherlands. Kossmann has described Dutch tolerance at the time of Locke's Letter on Toleration (1680) as `undogmatic, pragmatic, only based on principle to a limited extent'. It

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[11] The Remonstrants (literally, those `remonstrating' or petitioning for a synod decision to protect theological dissenters from persecution) were followers of Arminius, who rejected Calvinist doctrines of predestination and original sin. After their expulsion, they formed their own church.

[12] Schama, Patriots and Liberators, p. 71.

[13] F. Sassen, Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland (Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1959), p. 5.

[14] For a recent account, cf. J.P. Guépin, Het Humanisme 1350-1850 (Baarn, Ambo, 1993).

[15] Schama, Patriots and Liberators, pp. 69, 65.

[16] E.H. Kossmann, Politieke Theorie en Geschiedenis (Amsterdam, Bert Bakker, 1987), pp. 232, 218, 233.

was the consequence of the state lacking 'the means to make a policy of intolerance', rather than a deliberate barrier to protect individual rights from a powerful state.[17] Enlightenment philosophers sometimes treated this freedom as no more than an absence of constraint.[18] But it was, or became, a mode of life consciously adapted to a historical situation in which neither state nor church were assured of supremacy, and the civic virtues had a more active role to play. Free speech was a practice rooted in the age of cities, in Thom's phrase, rather than the age of nations.[19]

The Republican Interpretation of Socrates

The longevity and distinctive form of Dutch republicanism gave the legacy of Socrates a very different role in Dutch political and intellectual life from that created by Grote and Mill. Once again it was Erasmus who set the pattern, arousing the fury of Luther through his 'near-canonisation' of the ancient Greek philosopher.[20] The Enlightenment admiration for Socrates was widely shared by Dutch intellectuals in the 18th century. A work such as Pieter Langendyk's comedy Xanthippe makes use of the conventional Enlightenment devices for conveying Socrates' virtue: he is a responsible parent, an uplifting lecturer, encourages the patriotic virtues and the 'old ways' among the youth, and is familiar with the 'wise writings of the Hebrews'.[21]

The so-called 'Socratic war' of 1768-9 followed the Dutch translation of a novel by Voltaire's friend Jean-Francois Marmontel, which included a discussion of the question of whether Socrates and other 'virtuous heathens' had gone to heaven. The controversy soon extended beyond the salvation of his soul, and dealt with freedom of publication and the rights of religious minorities.[22] Jongenelen treats this controversy over Socrates as the rallying-point for the 'left flank of the Dutch Enlightenment' and its 'pockets of subversive thought'.[23]

It was only in the following decades - with the rise of the Patriot movement, the French

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[17] Kossmann, Politieke Theorie en Geschiedenis, pp. 56-7.

[18] Cf. Gay, The Enlightenment, vol. 2, p. 24.

[19] Thom, Republics, Nations and Tribes, pp. 5-8.

[20] Herbert Spiegelberg, ed., The Socratic Enigma (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p. 6.

[21] P. Langendyk, Xanthippe, of het Booze Wyf des Filosoofs Sokrates Beteugeld (Amsterdam, Izaak Duim, 1756), pp. 47, 50, 53.

[22] Ton Jongenelen, 'De Socratische Oorlog (1768-9): Een Terreinverkenning op de Linkerflank van de Nederlandse Verlichting,' Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland 5: 1-2 (1994), pp. 77-92; cf. J. Wille, De Literator R.M. van Goens en zijn Kring (Amsterdam, Historiese Dokumentatiecentrum, 1993), vol. 2, pp. 332-76.

[23] Jongenelen, 'Socratische Oorlog', pp. 90-1, quoting Margaret Jacob, 'Radicalism in the Dutch Enlightenment,' in M. Jacob and W. Mijnhardt, eds., The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 224-240.

Revolution and the overthrow of the Stadholder, William V - that this Enlightenment image of Socrates came to be given a more explicitly political cast. Jan Fredrik Helmers' epic poem Socrates (1790), addressed 'to the Netherlands', invoked a Socrates who 'taught you to strive for fame through virtue', a 'dear child of heaven' before whose altars 'the whole Batavia kneels'. Helmers' Socrates is a monotheist and an anti-monarchist. His downfall follows his refusal of the crown offered him by the Athenian people, grateful to him for his religious teaching: 'I wish to govern,' he tells them, 'but only in your hearts: there you must set up my throne, with no ruler making you bow under his laws. I strive for your freedom, not to take it from you again.' Anticipating the example of Jesus, he refuses to answer accusations against him, and asks God to forgive the Athenians and give them glory. The poem's dramatisation of virtue is mainly political, but it is in heaven - after Socrates drinks the hemlock - that his virtue is finally recognised and rewarded.[24]

Helmers presents Socrates as the patron of the Patriot struggle. But his poetic fancy leads away from politics. The task of outlining a Socratic conception of politics was undertaken by Johan Luzac, in a ceremonial address on laying down the office of Rector Magnificus at the University of Leiden in 1795, after the French invasion of the Netherlands. This address was perhaps the most ambitious attempt, in any language, to define a republican Socrates for the age of revolution.

Johan Luzac entered public life in 1775 as editor of the Leiden Gazette, a vocal supporter of the American Revolution and an outspoken opponent of English expansionism. He became Professor of Greek at Leiden in 1785, with the additional task of teaching 'the history of the fatherland', and Rector of the university in 1794. He was active in the Patriot movement from its inception. His better-known cousin, Eli Luzac, was one of the leading writers among the supporters of the Stadholder.

Luzac's address of 1795 was dedicated to John Adams, who had been the first US ambassador to the Netherlands, was US President at the time of the address, and who 'followed in the footsteps' of Socrates, according to the dedication.[25] Luzac treats Socrates as an exemplary figure for the modern age: an exemplar, above all, of patriotism and civic virtue (15-6). For Luzac, the two concepts are inseparable: civic virtue is 'the measure of true love of fatherland; or perhaps it is better to say, it is the love of fatherland itself, insofar as the desire and capacity to undertake all of the duties of human society are related to a particular country, nation or mode of living together' (iv).

His outline of civic virtue is broadly that of classical republicanism: commitment to the common good rather than self-interest, personal appetite, or blind partisanship 'even if falsely legitimated with the name of patriotic enthusiasm' (vi-vii). The 'strong and steadfast of soul, concerned only with recalling banished unity to their ancestral land through admonition, wise advice and personal example, at danger to their own lives from an impassioned people', are the true exemplars of civic virtue (17).

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[24] J.F. Helmers, Socrates in Drie Zangen (Amsterdam, P.J. Uylenbroek, 1790), pp. xxxv, 39, 49, 69-72, 115-6.

[25] Johan Luzac, Socrates als Burger Beschouwd (Leiden, A. & J. Honkoop, 1797), p. 9. This second Dutch edition includes a new preface, and extensive notes which did not form part of the original (Latin) address. Further page references to this work are given in the text itself.

Luzac also follows the republican tradition in treating civic virtue as the essential condition and defining feature of freedom. `True freedom' is the highest aspiration of humankind; `nothing more ennobles humanity, nothing can better educate it to the highest possible level of perfection, the goal of our existence on this earth' (v-vi). But without civic virtue, the quest for freedom becomes a `senseless desire for licence' (vi).

Within the republican tradition before Luzac, however, Socrates is seldom singled out in quite this way.[26] Luzac draws on the political arguments of Rousseau's Social Contract, for example, but never mentions Rousseau's own less fulsome estimate of Socrates.[27] In contrast, Luzac not only includes Socrates in the republican pantheon, but gives him the place of honour. He does so because his conception of civic virtue has a peculiarly philosophical element to it: for him, virtue requires a commitment to truth. `As Truth is the companion of Virtue,' he argues, `no one who does not love the latter can tolerate the former: they are sisters, they are joined together inseparably. Whoever closes their heart to Truth can never be regarded as finding a home for Virtue. And conversely, all those who honour and practise Virtue - the Citizen's Virtue - will receive Truth with joy, no matter how stern her outward appearance may be' (iii-iv). Socrates' wisdom and honesty, then - rather than the more conventional republican virtues of military prowess or love of honour - make him the model for those who would protect freedom (42, 22).

Luzac defends the classical republican ideal of `mixed government', drawing on Polybius for this argument, and rejecting Priestley (xxviii). He regards `people's government' as the highest form of government (42).[28] At the same time, he believes that `a country in which the will of the people is the highest law in matters of daily management, is the least fortunate of all' (xxxiii). In his extensive endnotes, he defends aristocracy - not on hereditary lines, but according to Rousseau's notion of an elective aristocracy in which `the wisest should govern the many, when it is assured that they will govern for its profit and not for their own' (164).[29] He argues that aristocracy is mistakenly opposed to democracy (166), and endorses an ancient view of the Athenian democracy as `aristocracy with the approval and consent of the people' (151). In this sense, aristocracy is not the opposite of popular freedom, but its `surest guarantee' (144).

For most of its history, the republican ideal of `mixed government' was defended primarily against the rule of a prince, or aristocratic power, rather than democracy. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the threat of `the unbridled freedom of the lowest

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[26] Diderot's article on Machiavelli in the Encyclopaedia reports that he said on his deathbed that `he preferred being in hell with Socrates, Alcibiades, Caesar, Pompey and the other great men of antiquity, to being in heaven with the founders of Christianity' (Peter Gay, The Enlightenment, vol. 1, p. 286; cf. Sebastian de Grazia, Machiavelli in Hell (New York, Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 341, 385). Even when Socrates is included in the republican pantheon, he is the exceptional case - all the others commanded victorious armies.

[27] Cf. Chapter Two above.

[28] Luzac uses the term volksregeering. According to Schama, what the Patriot leaders meant by the `people' was `that broad mass of petty traders, artisans, craftsmen, merchants and shopkeepers who could readily identify themselves with the term burgerij' (Patriots and Liberators, p. 66).

[29] Rousseau, The Social Contract, p. 57.

common denominator' is Luzac's main concern. But his critique of democracy is also given a distinctive cast by his sense of the specific situation of the Netherlands: a loosely-federated maritime republic, in the midst of ever more powerful and expansionist nation-states. For a 'predominantly urban republicanism' - as Kossmann describes it - it was clear that there was no return to the 'liberty of the ancients', based as it was on the landowner's willingness to expand the state.[30]

Luzac was a fervent supporter of American independence, and an admirer of the USA, 'where the laws protect the freedom of the people, but also restrain it' (6). But he did not believe that a 'pure democracy' could exist 'in a country of limited extent, with a dense population, mainly involved in commerce, and thus not altogether impoverished, also not separated from its neighbours by mountains, snow, ice and rocks' (xxxix). The task of sustaining the 'freedom and independence of our commonwealth' (viii) against the imperial powers of modern Europe is never far from his mind. Wise and honest men - like Socrates - were required for popular government to be made compatible with 'the character of the people, the size of the country, the extent of its wealth' if it was to be preserved from monarchical rule and 'the yoke of the great' (42). Socrates is contrasted with Pericles and Alcibiades, who awakened in the Athenian democracy the desire to dominate other free peoples, and whose imperialist ambition led to the city's downfall (45, 47).

Luzac's Socratic conception of civic virtue gave a more conspicuous place to intellectual life than was customary for classical republicanism. For him, 'learning is the source of true civic virtue' and Socrates the exemplar of 'how learning should be applied' (18). Literature, he argues, is not a matter of prestige or an embellishment, but a practical necessity, of use to 'all the other sciences, especially rational religion, law, politics and ethics' (x). In his own time, he believed the legacy of Socrates was exemplified by Pieter Nieuwland - a poet and Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Leiden, a man of humble family and prodigious intellectual gifts, who died in 1794 at the age of 30 (72-3).

Luzac's address of 1795 had placed Socrates at the centre of a peculiarly self-conscious and forward-looking republicanism. Unlike many within the republican tradition, he did not rely on traditional ties of custom and religion to sustain virtue, but emphasised literary creation and philosophical enquiry instead. Unlike the bourgeois liberalism emerging at the time, he continued to see civic virtue as essential to freedom. He did not envisage a market-based society in which the state would either be indifferent to the task of upholding virtue or consider such a task as interference with the individual's freedom. He saw a conscious commitment to ongoing enquiry, aimed at establishing truth, as a condition for freedom, but offered no real philosophical argument for this view. It might be said that he made use of an image of Socrates which had been established in Dutch literature and philosophy, but was still to be vindicated by actual philosophical argument.

Luzac promised a sequel in which he would show the 'libellers of Socrates' as 'false friends of freedom' (xv). The sequel never appeared. Having opposed the rule of the Stadholder, he also opposed the Batavian Republic which supplanted it with the assistance of the French army. He 'upheld the traditions of the old republic against the vices of the new', sustaining a 'gentle and ironic opposition', until his death in 1807, as a result of the explosion

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[30] Kossmann, Politieke Theorie en Geschiedenis, p. 222.

of a gunpowder-barge moored in the Rapenburg in Leiden.[31] The conditions which made feasible his republican interpretation of Socrates - the rise of national powers, intent on territorial and economic expansion - were also those which put an end to classical republicanism as a real political alternative. That interpretation was to find its sequel in the less directly political spheres of Dutch philosophy and theology.

The Dutch Socrates from Hemsterhuis to van Heusde

Luzac's interpretation of Socrates echoed - and may have consciously drawn upon - the image of Socrates as a precursor of modernity which Frans Hemsterhuis had done more than anyone else to establish in Dutch philosophy. Hemsterhuis died in 1790, and came to be remembered as the `Dutch Socrates'.[32] His philosophical work was intended `to bring Newtonian mechanical philosophy within the wider framework of a Socratic philosophy of man'.[33] He has been described as `the most original Dutch thinker of the 18th century'. Some decades after his death Philip Willem van Heusde - the Utrecht philosopher whose influence shaped the development of liberal theology in the Netherlands - saw Hemsterhuis as the philosopher who had formulated the essentially Dutch outlook.[34]

In his own lifetime, Hemsterhuis was not as clearly rooted in Dutch life. He held no university position. His main works were written in French. His most intimate collaborator, the Princess von Galatzin, was the wife of the Russian ambassador at the Hague. In spite of his Enlightenment views on politics and religion, he supported the Orangist Stadholder against the Patriots in the 1780s, at the same time praising the revolution in France. He suggested erasing the word `fatherland' from all children's books, so that `the child should become a cosmopolitan and see the world or at least the whole of Europe as its fatherland'.[35] Perhaps there was something essentially Dutch in this indifference to questions of nationality? Hemsterhuis was an admirer of Rousseau, but his political thought had a remote and abstract character - a republicanism not committed to the defence of any actual republic. But his

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[31] Schama, Patriots and Liberators, pp. 339, 548.

[32] He was frequently addressed as `Socrates' in his lifetime, and encouraged the practice (M.J. Petry, ed., Frans Hemsterhuis: Waarneming en Werkelijkheid (Baarn, Ambo, 1990), p. 22). His main writings were dialogues set in ancient Greece, in which his own views were sometimes defended by Socrates. The epithet `the Dutch Socrates' was part of the title of a book-length study of Hemsterhuis by Boulan, published in 1924. Cf. also Marcel F. Fresco, `Hemsterhuis tussen Leibniz en Hume,' Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland 5:1-2 (1994), pp. 121-38.

[33] Michiel Wielema, `Frans Hemsterhuis: A Philosopher's View of the History of the Dutch Republic,' Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies 14:1 (Spring 1993), p. 109; for a detailed exposition, cf. Frank Söhngen, `Hemsterhuis in Context,' in M.F. Fresco et al, eds., Frans Hemsterhuis 1721-1790 (Munster, Lit, 1995), pp. 263-96.

[34] Wielema, `Frans Hemsterhuis: A Philosopher's View,' pp. 109, 115-6; cf. J.M.M. de Valk, ed., Philip Willem van Heusde: Wijsbegeerte van het Gezond Verstand (Baarn, Ambo, 1989), pp. 19-23; Sassen, Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland, pp. 299-300.

[35] Wielema, `Frans Hemsterhuis: A Philosopher's View,' p. 115.

Newtonian image of Socrates - at once compatible with modern science, an ally of discursive reason rather than religious authority, and yet opposed to liberal individualism - made him a powerful resource for Dutch philosophy in the 19th century.

The dilemmas of Dutch republicanism are more readily visible in the work of Paulus van Hemert. Van Hemert became a minister in the DRC in 1781, the year in which the Patriot movement began. In 1784 he resigned from the ministry, saying that he could no longer uphold the doctrine of predestination, nor the teaching of the depravity of human reason. In 1788 he joined the Brotherhood of Remonstrants, and taught at their seminary in Amsterdam until 1796. In 1798, his four-volume exposition of the philosophy of Kant appeared. From 1799 to 1803 he was the editor and main contributor of the Magazijn voor de Critische Wijsgeerte, which sought to propagate the critical philosophy of Kant as a `powerful instrument' for moral improvement among the `Batavian people' and a `source of perpetual peace'.[36] Together with the poet Johannes Kinker and others, van Hemert occupied a `unique position' as representative of the radical wing of the Enlightenment in the Netherlands, as distinct from its moderate, theologising counterpart.[37]

The Magazijn treated Kant's philosophy not as a field of academic study - its supporters were based mainly in the professions, rather than in academic institutions - but rather as a new perspective for the reform of human thought, and the re-interpretation of its history. Van Hemert wrote not only on Kant, but on a range of other historical and philosophical topics, including a three-part account of Socrates as philosopher and teacher, which appeared in 1801.

For van Hemert, Socrates' philosophy was embodied in, and inseparable from, a method of teaching which enabled `the minds of his pupils to work for themselves, and in this way (instead of copying concepts from others) to produce their own concepts, and thereby science, for themselves'.[38] The aim of this method was `the furthering of the self-sufficiency, freedom and independence of the human mind in everything which Reason commands, but which the rulers of humanity, and in particular the spiritual rulers - whether they are stupid, fanatical and intolerant; or treacherous hypocrites, who actually know better - have for too long suppressed by all available means, still continuing, as much as they dare, to fight against progress' (347). In this perspective, Socratic education is a political activity. Indeed, it is more deeply political than the activities of legislators, in that spiritual laws - being `grounded in the self' - are not arbitrary or subject to change, so that progress based on these laws cannot be held back by `the cunning of priests' (348).

Van Hemert holds that although Socrates is universally admired, it is only the Kantian philosophy which can explain the truth of his method (343-4). He sets out the Platonic theory

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[36] J. Plat and M.R. Wielema, eds., Paulus van Hemert: Gezag en Grenzen van de Menslijke Rede (Baarn, Ambo, 1987), pp. 15-24; quotations are from the opening editorial of the Magazijn, which is reproduced on pp. 23-5.

[37] M.R. Wielema, `De Nederlandse Verlichting,' Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland, 5:1-2 (1994), pp. 23-4.

[38] Paulus van Hemert, `Waarom Verdient de Leerwijze van Socrates, boven die van Anderen, de Voorkeur?,' Magazijn voor de Critische Wijsgeerte, vol. 4 (1801), p. 304. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

of recollection, but does not rely on it in order to explain how Socrates was able to teach geometry to Meno's slave. Or rather, to the extent that he does, his account of this theory is heavily coloured by Kantian epistemology and ethics. The young slave learned geometry, rather, by learning to think independently, through free self-activity of the mind (309-10; cf. 314, 336). For in our consciousness, the knowing subject and the object of knowledge are necessarily separated (310-11; cf. 328).

The ancient philosophers, including Socrates, had sought to explain how this division was overcome by adopting the `Eastern Philosophy' that man was part of God, and would be reunited with God in an afterlife (315-6). The immortality of the soul seemed to offer a solution, by positing a time in which we had complete knowledge which we could later recollect. But according to van Hemert, this was only an apparent solution, for it does not explain how the human mind could have gained knowledge before its earthly incarnation (317-8). For him, learning is not recollection, but development through self-activity (320). Indeed, truth is impossible or meaningless without self-activity, as a passive recipient of it would be `merely dependent on the truth' (327), which would then be `arbitrary and changeable' (330). Learning is the product of enquiry, based on rational capacities, and such enquiry requires freedom (330).

Van Hemert's work was clearly motivated by strong convictions about his own society. But these were never brought into any coherent relationship with the conflicts of his own time, and perhaps they could not have been. He criticised empiricism for its reliance on experience `which shows what actually is, and not what can necessarily be so, and not otherwise' (341). His critique suggests a dialectical movement which transforms `what actually is'. His description of his opponents as `those who have not yet come of age' suggests a process of growth towards philosophical truth. But apart from moral and philosophical education, conducted by a handful of enlightened Kantians, he had no way of working to bring about this movement or growth.

Van Hemert's followers dwindled, complaining of the `obscurity' of his work. It was indeed in conflict with the more concrete and historical orientation of Dutch intellectual life. He turned to lighter, more anecdotal writing, and published a new magazine: Lectuur by het Ontbijt en de Theetafel (Reading for the Breakfast and Tea Table). But he could reply to increasingly vehement criticism only by returning to the `obscurity' of philosophical argument. In 1814 he ended his philosophical career, turning to charitable work, which he pursued until his death in 1825. `Disappointed in the propagation of the theory of Kant's philosophy,' according to Plat and Wielema, `he devoted himself wholly to its practice'.[39]

Luzac's Socratic interpretation of republican freedom could not be vindicated through philosophical argument alone, as van Hemert had attempted to do. But the legacy of Socrates came to be re-interpreted in yet another Dutch philosophical project - this time more consciously national in orientation, and closer to the theological idiom of Dutch political and intellectual life. Unlike Hemsterhuis and van Hemert, Philip Willem van Heusde was solidly established within Dutch academic life. He was a popular - indeed famous - figure at Utrecht, where he was a professor from1803 - the year in which van Hemert's Magazijn ceased publication - until his death in 1839.

Van Heusde was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, and by Hemsterhuis in

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[39] Plat and Wielema, Paulus van Hemert, pp. 30-3; quotation on p. 33.

particular. But his own project was formed in a time in which Dutch aspirations were humbled: the French annexation of the Netherlands in 1810, the post-Napoleonic restoration of monarchy in Europe, the restoration of the House of Orange under William I, the troubled union of the Netherlands and Belgium between 1814 and 1840. Among the projects of the Dutch Enlightenment, that which proved itself most durable was perhaps the educational reforms initiated by the Maatschappij tot 'Nut van 't Algemeen (Society for the General Good), which formed the basis for the Dutch elementary school system, established in 1806.[40]

Van Heusde belonged in these times, and reflected their needs all too directly. His main energies were taken up by teaching, rather than writing. The University of Utrecht was itself reduced to the status of a secondary school after the French annexation, and he worked tirelessly to re-establish its standing. He came to be known as Praeceptor Hollandiae (the teacher of the Dutch people). In his philosophical work, he consciously strived to develop a 'characteristically Dutch style' of simplicity, clarity and piety.[41] He claimed that Scottish common sense philosophy 'best fitted the Dutch national character', and attempted to provide an encyclopaedic overview of its tenets, rather than attempting any real philosophical innovation.[42]

Van Heusde presented his encyclopaedic 'philosophy for the 19th century' - in four volumes, written towards the end of his life - as 'the philosophy of the Socratic school'. This philosophy, he told his contemporaries, 'is entirely suited to the education of the youth, the forming of statesmen and ministers of religion, the practice of all the arts and sciences, the maintenance of order, justice and law in society; in a word, for the promotion of civilisation and national happiness'. Other contemporary schools of thought, he remarked, had 'not only been useless for the interests of society', but had sowed doubt, unbelief and internal conflict.[43] The complacency and conformism of these sentiments stand in sharp contrast with the defiant sense of Luzac and van Hemert that the world could be made anew. But van Heusde's treatment of Socrates returns to the issue which is at the heart of the distinctively Dutch republican interpretation of his legacy: 'how one comes through love of truth to freedom' (146).

Van Heusde pursues this question through an enquiry into 'the main principle of higher education'. He begins by rejecting the principles of utility and self-interest, which either view the individual as a cog in the larger social machine, or equate self-interest with the interest of society. This 'low doctrine', according to van Heusde, reduces human life to the level of the ant-heap (146-7). He attributes this doctrine to the 'French school' of the 18th century, among whom he singles out Helvetius (147-8); to Locke, whose empiricism leaves no room for our 'inborn love of truth' (148); and to Bentham, whose principle of utility is 'the ground of all

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[40] Cf. Schama, Patriots and Liberators, pp. 530-41.

[41] J.M.M. de Valk, ed., Philip Willem van Heusde: Wijsbegeerte van het Gezond Verstand (Baarn, Ambo, 1989), p 9; cf. pp. 21, 22.

[42] De Valk, Philip Willem van Heusde, pp. 18-20; cf. pp. 109-12.

[43] P.W. van Heusde, De Socratische School, of Wijsgeerte voor de Negentiende Eeuw (Groningen, H. Geertsma & J.B. Huber, 1860), vol. 1, p. x. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

mistaken political ideas' (166). He traces it back to the Sophists (148), and discovers it at work among the democratic leaders of classical Athens, seeking to satisfy the 'idle opinions of the masses' (153).

He does not contest the view that self-interest motivates the majority of humankind, but invites his readers - in the voice of Socrates and Plato - to 'join together in the search for a higher principle than that low self-interest' (148-9). In this way, they will learn what freedom is, and 'how one should come to true freedom through love of truth and morality' (149). The principle which he opposes to self-interest is that of love. He argues that those who are motivated by love will overcome all opposition, as they would rather die than betray the object of their love (149-51). It is also through love that we become 'highly moral beings', are able to 'transport ourselves to the soul of the other, and then look back and judge ourselves from there' (151).

The argument draws on Plato's dialogues - mainly the Phaedrus and Symposium - but transforms a psychological analysis of eros into an ethical principle of love. The love which, according to van Heusde, is able to change society is not directed at a beloved individual, as in Plato, but at the abstract principles of nobility and goodness. This fusion of classical and Christian concepts allows van Heusde to argue 'how close, how necessary is the link of love of truth and virtue with freedom, and that there is no freedom without truth' (155). 'Love of truth', in this perspective, is the erotic motive of those engaged in higher learning, who are at the same time those best able to 'distinguish themselves from the greed of the masses' (149).

The principle of democracy, according to van Heusde, is that of individual self-interest. He echoes Luzac's argument that democratic states are by nature imperialist, as the principle of acquisitiveness is transferred from the individual to the state itself. Self-interest leads to slavery, whether for the individual or the state (152). The 'insatiable thirst for freedom' embodied in the democratic state, he argues - along with Plato's Republic - results in tyranny (179).

But van Heusde's attack on utility and self-interest is never really carried through. He rejects the 'low doctrine' of utility, but puts a 'higher' doctrine of utility in its place by arguing that love of truth is 'really useful and in the interest of society' (149), and enables people to live 'calmly and happily' (176). His challenge to the conventions of his day never extends to the moral conventions of Dutch Christianity: 'It is far from my intention for you to leave the Christian school and be satisfied with the Socratic. On the contrary, I wish to enable you, by means of philosophy, to understand better that which you have been taught from your earliest years, and to estimate rightly the high value of divine revelation above all human knowledge.' He explains to his readers - who he frequently addresses as 'young people' - that their guides, Socrates and Plato, have brought them to a point from which they can see 'how easily, in our time, genuine philosophy is united with genuine religion', so that 'the true philosopher is also a Christian philosopher'.[44]

Van Heusde drew on the republican interpretation of Socrates which had emerged in the Dutch age of revolution. He saw the legacy of Socrates as standing in opposition to the liberal individualism of Locke and Bentham. But his republicanism was a kind of historical residue rather than a political programme. His interpretation of Socrates was a peculiar amalgam: a teacher of virtue rather than an exemplar of it, whose philosophical commitment to truth is obscured by the sentiment of love at its foundation. In spite of van Heusde's

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[44] De Valk, Philip Willem van Heusde, p. 68, 81.

encyclopaedic ambitions, it was within the sphere of liberal Christianity that his Socratic project could be taken further.

Liberal Theology and the Dialectical Tradition

Van Heusde's main writings were published towards the end of his life, or posthumously. By then, however, Dutch intellectual life had been transformed, by the restored stability of the European political order, the growing prestige of the natural sciences and secular modes of learning, and by the emergence of the Réveil movement, characterised by a rejection of the legacy of the Enlightenment and a call to return to the articles of faith adopted by the DRC at the Synod of Dort.

The manifesto of this movement, Isaac da Costa's Bezwaren tegen den Geest der Eeuw, appeared in 1823. Da Costa was the `prophetic voice' of the Réveil in the Netherlands, condemning the writings of Rousseau, the idea of a constitution and the emancipation of slaves in one vigorous breath; Groen van Prinsterer emerged as the leader `more orientated towards church, confession and politics'.[45] Van Heusde's only engagement in public polemic in his long career was a critical discussion of Groen van Prinsterer's work, published in 1837.[46]

Van Heusde's teaching and influence lived on mainly in the Groningen school of theology, which began to take on its distinctive character after the appointment of P. Hofstede de Groot and J.F. van Oordt at the University of Groningen in 1829 and L.G. Pareau in 1831. This school took on a clear public identity and role with the establishment of the journal, Waarheid in Liefde (Truth in Love) in 1837. With the growth of the Dutch elementary school system in the 1830s, in which schooling was Christian, `but had to be acceptable to all sorts of Protestants and Roman Catholics', the Groningen theology - with its `mild, lyrical belief, optimistic, extraverted, vague, conciliatory' - came to have a powerful influence, which continued until the 1850s.[47]

Years later, acknowledging van Heusde as `the greatest influence on us', de Groot echoed his characteristic themes: the quest for a `genuinely Dutch' style of theology and philosophy; the idea of love as the central feature of religion and ethics; and an idea of method informed by van Heusde's interpretation of Socrates. According to Hofstede de Groot, van Heusde `left no system of philosophy. By far the most of his strengths and his distinctive characteristics lay, as with Socrates, in his method'. He taught his pupils through dialogue, so as `not to impose something alien on them from outside, but to educate them by developing that which was in them already'. The Groningen school took from van Heusde, above all, a conception of Jesus which was incompatible with theological dogma: a conception which explained, in Pareau's account, `why Jesus never proclaimed a law, or conveyed a regularly constituted doctrine, but educated younger people through discussion, through interaction, by forming a circle of friends, and through that education to establish his congregation in them, who were

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[45] A.J. Rasker, De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795 (Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1981), p. 75; cf. Allard Pierson, Isaac da Costa: Een Gedenkrede (Haarlem, A.C. Kruseman, 1865), pp. 44-7.

[46] de Valk, Philip Willem van Heusde, p. 17.

[47] E.H. Kossmann, The Low Countries 1780-1940 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978), p.290.

bound together by a spirit of truth and love'.[48] In short, the Groningen school came to understand Jesus on the model of van Heusde's Socrates. In this way they preserved the distinctively Dutch legacy of republicanism - its tolerance, its commitment to enquiry - while removing its essentially political character.

The transformation which began in van Heusde's lifetime did not end there. The same context enabled other schools of thought to emerge which were still more critical of Calvinist orthodoxy. Jan Hendrick Scholten was appointed at Leiden in 1843, and became the main spokesman of the Leiden or 'modern' school. He had been taught by van Heusde at Utrecht and began by sympathising with the Groningen school. But he soon went beyond them, arguing in his major work, De Leer der Hervormde Kerk (1848), that the Bible be seen as a historical and fallible document which gave expression to Christianity rather than serving as its basis.[49] Among the Dutch universities, Utrecht remained the most orthodox, but the appointment of C.W. Opzoomer as Professor of Philosophy in 1846 ensured that it did not remain free of controversy. Opzoomer criticised Scholten in turn for upholding the divinity of Jesus.[50] These developments led to an increasingly vigorous defence of Calvinist orthodoxy within the DRC. The 'Address of the Seven Gentlemen of the Hague' to the Synod of 1842 objected strongly to the Groningen theology.[51] The defence of orthodoxy also became more politicised after the major figures of the Réveil grouped together in 1845 as Christelijke Vrienden, from which the Anti-Revolutionary Party was later to emerge.[52]

A major source of controversy within Dutch liberal Protestantism in these decades was the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel himself had visited the Netherlands in 1809 and again in 1822, was much impressed by the beauty and prosperity of the Dutch cities, but not by 'the indifference or aversion to philosophy now prevailing in Holland'.[53] Van Heusde warned his followers at Groningen against the influence of Schleiermacher and Hegel, and Hofstede de Groot was especially hostile to D.F. Strauss's Life of Jesus.[54] Scholten and his followers, in contrast, assimilated much of the historical and critical method of German Biblical scholarship as represented by Strauss. Opzoomer's early philosophical work was influenced by Hegel, but in a somewhat inconclusive way which fell short of a real engagement of the

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[48] Jasper Vree, De Groningen Godgeleerden: De Oorsprongen en de Eerste Periode van hun Optrede 1820-43 (Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1984), pp. 40, 41, 43.

[49] Cf. Rasker, De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, pp. 115-22.

[50] Cf. Rasker, De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, p. 114; Wim van Dooren, Cornelis Opzoomer: Het Wezen der Kennis (Baarn, Ambo, 1990).

[51] Vree, De Groninger Godgeleerden, pp. 302-24.

[52] Cf. Rasker, De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, pp. 93-6; Kossmann, The Low Countries, pp. 184-6.

[53] Clarke Butler and Christine Seiler, eds., Hegel: The Letters (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 575-607; quotation from p. 588. Later, in 1827, there was some discussion of Hegel taking an academic post in Belgium (pp. 662-3).

[54] Vree, De Groninger Godgeleerden, pp. 163-4, 196-9.

Dutch philosophical tradition with historical dialectic.[55] The influence of Hegel was felt in a more sustained way in the work of Bolland in the last decade of the 19th century.[56] But the Dutch assimilation of Socratic dialectic already lent itself to exploring the historical character of ideas and arguments, and Groningen theology was itself receptive to that task.

At the same time as the Socratic legacy in the Netherlands became less overtly political, its dialectical character became explicit and more historical in orientation. This is apparent in the concept of truth which occupied so central a place in the Groningen theology. The first issue of Waarheid in Liefde set out its editors' conception of the task of their time: to establish `what part of Christendom is constantly enduring truth, to which we must continue to hold fast through all changes in opinions and systems?' Through their enquiries, they hope to discover Christian truth `not perfectly, and not for always, but insofar as the light of these times and their own powers allow, gradually to approach it more closely'. According to Pareau, truth and love are `the essence of Christianity'. But we can know truth only in part; it remains `the object of constant enquiry and constantly perfectible knowledge'. Truth, in this perspective, is a historical process, rather than a result; the object of ethical commitment rather than intellectual achievement; always in need of further scrutiny, rather than passive acceptance. To this end, the editors commit themselves to avoid theological jargon, not to condemn `those who think differently', and to reject the idea of an infallible church.[57]

This concept of truth already implies a certain philosophical conception of history - an open-ended historical process, with a general tendency to progress, in which the moral and intellectual virtues which promote free enquiry and debate have a large role to play. That philosophical conception was seldom elaborated in much detail, and never explicitly defended as a dialectical conception of history. But it is not difficult to see how it moves in that direction in the work of one of the second generation of the Groningen school, E.J. Diest Lorgion.

Lorgion studied at Groningen under Hofstede de Groot, van Oordt and Pareau, and became the minister of the local congregation. He `came to occupy a leading place in the circle of the Groningers' as the author of works of religious history, and expositions of the Groningen theology, written in dialogue form, intended for a popular audience.[58] One of these dialogues, The Pastor of Vliethuizen, was serialised in the Cape Town journal, De Onderzoeker, which became the mouthpiece of theological liberalism at the Cape, and an English translation by Dr A.N.E. Changuion was published in Cape Town in 1861. In the previous year, Lorgion was appointed as Extraordinary Professor in Theology in Groningen. In his inaugural lecture, he set out his views on `the right practice of historical theology,

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[55] Cf. Sassen, Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland, pp. 319, 324; a mass of detail is provided in T. de Boone, `Uit de Geschiedenis van het Hegelianisme in de Eerst Helft der 19de Eeuw in Nederland,' De Idee, 1925-6. The first two parts of this survey make clear that there was widespread awareness of Hegel's philosophy in the Netherlands in this period, rather than far-reaching influence. I have not been able to locate the remaining parts of this survey.

[56] Cf. W. Otterspeer, `"De Hegelarij is alevel wat Raars!": Leven en Denken van Bolland,' Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland 6:1-2 (1995), pp. 137-44.

[57] Vree, De Groninger Godgeleerden, pp. 165-9.

[58] Vree, De Groninger Godgeleerden, p. 131; cf. p. 75.

excellently suited to building the church of the future', in a way which makes clear the distinctive character of the tradition of dialectical thought in which he stood, and which was to be developed further in the South African context.

Lorgion begins by asserting that `the religious condition of humankind is still far removed from the highest level of development which can be reached'. The history of human religion tends towards progress, but is not pre-determined `in the way in which the seed contains in itself the idea of the plant which will grow from it'.[59] Human history does not have this degree of necessity; `the higher life of the mind does not develop except through its own self-conscious activity'.[60] He argues that this self-conscious activity must necessarily be historically informed if it is to be coherently directed towards its goals, and sets out the duties of the historian in this regard: always to use the original sources (14-7); to use the sources critically, with an awareness of the author's assumptions and of possible falsifications (17-9); to search for the truth impartially, rather than using history as an `arsenal' from which to draw what helps to establish a preconceived conclusion (23-5); and finally, `to approach and view everything in a genuinely philosophical way' (27).

This injunction to approach history `philosophically' draws together the more specific and practical directives that precede it. Lorgion warns that there is no easily discoverable pattern in history: there is much diversity of context (11-2); sources are always informed by more or less problematic assumptions, and even the most authentic of them can be used in a way which is `superstitious' (18); the history of Christendom is represented in contradictory ways (18). For all these reasons, `it is not enough to view individuals and issues in isolation. Attention must be paid to the relationship in which the phenomena of the Church stand to the general spirit of the time and to each other; causes and consequences must be investigated; everything that is required to understand and assess the evidence and the people concerned must be kept in sight; in short, the treatment must be a philosophical one' (26-7).

The understanding of history requires, in other words, a conception of the historical process as a whole, in which each event is regarded `in the light of the centuries' (26). Only then can historical developments be `explained and grasped as much as possible'. But this philosophical framework cannot simply be imposed on history: `one must go to work with the greatest care, with philosophical speculation being preceded by the most thorough research, and especially without confusing philosophical argument with the play of fantasy' (27). The task of developing such a philosophy of history is never complete. But through this kind of enquiry, the `realm of truth, godliness and virtue' is extended (28), toleration of conflicting views is promoted (31), and conflict of opinion itself can be made a means towards attaining truth (37-8).

Lorgion's popular dialogues make use of a method of Socratic dialectic in order to propose a fundamentally historical approach to questions of theology and ethics. His fictional character, Pastor Welman - who is called to Vliethuizen by a Church Council hostile to the

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[59] This discussion of the seed and the plant which grows from it might be seen as a critical reference to the use of that analogy by Hegel (cf. Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 7.

[60] E.J. Diest Lorgion, De Regte Beoefening der Historische Theologie uitnemend geschikt ter Opbouwing van de Kerk der Toekomst (Groningen, H.R. Roelfsma, 1860), pp. 6, 8, 9. Further references to this work are made in the text.

errors of the Groningen school, without realising that he is a graduate of Groningen - gently exposes the contradictions in the defence of orthodoxy made by the mayor, Brinkhof, the wealthy merchant Brouwer, and others. When they appeal to `the faith of their ancestors' at the Synod of Dort, he points out the earlier ancestors who upheld the Catholic faith before the Reformation, or pagan faiths against those who brought Christianity to the Netherlands. When they defend the `fundamental truths of Christianity', he shows that Christians differ about whether they are true and proposes that they `stand the test of a careful scrutiny'. When Brouwer himself forgives a crippling debt owed to him, he points out the conflict with his impassioned defence of the doctrine of atonement for sin.[61] In this way, the Groningen positions are gradually vindicated, and a repertoire of arguments for theological liberalism and for toleration of differences is built up. In all of this, Welman is at pains to deny the accusation that the Groningers see Jesus as merely human, like Socrates.[62]

But by the time that these theological developments were felt at the Cape, their impetus in the Netherlands was already declining. The unique combination of circumstances which had created the Socratic moment in Dutch political and intellectual life came to an end. The renewal of the Dutch state in the decades after 1848 brought about a `pacification of the past', in Stuurman's phrase.[63]

The republican interpretation of Socrates lived on for a certain time in Groningen; for example, in the work of van Dijk. His treatment of Socrates draws explicitly on the work of Grote and Mill, whose admiration for Socrates provides the starting-point of his enquiry. But van Dijk does not share their optimistic hope that the conviction of Socrates could be prevented today by the establishment of the individual right of free speech. Van Dijk is also deeply influenced by Hegel's interpretation of the trial of Socrates as a `principially necessary conflict, a world-historical tragedy', and argues that the tragedy is inherent to the nature of intellectual commitment in all times. Socrates' conflict with the Athenians must be explained by a `tragic law, according to which whoever adopts a particular religion more warmly and passionately, in a deeper and more spiritual way, than the majority, will be considered as undermining that religion and denying the official gods'. The accusation against Socrates was both true and not true, he argues, and this verdict reveals the `tragedy of the artistic capacities of man'. This tragedy is not averted by the liberal defence of free speech: `The hymns of praise to free enquiry are sung in high tones,' but it is clear that the satisfaction with freedom of thought is greater, out of all proportion, than the satisfaction with the duty of thinking, and the effort which is required for the forming of precise ideas.'[64] Van Dijk seems not to realise that this `duty of thinking' - although it is at the heart of Socrates' mission - is hardly compatible with the liberalism of Grote and Mill.

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[61] E.J. Diest Lorgion, The Pastor of Vliethuizen, or, Conversations about the Groninger School, the Doctrine of the Church, the Science of Theology and the Bible (Cape Town, Juta & van de Sandt de Villiers, 1861), pp. 10, 16; cf. 24.

[62] E.g., Diest Lorgion, The Pastor of Vliethuizen, pp. 13, 16.

[63] Siep Stuurman, Wacht op Onze Daden: Het Liberalisme en de Vernieuwing van de Nederlandse Staat (Amsterdam, Bert Bakker, 1992), pp. 52-3.

[64] I. Van Dijk, Het Conflict tusschen Socrates en zijn Volk (Groningen, Noordhoff, 1890), pp. 5, 54, 63, 32-3.

But if the conditions which gave rise to the theological controversies of the mid-19th century were disappearing in the Netherlands, such conditions were occurring for the first time in the former Dutch colonial possession at the Cape, which was now part of the British Empire. That peculiarly Dutch interpretation of the legacy of Socrates took root there without its defenders having a clear awareness of the historical background of their ideas, or a clear sense of their differences - which were often sharply-felt - with the British tradition of bourgeois liberalism. It was formed by a harsher environment, in which social conflict was more fundamental and overt, and customs of debate and toleration less deep-rooted. In the Dutch context, that Socratic legacy had shifted its ground from politics to philosophy to theology; in South Africa, the dialectical tradition was to reverse the process. To trace that development is the work of the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF FREE ENQUIRY IN COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA

The 'Liberalism Struggle' in the Cape Dutch Reformed Church

The Cape of Good Hope was an outpost of the Dutch East India Company from 1652 until 1795. For most of that time, its political and intellectual life reflected that dependent status. Written accounts of conditions at the Cape did not extend much beyond official reports and the descriptions of visiting explorers and naturalists. 'In all South Africa,' according to L.M. Thompson, 'there was nothing approaching an intellectual circle.'[1] Political disputes turned on access to land and the right to supply ships docking at Cape Town. The ideas of the Dutch Patriot movement gave rise to a flurry of political activity in the 1780s, but produced no lasting legacy at the Cape.[2]

The Cape became a British colony after 1805, and the early decades of the 19th century saw a rapid expansion of its economy and government. In the first decades of the century, colonial political and intellectual life was changed by the assimilation of the idea of progress, which came to be held up as the standard by which government, colonists, missionaries and their converts and others should be measured.

The idea of progress was at first an anomaly in colonial conditions. Jean du Plessis describes how those who asserted the need for a 'regular society' capable of 'regular progress', such as W.S. van Ryneveld in 1805, had to admit that they could not see how it could be achieved. The more representative mode of argument for social change involved calling for a return to the 'golden age' of Jan van Riebeeck.[3] In the 1830s the idea of progress was put forward more confidently. Du Plessis cites the Cape of Good Hope Almanac and Annual Register - with the motto, 'Our Object is Utility' - as the path-breaker in this field, announcing, for example, in 1834: 'As Education shall expand the mind of the Rising Generations, as Civilization shall go steadily rather than rapidly onward, and as Liberal Sentiments and Knowledge shall come to bear upon the Colony's Capabilities, an entire change will be wrought in the aspect of the country. Every acre of cultivatable land will be brought into use; every tree and herb, and almost every green leaf, will be rendered subservient to the use of

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[1] L.M. Thompson, 'The South African Dilemma,' in Louis Hartz, ed., The Founding of New Societies (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1964), pp. 188-9. The most original attempt to reflect on the character of South African society in this period - Johannes Grevenbroek's Elegant and Accurate Account of the African Race, commonly known as Hottentots of 1695 - was produced in isolation, and had little or no impact on his contemporaries. The Latin text was translated into Dutch by J.W.G. van Oordt in 1886.

[2] Cf. André du Toit and Hermann Giliomee, Afrikaner Political Thought, 1780-1850 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1983), pp. 39-45.

[3] Jean du Plessis, Colonial Progress and Countryside Conservatism: An Essay on the Legacy of van der Lingen of Paarl, 1831-1975 (unpublished M.A. thesis, Stellenbosch, 1988), pp. 43-75.

man, as it was meant by the Creator to be.'[4]

Even then, however, officials and visitors from the metropolis were most prominent in articulating this ethos of progress. In this vein, the British astronomer, Sir John Herschel, announced to the South African College in 1837 the coming of a 'Scientific age - an age of thought carried out into action, an age of the application of the inductive philosophy to all the purposes of life and to the improvement of the human condition upon earth.'[5] The requirements of progress, or the 'spread of civilisation', were also used to question racial privilege by missionaries such as Dr John Philip. Philip and his allies generally found it more effective to appeal directly to the Colonial Office in London, or to British public opinion.[6]

By the mid-19th century, however, expansion of the colonial economy led to changes in the character of its political and intellectual life. The white population grew from 66,000 in 1832 to 140,000 in 1854. The number of Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) congregations increased from fourteen in 1824 to 49 in 1854, as new towns were formed, usually with a church and school. The number of children at school increased from fewer than 4,000 in 1842 to almost 20,000 in 1860. Previously isolated parts of the colony felt the benefits of improved transport, increased credit facilities and trade. At the same time, a rapid increase in newspapers and journals, in English and Dutch, created a substantial public audience for debates and controversies. Increasing numbers of colonial youth, not only from the tiny Cape Town elite, were returning to the Cape from studies abroad, especially in the Netherlands, where they had been exposed to a society in which intellectuals had a definite public role. Lastly, the campaign of 1849-50 against the deportation of convicts to the Cape, and the events leading up to the granting of representative government in 1853, created a climate of vigorous political contestation, in which intellectuals were called upon to intervene.[7]

These developments did not by any means weaken the role of the DRC in colonial life. Under British rule, the DRC remained the official church of the Colony. Its ministers' salaries were paid by the government, and until 1843 its synod decisions had to be confirmed by the British governor. It aligned itself closely with the colonial government in the first decades of British rule at the Cape - an alignment expressed by support for the policy of anglicisation of the first DRC synod at the Cape in 1824 and in its condemnation of the Great Trek in 1837. As the colony grew, the educative and stabilising role of the DRC became more important. Sir George Grey remarked in his address to the colonial parliament of 1855 that he had 'been struck by observing how powerful an influence the system of government and discipline of the Dutch Reformed Church exercises over the morals and conduct of its members'. The

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[4] Du Plessis, Colonial Progress and Countryside Conservatism, p. 54

[5] W.T. Ferguson and R.F.M. Immelman, eds., Sir John Herschel and Education at the Cape, 1834-40 (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 55-6.

[6] Cf. Andrew Nash, 'Dr Philip, the "Spread of Civilisation" and Liberalism in South Africa,' in Glenn Moss et al, The History of Opposition in South Africa (Johannesburg, Development Studies Group, 1978), pp. 91-118; Andrew Bank, Liberals and their Enemies: Racial Ideology at the Cape of Good Hope, 1820-50 (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Cambridge, 1995), pp. 96-101.

[7] This paragraph draws heavily on André du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' Failed Liberal Moment, 1850-1870', in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh, eds., Democratic Liberalism in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), pp. 37-41

'discipline and system of that Church ... fulfils many of the functions of government, beside affording an admirable machinery by which new settlements may be thrown off from the old stock'.[8]

In the 1850s, conservatives within the DRC - under the leadership of G.W.A. van der Lingen - mobilised against the effects of this ethos. Van der Lingen was much influenced by Groen van Prinsterer's writings, but developed his own increasingly apocalyptic critique of European modernity. But his resistance to modernity - culminating in the proposed boycott of the train between Paarl and Cape Town in 1862 - did not win wide support. His call for a boycott was betrayed, as he saw it, by his allies in the DRC.[9] The DRC was not prominent in articulating the increasingly dominant ethos of progress, but stood to benefit from it.

The conflict within the DRC which became known as the 'liberalism struggle' emerged on this context.[10] This conflict was first manifested in response to the proposal to establish a theological seminary at the Cape. Abraham Faure, the DRC minister in Cape Town, took the lead in pressing for the establishment of a seminary as early as 1824, complaining about the considerable expense of overseas studies, but also of the 'modernism and unbelief' still prevalent in Europe since the French Revolution.[11] But it was only in the 1850s - with a younger generation, including John and Andrew Murray and N.J. Hofmeyr, in the lead - that the DRC began actively planning and fund-raising towards this goal. The call for the seminary was now mainly motivated by the need to insulate the DRC from recent theological developments in the Netherlands.

In 1853 Dr A.N.E. Changuion opposed this plan in a series of letters in De Zuid-Afrikaan - later collected as Bezwaren tegen het Oprigting eener Theologische Kweekschool in deze Volksplanting (Objections to the Establishment of a Theological Seminary in this Settlement). His intervention made the call for a seminary into a rallying-point for the orthodox. The DRC Synod of 1857 gave overwhelming support to the establishment of a seminary at Stellenbosch, which was opened - with John Murray and N.J. Hofmeyr as its first professors - in 1859.

The liberal challenge to DRC orthodoxy reached a decisive point with the establishment of the monthly journal De Onderzoeker (The Inquirer) in 1860, under the anonymous editorship of Leopold Marquard, a teacher of mathematics at Changuion's Institute, and later Surveyor-General of the Cape Colony. Het Volksblad, which had been established in 1849 largely to oppose the deportation of convicts to the Cape, became a mouthpiece of the liberal cause after the appointment as editor of Dr J.W.G. van Oordt, also a teacher at Changuion's Institute, in 1854. In 1861 a rival newspaper, De Volksvriend, was established, with the

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[8] Sir George Grey, Address to the Legislative Council and House of Assembly at the Opening of the Second Session of the Colonial Parliament (Cape Town, publisher unknown, 1855), p. 6. On the role of the DRC in the formation of new towns, cf. du Plessis, Colonial Progress and Countryside Conservatism, pp. 83-97.

[9] Cf. du Plessis, Colonial Progress and Countryside Conservatism, pp. 115-25, 178-97.

[10] The sense in which the contested theological views in this controversy could be described as 'liberal' is discussed in Chapter One above. The term has become established, and is used here for that reason, despite its ambiguity. The relationship of historical liberalism and Cape liberalism is discussed later in this chapter.

[11] G.B.A. Gerdener, Bouers van Weleer (Cape Town, NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1951), pp. 43-4.

seventeen-year-old Jan Hofmeyr as its editor, in order to defend the cause of orthodoxy. Other journals and publications added their voices to the controversy.[12]

The decisive test of strength came in the DRC Synod of 1862. The liberal cause had been strengthened by young men returning to the Cape after completing their theological studies in the Netherlands. Between 1857 and 1862, no fewer than 31 new ministers had been legitimated. By the time of the 1862 Synod, the liberals could rely on the support of twenty or more ministers or elders, more than a quarter of its membership.[13] At that Synod, J.J. Kotzé of Darling and T.F. Burgers of Hanover were suspended from their ministries for holding unsound doctrines, and S.P. Naude of Queenstown censured.

Kotzé and Burgers appealed to the civil courts. After a protracted legal process they were reinstated, but increasingly marginalised within the Church. The introduction of the colloquium doctum in 1862 enabled the orthodox party to prevent those whom they regarded as holding unsound doctrines from being called to the ministry. The establishment of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch also gave the DRC a greater degree of control over the training of its ministers. The final confirmation of the defeat of theological liberalism at the Cape came when De Onderzoeker ceased publication at the end of 1884.

The 'liberalism struggle' in the DRC was not merely a theological conflict. It was the first major intellectual conflict in South Africa within a largely colonial-born group. It took place within an institution which had a crucial role in colonial life. The DRC was the only major institution which extended across the entire area of white settlement, even beyond the colony's borders, and the only major institution in which colonial intellectuals were dominant. Its Christianity provided the basic framework of belief and legitimation which the colonial government and the colonists had in common. And the conflict concerned the meaning of the central assumptions of colonial political and intellectual life: the character of human progress; the role of conscious thought in bringing it about; the role of reason and revelation in sustaining and developing morality within colonial society; the meaning and significance of human freedom; the character of the Christian, Protestant and Dutch Reformed tradition, and the relationship of colonial society to Western historical tradition more generally. This was surely the first time in which significant numbers of South Africans had to develop in a sustained way, in a debate extending over many years, a philosophical account of the central concepts which informed their social life.

The theological liberals shared a particular philosophical vision, which informed their theological differences with the party of orthodoxy. They argued consistently that they did not deny or question the teachings of Christianity, but understood them differently from the party of orthodoxy. Their shared philosophical vision had its roots in the developments within

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[12] Cf. Elizabeth Conradie, Hollandse Skrywers uit Suid-Afrika, 1652-1875 (Pretoria, J.H. de Bussy, 1934), pp. 309-13.

[13] This estimate is based on voting counts at the Synod of 1862, which are given in F. Lion Cachet, Vijftien Jaar in Zuid-Afrika (Leeuwaarden, H. Bokma, 1875), p. 180. One historian gives a detailed breakdown of theological affiliations within the Synod of 1862, placing each member into one of five groups: three members (including van der Lingen) in the 'ultra-reformed' group; fourteen in the 'strict' orthodox group; seven (including John Murray) in the Irenic group, which generally supported orthodoxy. Seven are described as 'Gronings' or moderately liberal; and seventeen as liberal (S.P. Engelbrecht, Thomas Francois Burgers: 'n Lewenskets (Pretoria, J.H. de Bussy, 1933), p. 78).

Dutch liberal theology described in the previous chapter, but it developed in a direction of its own in the context of the Cape.

Nor was this a conflict which concerned Dutch-speaking colonists alone. It was not only that the Dutch-speaking colonists formed by far the largest part of the settler population. The challenge of the theological liberals was also, at the same time, a challenge to the conceptions which made possible a high degree of co-operation between the DRC and the colonial government. As we shall see, the mainly English-speaking Cape liberal establishment consistently supported the orthodox party within the DRC, even though politically it appeared to be closer to the theological liberals. In this sense, what was at stake was the moral basis and historical direction of colonial rule in South Africa.

Dr Changuion and the 'Andersdenkenden'

The liberalism struggle in the DRC was shaped by the conditions of colonial political and intellectual life in South Africa. It was, at the same time, a conflict between proponents of theological views developed in the Netherlands. Almost all the main figures within both the orthodox and the liberal parties were graduates of Dutch universities.

To some extent, it could be seen as a conflict between graduates of Utrecht and Leiden. Among the orthodox party, Abraham Faure studied at Utrecht in 1816-8, where one of his teachers was J.F. van Oordt, later of Groningen. John and Andrew Murray studied there in 1845-8, and N.J. Hofmeyr in 1846-50. Utrecht was often preferred for its orthodoxy, but also because study fees and accommodation were less costly.[14] Among the liberals, Changuion studied at Leiden in 1828-30. J.W.G. van Oordt, the only son of J.F. van Oordt, gained a doctorate in classics there in 1852. Of the young ministers who were most directly under attack at the Synod of 1862, J.J. Kotzé studied at Leiden in 1855-8, T.F. Burgers at Utrecht in 1853-8, where he was influenced by Opzoomer, and S.P. Naude began his studies at Utrecht in 1854 and then transferred to Leiden. D.P. Faure studied at Leiden in 1861-5.[15]

Among the students from the Cape - all of those mentioned above, except for Changuion and van Oordt - there is no clear dividing-line of wealth, status or family. On the orthodox side, Abraham Faure and Hofmeyr were sons of relatively wealthy families. Abraham Faure's liberal relative D.P. Faure grew up in more straitened circumstances. But J.J. Kotzé, whose father was twice mayor of Cape Town and twice the representative of Cape Town in the Legislative Council, grew up in one of the city's grand homes. His fellow-liberal, H.C.V. Leibrandt, who graduated from Utrecht in 1859, was the son of a wealthy wine-merchant. Johan Hendrick de Villiers (later Lord de Villiers, the first Chief Justice of South Africa), the son of a Paarl land-surveyor of modest means and the protégé of van der Lingen, decided to abandon his theological studies at Utrecht in 1863, fearing that his liberal views would not be well-received. 'To be an ideal minister at the Cape, one requires to lay aside all independence of thought and all individuality of spirit,' he wrote to his father in 1863. 'I am not sorry to say

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[14] P.B. van der Walt, John Murray 1826-82: Die Eerste Stellenbosse Professor (Pretoria, NG Kerkboekhandel, 1979), p. 44.

[15] Biographical details are taken from the five-volume Dictionary of South African Biography, published by the Human Sciences Research Council from 1968 to 1987. As far as I know, there were no graduates of Groningen in the Cape ministry at this time, even though the Groningen school had a considerable influence.

that the considerations are too hard for me.'[16]

Many of the most prominent liberals were associated with Changuion's Institute, either as teachers or pupils. But two of Changuion's former pupils, N.J. Hofmeyr and J.H. Neethling, were leading defenders of orthodoxy, who wrote a strongly-worded reply to his objections to the establishment of a seminary. D.P. Faure, who completed his schooling at Changuion's Institute, later commented that there was 'a peculiarly political atmosphere about the establishment'.[17]

Changuion was the son of the first Dutch ambassador to the USA. He came to the Cape in 1831 as Professor of Classical and Modern Languages at the recently-established South African College. In 1842 he resigned his post there, and established his own institute in Cape Town. He was a prolific author and can be credited with writing the first original philosophical text to be published in South Africa, his Wijsgeerig en Godsdienstig Leerboek of 1848.[18] He was clearly a gifted and much-loved teacher, but could not be described as a profound thinker. His philosophical primer began life as a series of short texts for translation, which dealt with such divergent topics as how your earthly life could be a preparation for the hereafter, and the benefits of early rising.[19] He is often remembered as the author of a series of letters objecting to the establishment of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch.

In retrospect, it is not difficult to see the publication of Changuion's Bezwaren as a tactical blunder. Conradie states bluntly that the opening of the Seminary in 1859 'signed Changuion's death warrant as a churchman as far as the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was concerned'.[20] But this is to make use of the benefit of hindsight, and does not properly recognise the nature of Changuion's intervention nor even its results.

Changuion makes his case against the seminary in three rather unevenly-balanced parts. First, he argues that there is no need for it. According to his estimates, there are only thirteen vacant pulpits in the DRC, including five outside the Cape Colony, at least twenty Cape students studying theology in the Netherlands, and at least 100 qualified ministers in the Netherlands who cannot find a congregation there.[21] Second, he presents an extensive set of calculations to show that adequate funds are not being raised to pay for the seminary, and it will not succeed for that reason. But these arguments can succeed only by ignoring the real

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[16] Eric A. Walker, Lord de Villiers and his Times (London, Constable, 1925), p. 24.

[17] D.P. Faure, My Life and Times (Cape Town, Juta, 1907), p. 15.

[18] There was one earlier philosophical publication at the Cape, but not an original work: a compilation of extracts from Bacon's Novum Organum, specially for the use of students at the South African College, published in 1836. It was probably either the work of Sir John Herschel, or compiled with his encouragement.

[19] A.N.E. Changuion, Wijsgeerig en Godsdienstig Leesboek (Cape Town, W. van der Vliet, 1848), pp. 89-92, 97-8.

[20] Conradie, Hollandse Skrywers uit Suid-Afrika, p. 285.

[21] A.N.E. Changuion, Bezwaren tegen het Oprigten eener Theologische Kweekschool in deze Volksplanting (Cape Town, van de Sandt de Villiers & Tier, 1853), pp. 13-4. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

case for the seminary - the fear of liberal theology in the Netherlands - which he is, in any case, bound to acknowledge. It is only in the third argument that he confronts the real issue.

Here Changuion argues that the seminary will become a 'training ground for orthodoxy'. Rather than allowing students to form their theological views through engagement with diverse theological schools, it will impose a single point of view which students will simply echo (35). It will avoid the danger of having unbelievers in the ministry by creating fanatics instead (29). It will ensure that the young men attracted to the ministry will be those who cling to the old doctrinal forms, rather than the 'impartial lovers of truth' (36). It will stifle freedom of thought and enquiry, and without such freedom, students will not learn to think independently for themselves (17-8). Supporters of the seminary at Stellenbosch will create 'theologians of cramped views, half-enlightened people, and only half-civilised members of society' (33). In that way they will bring about 'the decline of the intellectual class in our church', and eventually create division within it (33-4). The seminary will lay claim to a rich intellectual heritage, which it will then destroy: 'The image of Plato strolling with his pupils beneath the trees and binding them to himself through philosophical discussion is indeed an enchanting one, but one which belongs to an altogether different time. The shady oaks of Stellenbosch are certainly not to be despised, but Plato and his pupils will not come again' (25).

To the extent that the seminary accorded with Changuion's own expectations, he could hardly have expected any other verdict than his own 'death warrant' within the DRC. His opposition to the seminary received no public support from those who shared his liberal theological beliefs.[22] In opposing the establishment of a seminary, he was in effect calling for the perpetuation of intellectual dependence on the Netherlands. But at the same time as raising his objections to the seminary, he makes clearer what he hopes to achieve by setting out an account of how debate between different viewpoints might be accommodated within the DRC. In the process, he proposes an ethic of dissent, and develops a conception of the dissenting intellectual as dialectical thinker.

The opponents of the seminary have not raised their objections publicly, Changuion says, because in matters concerning the church 'sides are always taken more or less passionately'. This is as it should be, 'but passion often makes people unfair towards the differently-minded (andersdenkenden); that unfairness leads to estrangement between friends and those with whom one has dealings, through which financial and other interests are unavoidably affected' (5). Against this perspective, he argues that all parties have the same goal in mind - the 'blossoming of the church' - they differ only on whether the seminary is the proper means by which to achieve it. In acting as a 'moderate opponent of the seminary,' he feels entirely safe 'in the hands of a public under whose eye [he] has lived and worked for 21 years already'. He does not seek 'the honour of victory in a contest of pens', but to 'enquire fully into a weighty issue' (6). Even if he is in the wrong, his intervention should be welcomed by supporters of the seminary who will then 'gain more and more support, and achieve their goal more rapidly' (10). He warns against identifying one cause with the 'maintenance of the church' and another

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[22] In its tribute to Changuion, on his return to Europe in 1865, the leading liberal publication described his opposition to the establishment of the seminary as an attempt to secure a 'decent measure of doctrinal freedom' for the professors ('Dr A.N.E. Changuion,' De Onderzoeker 6:64 (April 1865), p. 30). This is not an accurate account of Changuion's Bezwaren, but probably identifies the objection to the seminary which was most capable of gaining the support of theological liberals in the DRC.

with its 'downfall' (6), and against questioning whether people with differing views 'mean well for the church' (20-1). All sides should guard against a 'loveless condemnation of andersdenkenden' and treat all people 'according to their own convictions' (28).

According to this ethic of dissent, the onus would be on the dissenter to be reputable - known and respected by the public - and to be 'moderate' in his views. He must be willing to risk the consequences of holding an unpopular opinion. Above all, his dissent has to represent a consistent perspective, which can be traced back to the scholarly debates of the day, in the way that Changuion traces his own arguments back to van Heusde, Opzoomer and Pruys van den Hoeven, the Rector Magnificus at Leiden (17, 23, 31). Dissent has to be constantly argued anew, without simply defending your own camp (9, 21). It requires a degree of self-knowledge, whose validity is constantly tested in discussion with those who hold another opinion.

If such dissent is tolerated within the Cape DRC, he implies, the dissenters will be able to defend the unity of the church and will add to its intellectual prestige. If it is stifled, then an 'explosion' will result (34). The establishment of the seminary crosses the dividing line from toleration of dissent to stifling it, insofar as it is consciously intended to create a generation of ministers who will equate orthodoxy with the 'maintenance' of the church and dissent with its 'downfall'. At the same time, his argument is a warning of the consequences if this ethic is made impossible by orthodox supporters of the seminary. Orthodoxy itself will be transformed - even against the intentions of its more thoughtful defenders - into unthinking dogmatism.

From a present-day standpoint, it is not difficult to see the DRC's alliance with Afrikaner nationalism in the 20th century as in some part the outcome of the process which Changuion foresaw and resisted. At the time that he proposed it, his ethic of dissent fell on deaf ears. But in outlining the role of the andersdenkende in South African political and intellectual life he was helping to form a current of thought which would live on.[23]

Changuion's argument also helps us to grasp the specific character of andersdenkende dissent. In the established meaning of the term, it is possible for dissent to be passive, or to be based on premises which are not systematically thought out by the dissenter. In matters of religion, it is possible without contradicting the meaning of the term to be born into a dissenting (or nonconformist) family. It is possible, also without contradiction, for dissent to be mainly a matter of temperament: the stubborn, contrary or argumentative individual might dissent from established opinion on one issue or many, at one time or consistently. But it is not possible, as Changuion's argument gives meaning to the term, to be born an andersdenkende, or to adopt that position without deliberate and conscious belief. It is not so much that the andersdenkende shares an identity or affiliation with those who defend the orthodox belief, although this is clearly what Changuion has in mind. Rather, the andersdenkende is defined not in relation to one specific issue or controversy, nor in relation to affiliation or identity, but in relation to a way of thinking which is independently and freely established, and which must constantly be sustained in argument.[24]

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[23] For the sake of simplicity, I will use the Dutch term andersdenkenden only where the context specifically requires it, and the Afrikaans term andersdenkende in discussing its usage both in Dutch colonial and Afrikaner politics.

[24] The etymology of the English and Dutch words seems to bear out this argument. 'Dissent' is drawn from the Latin dissentire (to feel or think apart), and 'dissident' from dissidere (to sit apart).

In short, the andersdenkende must be independently-minded in order to be differently-minded. Dissent must vindicate itself through a specific process of thought, intended to reach a consistent and comprehensive perspective. That perspective can never be accepted once and for all, but must always be a premise for further enquiry. In this rudimentary sense at least, the andersdenkende dissident is also a dialectical thinker.

'De Onderzoeker' on Truth and Enquiry

Changuion was in a unique position to propose such an ethic of andersdenkende dissent, by virtue of the fact that he had established himself within the DRC and the broader political and intellectual context of Cape Town before theological division between liberalism and orthodoxy had made itself felt. He had studied in Leiden before the rise of theological liberalism at the Dutch universities. In Cape Town he co-operated with Abraham Faure, without apparent friction, in editing the Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tijdschrift.[25] As late as 1850-1, Changuion's articles were published in De Kerkbode - which would not have happened if he was seen as standing outside the mainstream of the DRC.[26]

Changuion was alone among the intellectuals of his generation in his conscious support for liberal theology. He could be viewed, and could view himself, as holding an individual opinion, rather than representing a specific tendency. Consequently, he did not have to distinguish his own thought at all sharply either from DRC orthodoxy or from the liberalism of the British Empire, then beginning to inform the local variant of Cape liberalism. His Bezwaren is as much concerned with encouraging a broad spectrum of opinion from which the enlightened observer might make a choice; with preventing the 'stifling and coercion' of theological opinion (26) as with actively creating a culture of critical enquiry. Indeed, the ethic which commits the intellectual to critical enquiry is a by-product of a more explicit argument which is often closer to the conventional liberal defence of free speech. The distinctive features of a more dialectical defence of freedom of enquiry come into view only in the work of the generation after Changuion, and above all in the monthly theological journal established in Cape Town in 1860, De Onderzoeker.

'Dissent' was used in English as far back as 1585 to indicate a 'difference of opinion', and from 1722 to indicate non-conformity with an established church (cf. J.A. Simpson and E.C.S. Weiner, Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), vol. 4, pp. 837-8; W.W. Skeat, An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 175; C.T. Lewis and C. Short, A Latin Dictionary (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1879), pp. 594-5, 1672). There is a similar etymology for cognate terms in German. The most authoritative Dutch dictionary defines andersdenkenden as 'holding another opinion, including another church doctrine', and dissenter as 'differently-minded, someone with deviant views, Protestant not belonging to the state church' (G. Geerts and H. Heestermans, Van Dale Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal (Utrecht, van Dale, 1984), vol. 1, p. 179). The major Afrikaans dictionary is not very helpful, giving only an ambiguous quotation from Langenhoven to illustrate the term andersgesind (P.C. Schoonees, ed., Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (Pretoria, Government Printer, 1950), vol. 1, p. 196).

[25] Conradie, Hollandse Skrywers uit Suid-Afrika, p. 279.

[26] These articles were later collected as Licht op Uw Lewenspad; cf. Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), p. 142.

De Onderzoeker's opening editorial presented its dissenting role with some irony. 'We wish freely to enquire what the doctrine of the Bible is ... Desiring freedom of enquiry for ourselves within the bounds of Holy Scripture, we also wish to extend that freedom to others. We hope to make known our conception of the truth in a spirit of love, without excluding the andersdenkenden from the Christian community.'[27]

This opening editorial's claim to the mantle of orthodoxy, while turning on its head orthodoxy's aim of protecting established truth, has been discussed earlier, in another context.[28] The task of the journal is presented in a similar voice, as a parody of the orthodoxy it defies: 'If only we maintain what is Biblical, what is Christian, why should we be worried if, here and there, we are deprived of one or other ecclesiastical doctrine? We wish also to stimulate a spirit of enquiry, and count for that on the co-operation of all who are serious about furthering the Biblical lesson to "prove all things, hold fast what is good"[29].'

Finally, the anonymity of the editors is presented as consistent with their task of promoting independent thought: 'We do not intend to make known the editorial staff of the journal. If our names mean anything in the terrain of religion, in the estimate of our readers, then they may perhaps align themselves with us "because we say so". We do not wish for that. We wish only for agreement based on own insight into the truth. If, on the contrary, our names do not mean much, then there may perhaps be some who will disregard our idea of the truth, out of prejudice against our persons. Differences in opinion should also be based solely on own conviction ... Those who want to refute us must necessarily limit themselves to the matter itself.'

It is hard to believe that the authors of this statement expected to be taken at their word. Their definition of orthodoxy in such a way as to exclude all considerations of ecclesiastical tradition and authority; their claim of the right to judge for themselves what is to be considered Biblical; their broad-minded inclusion, on behalf of the orthodox, of dissenters - in this context, those who do not wish to be bound by Biblical principle - within the Christian community; perhaps above all the playful and ironical tone with which they deal with holy matters - all of these might have been calculated to arouse the fury of the orthodox within the DRC. And reaction was not slow in coming.

The following issue of De Onderzoeker contained a review of a booklet produced by two DRC ministers, P. Huet and P.E. Faure, warning the faithful against such 'detestable God-scorning mockers'; 'wilful enemies of the cross of Christ'; 'poisoners'; 'false apostles'; 'proponents of another gospel, cursed by God'; 'persecutors of the Lord Jesus'; and much else beside.[30] In later issues, the editors had to respond to more measured accusations which were perhaps best captured in a sermon delivered by Professor N.J. Hofmeyr of Stellenbosch in February 1860, charging De Onderzoeker with denying the divinity of Jesus, denying that reconciliation with God required the death of Jesus, and denying the divine inspiration of the

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[27] 'Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 1:1 (January 1860), p. 1. Page references are not given for further quotations from this editorial.

[28] Cf. Chapter One above.

[29] This injunction, from 1 Thessalonians 5:21, was frequently quoted in De Onderzoeker. It was later to become integral to the conservatism of Paul Kruger.

[30] De Onderzoeker 1: 2 (February 1860), pp. 9-10.

Bible.[31]

The orthodox party were constantly at pains to attribute to De Onderzoeker, and theological liberals at the Cape more generally, the views of the leading Dutch liberal theologians - above all, Scholten.[32] The journal constantly stressed that it could not be identified with any one theological school, but only wished to make known to 'all friends of enquiry' the ideas of the different schools of thought in theology, trusting them to 'examine all things thoroughly from the beginning'.[33] But there was very little in the way of internal debate between different currents of thought in its pages, and in the context of the Cape the differences between competing currents of theological liberalism were relatively insignificant when compared with their common need to defend themselves against the orthodox onslaught.

The practice of anonymous authorship also makes it difficult to distinguish sustained differences in viewpoint and emphasis. Leopold Marquard edited De Onderzoeker throughout its existence, and presumably wrote its editorial statements, which were regular and extensive for the first three years or so, and less regular after that. Changuion wrote anonymously for the journal before his return to Europe in 1865. The local authors whose names most often appear - especially in the later years of its publication - were D.P. Faure and J.J. Kotzé. Faure and Kotzé were close friends and allies from the time of Faure's return to the Cape after completing his studies at Leiden in 1866. Of the two, Faure was more prolific, and generally more outspoken. He was the first theological graduate to be excluded by the DRC's colloquium doctum, and once it became clear that he would not be called to a ministry in the DRC, he established the Free Protestant Church in 1868.[34] From 1882 until its demise in1886 he was also editor of Het Volksblad. Faure's thought was more mechanical and schematic, and Kotzé's more subtle and allusive, more prone to ambiguity and a certain pessimism. The respect in which Kotzé was held by his contemporaries is indicated by the petition by 527 members of the Cape Town DRC in 1867, asking - without success - for him to be called from Darling to their congregation.[35]

Despite many variations, it is possible to identify at least five closely-related philosophical premises which animate the work of De Onderzoeker. First, a clear, and even rigid, distinction

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[31] Hofmeyr's sermon was published as Een Getuigenis tegen de Hedendaagsche Dwaling (Cape Town, 1860); cf. A. Murray, Het Moderne Ongeloof (Cape Town, J.H. Hofmeijr, 1868), p. 5.

[32] E.g., 'Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 1:4 (April 1860), p. 25.

[33] 'Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 1:5 (May 1860), p. 33; 1:6 (June 1860), p. 41, quoting Luke 1:3. The quotation is used in a way which suggests - misleadingly - a Biblical injunction to critical enquiry.

[34] Relations between liberals in the DRC and Faure's Free Protestant Church are not always easy to decipher. Faure collaborated with liberals in the DRC in various contexts, and his sermons were printed along with theirs in De Onderzoeker until it ceased publication in 1884. At least one of the liberal ministers in the DRC, H.C.V. Leibrandt, subsequently became a minister of the Free Protestant Church. The Free Protestant Church was also sometimes known as the Free Thought Church. At some time in the 20th century, it became known as the Unitarian Church.

[35] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:299 (November 1884), p. 125. This valuable compilation of source material is a reprint of the original series which appeared in Het Volksblad in 1875-6.

was made between religion and theology. Its opening editorial defined Christian religion as that which is found in the Bible, as opposed to the theology of the churches. In 1861 the journal held that it 'owed its existence to our well-established, clear conviction that there is a distinction between Christendom and the doctrine which goes under that name. It was not possible to hold this conviction without burning with desire to account for it for the benefit of our fellow-Christians.'[36] Sometimes religion was interpreted as a personal relationship to God. According to Faure, 'religion has to do with the heart; theology with the intellect ... It is as absurd to speak of a new religion as it is to speak of new virtue or new love.'[37]

Second, their critique of theology had a strongly historical element. For some, it extended only to the theology of the Churches; for others, it extended the cosmology of the Old Testament. At first, Faure was probably alone in extending this critique to the Bible as a whole. For Faure, the Jews who returned to Israel after the Babylonian captivity 'belonged to the strictly orthodox party', the first Christians were 'Jewish Christians' and Paul became 'the founder of a more liberal and more true Christianity'.[38] In time, De Onderzoeker moved away from the sharp distinction between Biblical truth and theological interpretation presented in its opening editorial. It criticised the orthodox journal Elpis for maintaining that the Bible was the 'infallible word of God', arguing that this took Biblical truth as a 'result, which is fixed in advance and can therefore be used as a "measure",' whereas 'true science also investigates whether the measure it uses is adequate'.[39] The fundamental tendency of this critique was historical, although its conception of history was often unclear. It tended to dismiss that which was 'outdated' or 'superstitious' or did not conform to the findings of modern science. It did not approve that which was new for its own sake, but had a more complex view in which a single truth was often seen as occurring in old and new forms.

Third, theological liberals shared a broadly-defined conception of human progress, which was strongly orientated towards morality. They did not hold that progress or development was inevitable. Rather, they saw it as a moral imperative: 'A church which seeks not to dominate souls, but to lead and nurture them, must always come closer - as those souls themselves - to truth and virtue.'[40] They defended the idea that human progress was possible against the condemnation of it by the orthodox camp. In an extended discussion of a series of orthodox sermons 'according to the needs of the time' in De Kerkbode, Kotzé bases his rejection of the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism that 'man is constantly inclined towards all evil' on the idea of 'development'. For the defenders of orthodoxy, this doctrine is no more than 'the resistance of the unhumbled heart against the doctrine of resurrection', and 'the consequence of estrangement from the power of God to convert'. According to Kotzé, orthodoxy presents development 'as if the assumption of a principle of good in man must

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[36] 'Aan den Lezer,' De Onderzoeker 2:24 (December 1861), p. 89.

[37] D.P. Faure, Confirmation Sermon, delivered on 1 March 1874 (Cape Town, van de Sandt de Villiers & Co., 1874), p. 5

[38] D.P. Faure, 'Sunday Observance,' De Onderzoeker 25:296 (August 1884), p. 94.

[39] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), p. 137, quoting De Onderzoeker 14:158 (February 1873).

[40] J.H. Maronier, 'De Kerkleer,' De Onderzoeker 4:47 (November 1863), p. 97.

necessarily be accompanied by an underestimation of sin and guilt'.[41]

In some cases theological liberals argued that religious progress corresponded more or less closely with social progress, while theology was seen as an obstacle to progress. Probably the most confident in this was Faure who set out the stages in the history of religion, in such a way that they could also be conceived as stages in human history itself. According to him, there were five such stages: idolatory or polytheism; Mosaism; Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; theism.[42] But Faure's schematic view of history was in some degree of conflict with De Onderzoeker's interest in other religious traditions. Where Faure saw Judaism as a stage in the emergence of Christianity, the journal was later to carry a sympathetic discussion of Moses Mendelssohn, emphasising his Judaism. It carried one of the earliest expositions in South Africa of Buddhism, also treating it sympathetically.[43]

Kotzé's view of human progress was far more ambiguous. His most powerful presentation of that idea was focused - unconventionally, and somewhat enigmatically - on death and mortality. We need not fear death, he argues, 'even though its domination of matter is so powerful and complete', as 'it cannot destroy the principle of life.' He dismisses the idea of immortality, however; in particular the idea of the resurrection of the flesh which 'cannot stand the test of a little scrutiny'.[44] But even if there is no immortal soul or resurrected body, 'the human spirit lives on' after death; 'death is not destruction, but a necessary development of life, one of the rungs of its ladder, whose feet are planted on earth, but whose upper end no human will reach, because it continues to rise'. Loved ones live on, although not in heaven, but 'in my heart' where 'my love will find them again'. In this argument, death is a necessary part of our moral development. The death of others is a painful but necessary means of achieving self-knowledge, a way in which love for our fellows is proven and extended, and the dialectic of self and other made conscious. Kotzé's treatment of death is brought to an apparently political conclusion: 'Christians, friends, I imagine a society in which all are fulfilled, sincerely fulfilled, with the hope of eternal life. In that society, I find heaven already becoming present on earth. Let us seek to realise this blessed condition in our society.'[45]

Fourth, the theological liberals shared a belief that man was basically virtuous, and capable of achieving virtue through his own efforts. This was essentially the reverse side of Hofmeyr's charge that the liberals denied that reconciliation required the death of Jesus. This

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[41] X.Y.Z., 'Preken naar de Behoeften des Tijds,' De Onderzoeker 4:43 (July 1863), p. 51.

[42] Faure, Confirmation Sermon, pp. 3-4

[43] J. Morgenstern, 'Mozes Mendelssohn,' De Onderzoeker 22:255 (March 1881); T.W. Rhys-Davids, 'The Ancient Buddhist Belief concerning God,' De Onderzoeker 21: 252 (December 1880), pp. 102-3. Kolbe's discussion of Buddhism in his Socrates and Other Moral Teachers of Antiquity (1884) is discussed later in this chapter.

[44] The orthodox party defended the resurrection of the flesh. Elder S. Bekker and Deacon W. de Klerk of Aliwal North were charged before the Ring of Burgersdorp in October 1875 with denying this doctrine (cf. Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), p. 141.

[45] J.J. Kotzé, 'De Angel des Doods,' De Onderzoeker 22:257 (May 1881), pp. 49, 50, 51. In some respects, Kotzé's arguments prefigure those of Johan Degenaar's Sterflikheid van die Siel, discussed in Chapter Seven below.

belief motivated Kotzé's refusal in 1862 to preach on the statement from the Heidelberg catechism that 'man is constantly inclined to all evil'. This often provided the point of attack for the orthodox party: T.F. Burgers was likewise suspended in 1862 for denying the personality of the devil, and S.P. Naude was censured for commending 'an independent Christendom, which no longer bows the head or surrenders its own judgement in the face of the oracular sayings of their fathers'.[46]

Fifth, the theme which De Onderzoeker always placed at the centre of its concerns was its commitment to free theological enquiry as the path to religious and social progress. They upheld a strong commitment to dialogue; a preference for the individual conscience rather than the established wisdom of any institution; and a conviction that truth could only emerge from sincere and unconstrained engagement with contending ideas. This commitment held together all the others, and gave them coherent meaning in the controversies of their time. It was announced in the opening editorial of De Onderzoeker, and its centrality was recognised by allies and opponents alike. Their leading critic, Andrew Murray, took this to be their essential feature: 'The modern theology is a religion for thinkers.'[47] The idea of conscious self-knowledge, achieved through collective enquiry and argument, as the precondition of freedom defined not only there differences with DRC orthodoxy but with Cape liberalism as well.

This commitment to unconstrained and ongoing enquiry sustained De Onderzoeker through the changing fortunes of its 25 years of existence. An account of the 'two directions in the Church', first published in Het Volksblad in 1876 and reprinted in the closing issues of De Onderzoeker, concluded: 'the desire for impartial enquiry is on the increase ... The future is with the liberal direction ... The truth must prevail'. The author argued, with some justification, that the liberal side had better arguments throughout, and that orthodoxy was no longer defended by argument. 'Such a condition,' he held, 'must sooner or later lead to the demise of orthodoxy. No other logical result is conceivable'.[48] The theological liberals drew courage from their sense that history had a certain logic; but the logic of history was not on their side.

Theological Liberals and Cape Liberalism

In the same speech in which Sir George Grey recognised that the DRC 'fulfils many of the functions of government' at the Cape, he called on the Colonial Parliament to provide funds for the training of DRC ministers.[49] The Cape DRC's hostility to new theological developments in the Netherlands was by no means in conflict with the needs of British imperialism, any more than the establishment of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch was

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[46] Cachet, Vijftien Jaar in Zuid-Afrika, p. 190

[47] Andrew Murray, Versamelde Werke (Stellenbosch, Christen-Studentevereniging van SA, 1942), vol. 2, p. 396.

[48] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), p. 142.

[49] Grey did not call for funding for a seminary, but for 'one or more well-endowed theological chairs' to be established at an existing institution, most probably with the South African College in mind. But he made explicit that the professors in these chairs 'should be chosen by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church' (Address to the Legislative Council, p. 6).

an assertion of national identity on the part of Dutch-speaking colonists. Dr Changuion, the main opponent of the seminary was at the same time the most outspoken defender of Dutch, rather than English, as the language of the DRC.[50]

In matters of religion, however, the theological liberals were often in conflict with DRC orthodoxy and the British government alike. In 1859, when the Lieutenant-Governor, General Wynyard, announced a day of prayer for rain, it was the liberal Volksblad which took issue with him. Het Volksblad's response was probably written by J.W.G. van Oordt, then a regular leader-writer and later editor of the paper. He argued that religion - 'the intellectual, spiritual religion of Christians - does not so materialise God.' Where 'former heathen fancies' recognised God in earthquake and tempest, God should be recognised also in the 'still, small voice' of conscience. 'It is true that we want water', he said; but 'we have the power given us to study the laws of nature and to apply them; to protect ourselves, by prudence in some years, against the distress which, but for that prudence, we might suffer in others.'[51]

The Anglican Bishop of Cape Town defended the day of prayer, saying that 'the drought was a sign of God's displeasure that we had neglected Native Missions, and that our merchants were not always honest'. Het Volksblad endorsed the call to encourage honesty and 'to do much more for the Natives', but did not believe these were connected to the drought. A week later they warned against the conclusion that 'the rain which has now arrived is a sign that we have become more honest, or more considerate in our duties towards the Natives'.[52] The same pattern of event and argument was repeated in January 1866 when a new British governor, Sir Peregrine Wodehouse, proclaimed a day of prayer for rain, was criticised by J.J. Kotzé, and defended by the liberal Advertiser and Mail.[53]

Among the theological liberals, Changuion was in many ways the closest to the liberalism of individual rights, free trade and imperialist expansion which came to inform Cape liberalism and the non-racial franchise at the Cape Colony after 1854. Changuion's preface to his English translation of The Pastor of Vliethuizen is also one of the few texts from this period which directly addresses the relationship of theological liberalism with the liberalism of the British Empire. Christianity, according to Changuion is currently 'engaged in a struggle' from which it must emerge 'stronger and brighter than before' and 'purified from the dross of ages'. In this struggle, 'the human mind is asserting its divine right of inquiring into the truth and truths of revelation, a process in which it cannot afford to be trammelled with additional tenets adopted as rules of faith, in ages of comparative darkness, by any body of men calling themselves the Church'. This assertion must prevail against the 'dead weight of orthodoxism' because 'all science is essentially progressive' and human thought eventually 'breaks through all restraints'.

Although Changuion speaks confidently of the eventual victory of scientific reason, he notes that the struggle is more advanced in some countries than in others. In particular, 'England, eminently conservative in point of doctrine, can scarcely be said to have achieved

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[50] Cf. Conradie, Hollandse Skrywers in Suid-Afrika, pp. 288-9.

[51] 'Humiliation and Prayer,' Het Volksblad 6 October 1859. Although the newspaper was predominantly Dutch, its editorials were carried in both Dutch and English.

[52] Het Volksblad, 13 October 1859.

[53] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:299 (November 1884), p. 124.

that measure of freedom on religious ground which the Dutch have vindicated for themselves'. The response to the publication of Essays and Reviews in 1860 shows the conservatism of English intellectual life. For 'while the English are very jealous of their civil rights, they do not appear to have vindicated to themselves the right of free inquiry into the faith of their ancestors ... Great will be the impulse given to the human mind, when a nation, endowed with such political and moral power as the English, shall have asserted in theory and adopted in practice the important principle, that every man has a right to judge for himself, not only in his temporal, but also in his spiritual concerns'.[54]

Changuion's makes this distinction between English liberalism, with its focus on civil rights and temporal concerns, and a more inclusive Dutch liberalism, in a way which plays down their differences, and presents Dutch theology as a natural counterpart to English law. In making the distinction from the perspective of the principle 'that every man has a right to judge for himself', he overlooks the central concern of the theological liberals at the Cape with the truth of one judgement over another. Changuion's account is limited, in this sense, but unfortunately none of his contemporaries added substantially to it. It seems likely that his sense of the relative backwardness of English intellectual life was shared by his allies at the Cape, even if this sense of the matter was seldom clearly expressed.

In the same year as Changuion's preface, Bishop J.W. Colenso of Natal published at the mission station, Ekukhanyeni, his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in which he drew on the methods of historical criticism and argued for theological conclusions similar to those upheld by liberals in the DRC.[55] In the years after that, Colenso's multi-volume examination of the Pentateuch caused controversy throughout the Anglican Church, in England and South Africa alike. De Onderzoeker reported regularly on the legal proceedings which followed Colenso's excommunication and deposition as Bishop, and carried extensive reviews of his Pentateuch. It also followed proceedings against the authors of Essays and Reviews. At the same time, Colenso supported the theological liberals in the DRC, including contributing to their legal costs, as did the renowned Plato scholar and translator, Benjamin Jowett; and his fellow classicist, Lewis Campbell.[56]

It is probable that the Anglican Church's conflict with Colenso informed the response of the liberal English-language press at the Cape to the theological divisions within the DRC. The leading Cape liberal newspapers, the Advertiser and Mail and the Argus, were consistently hostile to Colenso and to the liberals in the DRC. The Advertiser and Mail was especially vigorous in its support for DRC orthodoxy, taking its interpretation of events such as the civil court overturning of the DRC Synod's suspension of Kotzé and Burgers directly from De Kerkbode, condemning Faure's public lectures and praising Andrew Murray's rebuttal of Faure in unfamiliar terms as 'keen in thought, scientific in treatment, and as profoundly philosophical in its essence as it was eloquent in its expression.' The Argus was more

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[54] A.N.E Changuion, 'Translator's Preface,' in E.J. Diest Lorgion, The Pastor of Vliethuizen, or, Conversations about the Groninger School, the Doctrine of the Church, the Science of Theology and the Bible (Cape Town, Juta & van de Sandt de Villiers, 1861), pp. v, vi.

[55] Cf., Jeff Guy, The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814-1883 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 70-4.

[56] J. du Plessis, Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa (London, Marshall Brothers, 1919), p. 244. For contributors to Colenso's legal costs, cf. Guy, The Heretic, p. 150.

moderate in its support for DRC orthodoxy, but condemned as 'improper and profane discussion of a serious and holy subject' Faure's anonymous defence of Colenso which made much use of irony and argument ad absurdum.[57]

Even if we take account of the impact of the case against Colenso, it is not immediately apparent why the English press at the Cape should have supported the DRC orthodoxy, while a number of Dutch publications either supported the theological liberals or gave them a fair hearing. Cape liberals and DRC establishment were not natural allies. In particular, the DRC was at variance with Cape liberalism in its somewhat contradictory demands that the state support the church financially, but that its courts should have no authority over it. Saul Solomon introduced a motion in the Cape Parliament each year from 1854 until it was adopted in 1875 to end state funding for the church and establish the 'voluntary principle'.[58] This principle was supported by the theological liberals, but vigorously opposed by the orthodox party in the DRC, who were also strongly opposed to the civil courts having authority to adjudicate matters concerning the church.

An issue on which the lines of division are less clear-cut was that of open election to DRC church councils. The theological liberals generally supported the principle of open elections of church councils, while the orthodox opposed it.[59] The Cape liberals were clearly in favour of the principle of representation in the context of parliamentary politics, but there are many possible reasons why this did not provide a basis for any durable alliance with the theological liberals of the DRC.

Cape liberalism was defined primarily, however, by its commitment to racially-inclusive public institutions, under the rule of law. It could be argued that this commitment was entirely distinct from the theological conflict of the day, and not relevant to it. Nonetheless the theological liberals tended to be on the side of the Cape liberals in matters of racial injustice. Faure sided with Saul Solomon in exposing the willingness of the Cape Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Upington, and other officials to allow white juries to acquit white men accused of the murder of blacks in a series of cases known as the 'Koegas atrocities' in 1879-80. Faure lost his job as Supreme Court interpreter as a result.[60] Once again, it is necessary to look further if we are to explain why Cape liberalism so often found itself in harmony with the orthodox party of DRC rather than the theological liberals.

To the extent that any single factor bound the Cape liberals and the DRC orthodoxy together, it was a conception of modernisation which they did not share with the theological

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[57] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:298 (October 1884), pp. 113-7, including p. 116 on Colenso and p. 117 on the court findings; De Onderzoeker 25:299 (November 1884), pp. 124-9, including pp. 125-6 on Faure and Murray; De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), pp. 137-43, including p. 138 on the Argus's response to Faure. On the controversy around Faure's article, cf. also Faure, My Life and Times, pp. 44-6.

[58] Cf. du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' Failed Liberal Moment,' pp. 52-3.

[59] Cf. du Toit, 'The Cape Afrikaners' Failed Liberal Moment,' pp. 53-5.

[60] These events are recounted in Faure, My Life and Times, pp.69-92. Faure worked closely with Solomon, in many ways the most consistent and principled of the Cape liberals, over many years. They were differed, however, on the question of the Contagious Diseases Act, which Solomon opposed on the grounds that it condoned prostitution. (My Life and Times, pp. 52-55).

liberals. The theological liberals saw modernisation primarily as an awakening of the moral autonomy of the individual and the growth of self-knowledge. For them, it was a process which extended uniformly across all spheres of life, and was motivated by a conscious and critical philosophical outlook. Modernisation led to freedom only through this route. The andersdenkende was in this sense a model for all to emulate.

Faure set out the conception of freedom which informed the politics of theological liberalism in a speech delivered in 1869. 'Freedom is beautiful, but beset with dangers ... Mankind's noblest possession can become a curse'. To enjoy the real fruits of freedom, it was necessary to understand its moral limits: 'We are free, but not free to sin; free but not free to disobey and silence the voice of conscience; morally free, free from worldliness, free from fear of our fellow-man, free from evil'. He concludes: 'It is an anomaly to call a sinner free ... He is the slave of his desires, the slave of the senses.' By upholding this morally-informed conception of freedom, 'we must show the world that we will make no peace with a false liberalism.'[61]

Burgers outlined something of this relationship of politics and morality in taking leave of his congregation in Hanover in 1872, after being elected President of the South African Republic. He explained that religion was 'an important element - indeed, the most important - but yet always only one element among many, which make up the great education of humankind to God'. He has 'always strived to teach you that religion as a sanctifying force cannot be separated from life, from temporal matters. In the path of God, we also find the art of politics, understood as one of the means by which He seeks to make us perfect.' Consequently, whether in the church or in politics, he still counts himself 'among those who have the task and privilege of helping to build up the empire of truth, love and justice'.[62]

The mainstream of the DRC claimed a more limited sphere for itself, and remained an essential instrument of colonial order. Theological orthodoxy preserved its authority in matters of religion. Cape liberalism depended on the political and military authority of the British Empire, and maintained it in its turn. Neither were weakened by the demise of theological liberalism and the attitude of critical enquiry which it sought to promote.

The Classical Legacy in Colonial Society

The ideas and arguments of the theological liberals were not entirely displaced from colonial political and intellectual life by their defeat within the DRC. In the decades until the unification of South Africa in 1910, some elements of their thought came to be assimilated into the philosophy of history which informed colonial political and intellectual life. At the same time, the colonial philosophy of history was itself transformed in complex ways. That transformation affected the scale of the world-historical process within which colonial society was to be located. In these decades, South African history began to be consciously conceived as part of a process extending back to ancient Greece.

Until the 1850s, there is little evidence that colonial intellectuals conceived of themselves in historical terms other than those provided by the expansion of Europe. In his address to

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[61] D.P. Faure, 'De Vrijheid waartoe Wij Geroepen Zijn,' De Onderzoeker 21:242 (February 1880), p. 10.

[62] Delta, 'De Twee Richtingen,' De Onderzoeker 25:300 (December 1884), pp. 137-8.

the annual meeting of the South African Library in 1856, E.B. Watermeyer sought to make these terms explicit. He deplored the way in which colonial education neglected 'the inquiry into our share of the philosophy of history', and set out to make up for this neglect.

For Watermeyer, historical progress has a very definite beginning: 'From the 15th century dates the modern history of the world'. The Renaissance and Reformation, the invention of printing and the voyages of discovery mark 'the beginning of the time wherein we live'. The classical past is quickly brushed aside: 'All the races before seem equally ancients in their thoughts, actions and aspirations - habitants more of an imaginary world of beings similar to ourselves, than of the actual world in which we live and breathe'. The legacy which South Africans will one day claim as their own - 'when, years hence, this land shall have fulfilled the history which in this century it has begun' - is that of Columbus and da Gama.[63]

In the decades after Watermeyer spoke, the ancient past - including the legacy of classical Greece and Rome - took on a new and more pronounced role in colonial intellectual life. There are at least three interrelated contexts in which this process was initially apparent. First, the historical perspective which had informed the Biblical criticism of the theological liberals was reinforced by developments within European intellectual life, and within the natural sciences in particular. Lyell's geological discoveries of the 1830s overturned conventional thinking about the age of the earth, and the reliability of the Biblical account of its creation. In 1854 Roderick Noble - another of the teachers at Changuion's Institute - addressed this topic in a lecture at the Cape Town Mechanics' Institute. Noble called upon the examples of Copernicus and Galileo in order the point out the 'wilful ignorance' of appealing to Scripture in order to oppose 'the advancing tide of knowledge'. 'Enlightened and liberal-minded men' are 'persuaded of the ultimate possibility of effecting a perfect harmony' between Biblical revelation and geological knowledge. Noble establishes this harmony by re-interpreting the relevant Biblical passages in the light of 'the objects of the writing, the times when it was written and the persons to whom it was addressed'.[64]

The implication that the Biblical past required interpretation in the light of modern science was a new departure, but may not have seemed especially controversial at that time. In his inaugural lecture at the Theological Seminary in Stellenbosch in 1859, John Murray argued along broadly similar lines that the theologian 'need be no stranger to the other disciplines of so-called worldly knowledge' but should treat the findings of the natural sciences as 'new and more elevated proofs of the endless power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator'.[65] This argument became the object of fierce controversy a few years later, after the establishment of De Onderzoeker and the publication of Colenso's writings. Geological discoveries also made possible new approaches to biology, which led to Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and the overturning of another aspect of the Biblical story of creation. The controversy around Darwinism soon made itself felt at the Cape with much greater force.

Second, as colonial education expanded, the legacy of classical Greece and Rome took on

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[63] E.B. Watermeyer, Address to the 27th Anniversary Meeting of the Subscribers to the Public Library (Cape Town, Saul Solomon & Co, 1856), pp. 4, 14, 15.

[64] Roderick Noble, Geology: Its Relation to Sacred Scripture (Cape Town, Saul Solomon & Co, 1854), pp. 5, 6, 12.

[65] John Murray, 'Redevoering,' in Gedenkschrift van de Inwijding van het Theologisch Seminarium der Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika (Cape Town, Marais, 1859), pp. 67, 69.

a new importance in that context. Paradoxically, this happened at the same time as more confident claims were made for the natural sciences, and in response to those claims. It was mainly in the context of debates about education that Darwinism was contested at the Cape. In this, a prominent part was played by Langham Dale - Changuion's successor as Professor of Classics at the South African College, who was also Superintendent-General of Education at the Cape from1859 to1892.

In a series of articles and public lectures in the1860s and 70s, Dale vigorously opposed the idea that 'the hoary-headed literature of the past will have to yield place to the green and lusty youth of the science of today'.[66] The 'questionings and probings of nature' create 'a fear in some minds that science is over-leaping itself'. In this context, 'the calm attitude of the philosopher, who can settle down to repose and reflection on approximations to truth' is 'not the lot of the man of this age'.[67] Dale upholds a liberal ideal of education, asserting that 'knowledge does not consist in accumulating facts' and that authority has 'no value unless its reason be shown, because it does not really teach but only calls for assent'.[68] But at the same time, he wants to prevent the questioning of accepted Christian belief. In this context, he sees classical learning as the proper focus of education.

Until then, the study of the classical languages had largely been seen as preparation for theology or law, rather than a source of independent enquiry and reflection as in Dale's perspective.[69] The basic thrust of Dale's argument was supported by William Porter in his inaugural address as Chancellor of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1876. Porter defended the study of metaphysics and the classical languages, as 'atheism - avowed, aggressive and here and there almost intolerant - is preached as the first and legitimate outcome of physical science'. The theory of evolution, in particular, raises the fear that science may 'overstep its limits when it assumes a right to rule despotically the whole domain of human knowledge and belief'.[70]

In the context of missionary education, classical learning was the focus of a different kind of controversy. The foremost educational institution for Africans at the Cape, Lovedale College, ceased to teach Latin and Greek to African students soon after the appointment of James Stewart as Principal of the College in 1867. Stewart gave priority to vocational training, instead of the classical education which would have been given to the settler elite.

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[66] Langham Dale, 'Writings of the Day (II),' South African Magazine vol. 2 (1868), p. 592.

[67] Langham Dale, Colonial Examinations in Science and Literature (Cape Town, Juta, 1873), pp. 13-4.

[68] Dale, Colonial Examinations in Science and Literature, pp. 6-7; Langham Dale, The Philosophy of Method (Cape Town, Juta, 1877), p. 8.

[69] Cf. F. Smuts, 'Classical Scholarship and the Teaching of Classics at Cape Town and Stellenbosch,' Acta Classica vol. 3 (1960), pp. 7-31.

[70] William Porter, An Address to the University of the Cape of Good Hope (Cape Town, Saul Solomon, 1876), pp. 30-1, 40. Faure's critical response to Porter, defending Darwinism as a 'more religious system' than that of Genesis, was first given as a speech in English, then published in Dutch translation as 'Darwinisme en Atheisme,' De Onderzoeker 11:92 (August 1870), pp. 80-2. An critical response reply to Porter was also published as a booklet under the pseudonym of 'Omega'.

Resentment at this decision continued for some decades afterwards.[71] Stewart's main concern was preparing students for employment rather than putting forward a philosophical perspective. But in defending this decision, he had to rely on a conception of gradual racial progress extending back over 'one or two thousand years of training'. It was only on this basis that he could contrast education for whites with that which, he told his students, was of value to them 'at your present stage of civilization'.[72]

Third, the legacy of classical antiquity became ever more prominent in the political discourse of colonial South Africa. To the extent that government either in the British colonies or in the Boer republics came to resemble that of a modern European state, South Africa came to be conceived as part of a political history extending back to ancient Greece. To the extent that the idea of a unified South Africa gained ground, primarily as a means for extending British control over the goldfields of the South African Republic, the South African role in a larger world-historical process culminating in modern statehood was emphasised.

The South African War of 1899-1902 forcibly located South Africa in world-historical context. Theodor Mommsen described the war as 'one of the strangest, as well as the saddest, known to history. The old, obstinate, religious-political fanaticism is struggling, in this forgotten and lost remnant of the Cape-Dutch, with modern civilisation, based on a not less fanatical desire of exploiting the whole world ... Two views of the world are here in conflict - the battle is being waged, so to speak, between the 16th and 20th centuries'.[73] The British war effort was frequently legitimated by the needs of progress.

Reconstruction after the war and unification in 1910 continued the process through political and constitutional, rather than military, means. Lord Milner was himself a product of Balliol College under Jowett, and the young men who served under him in the aftermath of the war were schooled in the British Hegelianism which flourished at Oxford in those decades. Their task was to strengthen the 'imperial tie'; but to do this, they had to persuade the white settlers of their role in a larger historical project: 'History will record no nobler triumph,' according to Lord Selborne's memorandum of 1906, that 'if they succeed in peacefully leading on the upward path of Christianity and civilisation the vast tribes who are beginning to emerge from barbarism'.[74] The restructuring of the university curriculum - including the revision of classical studies in order to 'abolish compulsory Greek, introduce compulsory Hellenism' - was a central part of R.F. Alfred Hoernlé's efforts to establish a variant of that Hegelianism within colonial intellectual life. These efforts failed partly because rival projects - including the

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[71] R.H.W. Shepherd, Lovedale South Africa 1824-1955 (Alice, Lovedale Press, 1971), p. 35; the resentment of African parents at the decision to scrap Latin and Greek continued into the 1890s, according to James Wells, Stewart of Lovedale: The Life of James Stewart (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), p. 106.

[72] James Stewart, The Experiment of Native Education (Lovedale, Mission Press, 1884), pp. 22, 25.

[73] F. Max Müller and T. Mommsen, The Question of Right between England and the Transvaal (London, Imperial South Africa Association, 1900), p. 13; cf. J.S. Galbraith, 'The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War,' Journal of Modern History 24:2 (June 1952), pp. 122-3.

[74] L.M. Thompson, The Unification of South Africa, 1902-10 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 62, 65.

emerging Afrikaner nationalism - had learned to make use of a similarly world-historical framework.[75]

South African history between about 1870 and 1910 was unusual - perhaps unique - in that the social experience of time was re-organised at four levels at once, or at least within a relatively short period. The time of nature was assimilated into the traditional cosmology of Biblical Christianity. The time of history was extended back from the voyages of European discovery to ancient Greece, and by novelists such as Rider Haggard into an imaginary African antiquity.[76] The time of capitalist labour was forced upon African societies being drawn into the production of commodities.[77] The time of the state was re-conceived, so that it no longer sought to conform to eternal dictates of the divine will, but to the finite needs of the present.[78]

In this complex process, certain elements from the arguments of the theological liberals were assimilated into a new philosophical outlook. But they were re-interpreted in such a way that their essential meaning was lost. Something of this contradictory process can be seen in the way in which the defence of free enquiry came to be integrated into Dale and Porter's arguments for classical education.

Dale and Porter's immediate task was, in effect, to defend Galileo in such a way as to demonstrate the inadmissibility of Darwin. Dale defends the study of metaphysics 'even if from such inquiries little is added to the stock of actual knowledge, little that is reducible to practice'.[79] In contrast, he argues that scientific enquiry should be pursued 'only as the precursor of some practical and industrial agencies'. He does not 'fear the charge of narrow utilitarianism' when he says 'that we may as well abandon at once all laborious experiments and scientific observations if they are not to be brought to bear on the development of the resources of the country and the material welfare of the people'.[80] Put differently, whatever reinforces conventional belief is valuable in its own right; whatever has the capacity to disturb it had better be studied for the sake of its practical results alone.

Porter also defends the long-dead Galileo, asserting that 'proved facts must not be denied, however much they may clash with preconceived opinion'. But he argues that the theory of

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[75] R.F.A. Hoernlé, 'The Place of Classics in Modern Education,' South African Journal of Science vol. 8 (1911), p. 121; Hoernle's philosophical work in South Africa in the period around unification is discussed extensively in my MA thesis (Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy, especially pp. 122-67).

[76] H. Rider Haggard's novel, King Solomon's Mines, was first published in 1885.

[77] For an overview of this problem in the South African context, cf. Keletso E. Atkins, '"Kafir Time": Pre-industrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal,' Journal of African History vol. 29 (1988), pp. 229-44.

[78] Pocock describes the process of the state 'confronting its own temporal finitude' in the context of the West (Machiavellian Moment, p. viii). The question is whether the state must obey eternal dictates or historical needs is central to the debates among the Boer leaders at Vereeniging in 1902 (cf. J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, The Peace Negotiations between Boer and Briton in South Africa (London, Richard Clay & Sons, 1912), pp. 152, 160, 168-9, 187, 191).

[79] Dale, Colonial Examinations in Literature and Science, pp. 16-7.

[80] Dale, The Philosophy of Method, pp. 29-30.

evolution is in conflict with the 'inviolate laws of the Human Understanding' which are themselves 'proved facts'.[81] Dale's restriction of modern science to its useful (that is, profitable) applications and Porter's to its empirical content both have the effect of upholding free enquiry as a rhetorical ideal, but cutting short the kind of philosophical enquiry which De Onderzoeker and the theological liberals sought to promote.

At the same time, the theological liberals' conception of historical progress as a conscious and contingent process of moral development made way for a conception of historical progress as essentially economic. In this conception, progress required a commitment to production rather than truth, to co-operation rather than debate, to conventional moral belief rather than ongoing enquiry. In this context, the philosophical legacy of ancient Greece was made into a barrier to dialectical enquiry, rather than a basis for it.

Against the Current: van Oordt, Kolbe, Schreiner

The legacy of the dialectical defence of free enquiry by the theological liberals lived on in distorted ways, within the conventional liberal defence of free enquiry, and within an increasingly economic conception of historical progress which could not entirely separate itself from moral enquiry. Insofar as colonial rule continued to legitimate itself on the basis of the achievements of Western civilisation, it could not repudiate the ideal of critical enquiry, even if it sought to limit or stifle the practice. That dialectical legacy lived on also in the thought of isolated individuals, working against the current of their times and often with a deep sense of their own isolation. The legacy of Socrates - and of ancient Greece more generally - provided a point of orientation for intellectual dissent.

The theological liberals' defence of free enquiry had its roots in the Dutch interpretation of Socrates. But they saw little need to claim Socrates' legacy as their own. The foreshortened historical perspective expressed by Watermeyer in 1856 may help to explain this absence. Allusions to classical antiquity were part of the staple diet of political and philosophical debate both in Europe and at the Cape, but were not especially prominent in their vocabulary. Faure - the most eager of them to embrace modernity - said of his own education that it was 'a pity to waste so many precious years on classical studies'.[82]

The two theological liberals who reflected on Socrates in the 1860s were relatively marginal figures in their own intellectual camp. P.N. Ham had been called to Port Natal (now Durban) in 1841 to minister to the Voortrekkers. The British did not allow his ship to enter the harbour and eventually he disembarked in Mozambique. From there he went to Madagascar, before ending up in Delagoa Bay where his wife and child died and he survived a severe bout of yellow fever. Three years after his departure for South Africa, he arrived in Cape Town and was installed as minister at Franschhoek. His twenty year tenure there was marked by complaints from his congregation about his theology and his excessive drinking.[83] In 1864, he addressed the Wellington Literary Society on Socrates.

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[81] Porter, Address to the University of the Cape of Good Hope, p. 38.

[82] Faure, My Life and Times, p. 16.

[83] Cf., Dictionary of South African Biography, vol. 3, p. 368; cf. also De Onderzoeker 3: 35 (November 1862), p. 99 on his position in the Synod of 1862; De Onderzoeker 4: 47 (November 1863), pp. 102-3 on charges brought against him to the DRC Synod Law Commission.

Ham's Socrates was 'a man ... who God himself appears to have destined to be a gift to humanity.'[84] He has the qualities of Xenophon's Socrates: respectability, moderation, courage, an earnest sense of calling, some pompousness and a large store of sensible advice on topics such as how to make friends. Ham rejects the charges brought against Socrates, and explains them as the result of the guilt felt by the licentious and luxurious Athenians at the standing reprimand of Socrates' austere virtue. 'It is a sorry truth,' he says, 'that the lack of virtue of the great multitude brings it about that the few, who remain true to virtue, are not appreciated' (18; cf. 21). He paints a touching picture of Socrates consoling his friends while awaiting the death-sentence, and concludes: 'His lessons were not forgotten; his death had put the seal on them, and made them holy in the hearts of his friends ... No, he is not dead, he sleeps, and his awakening, O gentlemen, his awakening will surely be a blessing' (21).

This portrait follows the Enlightenment image of Socrates in taking its central features from the life of Jesus: the piety, the calling, the false accusations caused by suppressed guilt and jealousy, and the blessed awakening from the dead, which is still to come. It omits the Socratic ideals which are to be found in the actual struggles of the theological liberals in the 1860s and after. Plato is mentioned by Ham in passing as 'the noblest of all philosophers', but is treated as no closer to Socrates than Xenophon, 'the charming writer, brave fighter for his fatherland, and noble defender of his excellent friend and teacher' (15). Ham's picture is perhaps more useful as an indication of how it might have happened that the theological liberals drew on the legacy of Socratic dialectic but did not recognise their practice in the conventional image of Socrates.

A much more substantial account of the life and death of Socrates is given in J.W.G. van Oordt's scholarly work on ancient Greek religion, which was published in the Netherlands in 1864. Unlike Ham's lecture, this work is based on conscientious study of the ancient sources and contemporary scholarship, including Grote's newly-published History, with which van Oordt was not much in sympathy. Van Oordt introduces Socrates in his final chapter on the decline of Greek religion, by way of his depiction in Aristophanes' Clouds.

Van Oordt brings to the fore, in a complex and densely-argued passage, the serious conclusion found in Aristophanes' comedy: 'If the ancient customs were the work of humans, then why should humans not change them? And they must be the work of humans if there are no gods, and whoever knows the gods only from natural phenomena, which could equally well be explained by the working of natural forces, or from a fear of the punishment which the gods inflict, which can easily be shown to be groundless, what reason do they have to believe in them?' In the play, then, 'first the gods and morality are reasoned away, and then a glimpse of the state of things which prevails without them is supposed to restore them again to their former dignity. A weaker argument for the existence of the gods is not easy to conceive; a reaction to the spirit of the time which had nothing more to rely on, could really not get very far. And were there now other grounds for defending the world of the Greek gods against this spirit? The answer to this question we find in the person of Socrates, who opposed those who denied the gods in a similar way [to Aristophanes].'[85]

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[84] P.N. Ham, Socrates. Redevoering gehouden te Wellington (Cape Town, J.C. Juta and N.H. Marais, 1864), pp. 4-5. Further page references are given in the text.

[85] J.W.G. van Oordt, De Godsdienst der Grieken met hunne Volksdenkbeelden (Haarlem, A.C. Kruseman, 1864), pp. 385-6

Van Oordt describes briefly the religion of Socrates, and shows its powerlessness to arrest the forces at work in Greek society: 'He too could not save the gods.' And yet, van Oordt concludes, 'although his condemnation remains a stain on his people, there was still a deep truth in the charge which presented him as a corrupter of the youth, and as one who teach them to hold the people's gods in contempt: whoever taught the youth to think and reason would inevitably alienate them from gods who could not exist for the thinking and reasoning temperament.'[86] Socrates is vindicated, in this account of Aristophanes' comedy; but his vindication at the same time reveals the tragedy inherent in his task. And insofar as the Socrates of van Oordt takes on the characteristic features of the theological liberals of the Cape, their vindication also reveals the tragedy which is to befall them.

By the time van Oordt's book was published, he had returned to the Netherlands to take up a post at the Gymnasium at the Hague. There were a range of reasons for his departure: his wife - who was the daughter of Changuion - was mentally ill; Changuion's Institute was in decline, and closed a few years later; finally, he felt that his editorials in Het Volksblad had become 'too liberal' for the DRC.[87] He returned to Cape Town only in 1876, after failing to secure a post at a Dutch university. He was editor of Die Zuid-Afrikaan until 1894, when 'he reached the conviction that his ideas and insights had lived on beyond their time, and decided to withdraw from the world of journalism'.[88]

His historical writing on South Africa became increasingly hostile to British imperialism, and sympathetic to the Boer Republics, where he believed that the 'old Dutch' mode of life lived on after its demise in modern Europe. His study of Plato was published in England and the Netherlands in 1895. Something of van Oordt's sense of the missed opportunities of his own time is projected back into the context of antiquity. The central philosophical inconsistencies which he discusses 'might have been avoided had Plato, like Socrates, kept to mankind instead of attempting to set up a theory about the universe. But by doing so he simply yielded to the influence exercised on him by the times he lived in; times which soon after his death would see science get the better of idealistic thought'.[89]

He concludes by defending the study of Plato 'even in our days' - characterised by material progress and democratic politics - 'especially in those parts of the world where another and better condition can still be brought about than that now witnessed in the old seats of European civilisation.'[90] In all the literature on Plato, there is no other suggestion that his philosopher-king might have governed the Transvaal.

In the same year, van Oordt was appointed state historian of the South African Republic. He remained in Cape Town, where he transcribed archival documents of relevance to the history of Kruger's republic and wrote a history of the rebellion of Slagtersnek, attacking the

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[86] van Oordt, Godsdienst der Grieken pp. 386-7

[87] Conradie, Hollandse Skrywers uit Zuid-Afrika, p. 294.

[88] F.A. van Jaarsveld, 'Dr J.W.G. van Oordt (1826-1904) - Erflater van 'n Wêreldgeskiedenis aan Suid-Afrika,' Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe 23:1 (March 1983), p. 45.

[89] J.W.G. van Oordt, Plato and the Times He Lived In (The Hague, M. Nijhoff and Oxford, J. Parker, 1895), p. 261.

[90] Van Oordt, Plato and the Times He Lived In, p. 266.

policies of the British for their commitment to racial equality.[91] After the fall of the Boer republics in 1900, he spent the remaining years of his life on a massive World History, which spanned the period from the Trojan War to the fall of Napoleon in four volumes. The book was specifically written for the 'South African people' - that is, the Dutch-speaking settlers - and intended as a response to the 'decline of the West'. But to reconstruct Western history from the standpoint of its redemption in the Boer Republics was an impossible task, which his contemporaries could hardly have found intelligible. Ironically, in the light of his own reactionary racial attitudes, his treatment of ancient Greece produces consistent parallels with pre-colonial African societies - most clearly in their commitment to extensive political debate.[92] By then van Oordt had left the convictions of his earlier theological liberalism behind; but they surely left their mark on his rejection of the modern idea of progress represented by the British Empire.

F.C. Kolbe approached Socrates on the basis of a very different conception of world history. Kolbe was the son of a Congregationalist missionary in Paarl. He lodged with Andrew Murray in Cape Town as a student around 1870, and Murray hoped that Kolbe would study for the DRC ministry. Instead, after graduating from the South African College, he studied law in London until his conversion to Catholicism in 1876. He was ordained a priest in 1882 and returned to the Cape soon after. He presented his lecture on Socrates and Other Moral Teachers of Antiquity in Cape Town in 1884.

Kolbe presents a lively and attractive picture of Socrates in Athens - 'the home of the Muses, the head-centre of Art, the mother-country of philosophy, the city of freedom, and the birth-place of culture'.[93] Socrates' achievement - in bringing the dialectical method which he had learned from Zeno to bear on the everyday problems of his fellow-Athenians - was at once political and philosophical (14-5). In the religious sphere, he enabled humankind to pose those questions 'of which the solution could come from heaven alone' (18). We learn from him 'that mere custom, mere prejudice, is not a sufficient ground for moral action for a rational being: we cannot be in the highest sense of the word just, or temperate, or virtuous generally, without knowing what we are doing and why; without knowing what justice, or temperance, or virtue is'. We learn, in short, that 'morality is an Art' (24).[94]

Kolbe stresses the uniqueness of Socrates' life and death. But he is concerned with him 'not so much individually, but as the central figure of the Hellenic or Grecian spirit of morality'. According to Kolbe, there are 'only two great moral tendencies in the world': the Greek, which seeks after wisdom; and the Oriental, which seeks after power (9). The two tendencies were prematurely united by Pythagoras, but were successfully fused only in Christianity.

The other moral teacher whom Kolbe discusses, Buddha, is 'not so well known to us as

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[91] Van Jaarsveld, 'Dr J.W.G. van Oordt (1826-1904),' pp. 45-9.

[92] J.W.G. van Oordt, Wêreldgeschiedenis tot den Val van Napoleon I, vooral voor het Zuid-Afrikaansche Volk Geschreven (Amsterdam and Cape Town, HAUM, 1903), vol. 1, pp. 129-30.

[93] F.C. Kolbe, Socrates and Other Moral Teachers of Antiquity (Cape Town, Thos. Delahunt, 1884), pp. 5-6. Further page references to this work are indicated in the text.

[94] Kolbe develops this theme in his major work on morality, The Art of Life (1903).

Socrates, but far above him both in moral insight and in influence on mankind' (18). Kolbe outlines Buddha's discovery that the 'law of pain' could be turned against itself, so that 'by trusting the law to the utmost limit of its demand, he would make for himself and for all men a sure path of final release' (19). He describes Buddha's teachings as 'an astonishing anticipation of Christian ethics' (22).

Rather than defending any one moral system, Kolbe claims to have 'learned what are the limits of my knowledge and the range of my ignorance'. He has come to know 'who are the real authorities in morals', among whom he lists Confucius, Pythagoras, Buddha, Socrates, Augustine and Aquinas. Where they all agree, he would be 'unfaithful to the noblest heritage of the human race' if he tolerated a dissenting opinion (25). Kolbe's analysis of Socrates has the paradoxical result of affirming authority in moral questions, yet removing that authority from any specific doctrinal basis, or even any basis in a specifically Western tradition. He places himself on the side of authority, but reduces authority to an idea which is capable of the widest possible interpretation. He neither challenges doctrinal authority, nor entirely conforms to it, but instead creates a larger interpretive framework for it. His moral authorities are Greek, Chinese, Indian, African and European, but none are modern.

The argument that we must rely on authority in morals leads to the conclusion that 'our wisdom is chiefly shown in the choice of authority to which we bow'.[95] It is an argument which enables him to speak from a Catholic perspective, but not to be limited to it. It enables him to dissent from the dominant viewpoint, and legitimate that dissent on a world-historical basis. Kolbe's argument surely reflected his own temperament and something of his situation as a Catholic priest in a predominantly Protestant intellectual environment. But it can also be seen as a reinterpretation of the role of the andersdenkende, still requiring a conscious philosophical basis for dissent but extending the historical sources on which dissent can draw.

Kolbe retained a high degree of political and intellectual independence throughout his long career. During the South African War, he criticised British aggression, opposed martial law at the Cape, and argued that there was greater need, not less, for political debate. His editorial in the South African News, satirising the expectation that 'we should have gradually trained ourselves to proportion our speech to our environment', led to the newspaper being closed down in 1901 by the British military authorities.[96] His influence lived on both in the Buddhism of C. Louis Leipoldt and the Catholicism of Martin Versfeld.

Like Kolbe, Olive Schreiner was the child of a German missionary family. She was born, a year after Kolbe, at a remote mission station in the Wittebergen of the North Eastern Cape. Her novel, The Story of an African Farm, was written while she was a governess on a remote farm, and published in London in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Iron. The intellectual isolation imposed by her rural surroundings and by being a woman came to an end when the novel's success established her as South Africa's leading writer.

The Story of an African Farm contrasts a rudimentary Calvinism, promising hellfire and damnation, not with an optimistic view of progress, but with the painful and unrelenting search

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[95] F.C. Kolbe, 'Utility, Considered as a Standard of Ethics,' Cape Quarterly Review 2:7 (July 1883), pp. 400-1.

[96] J.C. Kannemeyer, Leipoldt: 'n Lewensverhaal (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1999), pp. 112-6, 135-40; quotation from p. 139. One of Kolbe and Leipoldt's collaborators on the South African News was D.P. Faure (p. 116).

for spiritual truth recounted by Waldo's stranger.[97] The essays which Schreiner wrote in the 1890s, which were later collected as Thoughts on South Africa, adopted an unconventional stance on the conflicts of the time. 'Her defence of the Boer was a critique of the purposes of capitalism in South Africa,' as First and Scott comment.[98] Her most substantial philosophical work, Woman and Labour, written while she was interned in Hanover during the South African War, similarly rejects the liberal optimism which held that if women would 'but wait peacefully till the males alone had solved their problems', all would be well. Instead, she defends the loss and renunciation endured by the lone woman striving for 'great impersonal ends, to be brought, even if slowly and imperceptibly, a little nearer by her action'. Her dialectical turn of mind is perhaps most evident in her central argument that the fate of the two sexes is inextricably interconnected.[99]

In 1908 Schreiner set out her views on the unification of South Africa. 'An attempt to base our national life on distinctions of race and colour,' she argued, 'will prove fatal to us.'[100] She contested the principle of racial domination by locating South African history and prospects in world-historical context, asking what unique contribution South Africa might make in a process she traces back to ancient Greece. The 'native question', she held, is 'the root question in South Africa; and as is our wisdom in dealing with it, so will be our future (23-4) ... On our power to solve it regally and heroically depends our greatness.' If a humane and just solution to this question is found, South Africa will 'raise up a free, intelligent, harmonious, nation, each part acting with and for the benefit of the other' (26).

To this end, she argues for a 'confederacy of largely autonomous states' rather a unitary South Africa. The confederacy would produce a 'more self-governing people imbued with a more strongly civic spirit'; 'the general intellectual vigour and initiative would be higher'; it would produce 'a larger number of remarkable men and women' (3); all this would enable the component parts of the South African nation to 'retain enough individuality and distinctness to impinge upon and stimulate each other' (4). These qualities suggest an idealised picture of classical Athens - 'the little city and territory of Athens, which might have been put into many a Karroo farm and lost there' (22). Wherever the model is drawn from, its distinctive features are not those of the modern liberal state, in which each individual may pursue their own good in their own way.

Instead, in Schreiner's argument, freedom is defined by difference, stimulation and constant intellectual exchange and renewal. Freedom is sustained by the conditions which create a dialectical self-knowledge among the individual members of society. This conception of freedom was defeated in the DRC in the 1860s and 70s, and ignored by the leading figures of Cape liberalism in the 1870s and after. At the end of the colonial period, it was briefly upheld as the basis of a non-racial South Africa.

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[97] For the sermon on eternal damnation, cf. Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971), pp. 146-7; for the allegory of Waldo's stranger, pp. 159-69.

[98] Ruth First and Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner (London, André Deutsch, 1980), p. 197.

[99] Olive Schreiner, Woman and Labour (London, Virago, 1978), pp. 117, 127, 251.

[100] Olive Schreiner, Closer Union (Cape Town, Constitutional Reform Association, n.d.), p. 8. Further page references are given in the text.

The examples of van Oordt, Kolbe and Schreiner demonstrate - each in a different way - the falsity of a widely-accepted account of colonial political and intellectual life. That account treats the colonial context as if it were defined by the existence of two poles of orientation: on the one hand, reactionary dogmatism, clinging to the gains of the past and resisting the progress of modernity, which was strongest among Dutch colonists or Afrikaners; on the other, a forward-looking liberalism seeking to overcome the restrictions of tradition and prejudice among some, although not all, English-speaking whites. In this vein, Allister Sparks writes that the British 'by importing their modern influences to this backward land' transformed the Cape Afrikaners 'turning some of them into an intellectual elite that was then able to articulate and polemicize the grievances of the volk at large'. More liberal attitudes among Afrikaners are described as the 'adoption of British ways', sometimes taken so far that 'a class of polished Anglo-Afrikaners emerged'.[101]

It is true that van Oordt eventually turned to a backward-looking defence of Kruger's isolationism. But the course that led to this result began with his opposing British imperialism not because it was too modern, but because its claims to modernity were contradicted by its practice. British colonial rulers sought to introduce modernity in ways which were hypocritical, manipulative and negated the moral autonomy of its subjects - upholding the DRC orthodoxy in the rural areas, pacifying the colonial populations with days of prayer for rain, and the like. Kolbe's conversion to Catholicism did not separate him from Afrikaner political and intellectual life, but gave him a different vantage-point from which to interpret more broadly the sources of moral authority to which Afrikaners and others laid claim. Schreiner was much influenced by the liberalism of Mill and Spencer, but found little common ground with her Cape liberal contemporaries. Her conception of a free South Africa had more in common with the account of modernity as moral autonomy developed by the theological liberals in the DRC.

The third pole of orientation described here - a dialectical perspective critical both of Calvinist dogmatism and liberal individualism - cannot simply be located on a spectrum between the other two. It played a crucial role in the formation of colonial intellectuals, whether they were more or less closely affected by the theological controversies of their time. The trajectories of the next generation of Afrikaner intellectuals - Leipoldt, Eugene Marais, and even those such as Jan Celliers and C.J. Langenhoven, who later became icons of nationalist literary mythology - cannot adequately be described without taking account of this dialectical idea of freedom.

This legacy of Socrates also helped to define a distinctive political perspective among those fighting against racial oppression in the colonial context. For although the struggle against racial oppression drew on the resistance of oppressed communities, they were informed and unified by the conceptions of Western political thought. In South African history, this process is best examined in the thought of M.K. Gandhi.

Gandhi's Socrates and Satyagraha

From the time he arrived in South Africa as a young lawyer in 1894 and found himself drawn into political activism, Gandhi relied on a specific conception of how freedom was attainable by African and Asian victims of colonial dispossession and resisted that conception at the same

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[101] Allister Sparks, The Mind of South Africa (London, Mandarin, 1991), pp. 115-6.

time. That conception of racial freedom emerged within Western political thought in the 19th century, and became a crucial part of the ideology of British imperialism. The central metaphor which informed it was set out in Mill's On Liberty, in his exclusion of two categories of people from the principles of liberty: 'children, or young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood ...who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others', and 'those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage'. For 'despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.'[102] In this metaphor, the guardianship of the more advanced race was justified by their capacity to lead the less advanced along the linear ascent to freedom. Conversely, the racially excluded could gain their freedom by advancing along that linear path to 'maturity'.

For many years Gandhi was unswervingly loyal to the British Empire, and trusting of its claims to uphold racial equality..[103] His resistance to racial oppression remained within the limits of the law. It was only in the struggle against the Asiatic Laws Amendment Ordinance of 1906, requiring that Indians in the Transvaal register as residents and produce their certificate of registration on demand, that Gandhi developed the strategy of nonviolent resistance which came to be known as satyagraha.

Gandhi's account of this development shows how he both depended on this linear conception of freedom, and at the same time contested its criteria for measuring advancement along its path. He describes the draft ordinance as an attempt to lower the prestige of the Indian community, where registration by mutual consent would have increased it. It sought to 'humiliate not only ourselves but also the motherland'.[104] He has 'never known legislation of this nature being directed against free men in any part of the world'. He knows that 'indentured Indians in Natal are subject to a drastic system of passes, but these poor fellows can hardly be classed as free men.' Their oppression is 'a mere fleabite' compared to the 'utter ruin' which faces wealthy traders (137).

This sense of the prestige and honour of 'free men' being attacked animated Indian resistance to the measures. The strategy Gandhi proposed was centrally concerned with the maintenance of prestige. At the meeting of Transvaal Indians, it was decided that rather than submit to the Ordinance, they would suffer the penalties of defying it - including prison, loss of property and deportation. One of the older members of the Indian community proposed that this resolution be accompanied by an oath taken in the name of God. The metaphor of 'manhood' is central to Gandhi's explanation of the significance of this step to the meeting: 'a man, who deliberately and intelligently takes a pledge and then breaks it, forfeits his manhood'; no one there 'can be classed as an infant or as wanting in understanding'; all are 'well advanced in age and have seen the world'. None can say that 'he did not know what he

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[102] J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government, ed. H.B. Acton (London, J.M. Dent, 1972), p. 73, cf. p. 384.

[103] Cf. J.H. Stone, 'M.K. Gandhi: Some Experiments with Truth,' Journal of Southern African Studies 16: 4 (December 1990), pp. 721-40.

[104] M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, in S. Narayan, ed., Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1968), vol. 3, p. 138. Further page references are given in the text.

is about when he took the oath (143-4).

This idea of demonstrating a degree of 'manhood' which is denied by the oppressor through willing acceptance of suffering is central also to the question of how this strategy is to be named. When a sympathetic commentator describes it as 'passive resistance, which is a weapon of the weak' (152-3), Gandhi immediately responds: 'If we continue to believe ourselves and let others believe that we are weak and helpless and therefore offer passive resistance, our resistance would never make us strong'. In contrast, by 'fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger and stronger every day' (156). In this sense, satyagraha was not simply a means of demonstrating the moral capacity of the oppressed, but also a means of increasing that capacity in order genuinely to earn the rewards of their 'civilisation'.

While in prison in 1908, Gandhi read (or re-read) Plato's Apology.[105] Immediately after his release, he began publishing a six-part Gujerati translation, summary and discussion of the text in Indian Opinion, under the title `Story of a Soldier for Truth'. According to Gandhi, Socrates was 'a great satyagrahi' who 'adopted satyagraha against his own people. As a result the Greeks became a great people' (173). Socrates was an example to the Indian struggle, he argued, in his rejection of compromise on the one hand, and `extremism' on the other. His example showed how India could be 'cured and cleansed both within and without' so that 'it will become immune to the germs of the disease, that is, to the oppression of the British and others' (174). He emphasises Socrates' skill in cross-examination, his commitment to impartial justice, and above all his tenacity of purpose. 'We pray to God,' Gandhi concludes, 'and want our readers also to pray, that they, and we too, may have the moral strength which enabled Socrates to follow virtue to the end and to embrace death as if it were his beloved. We advise everyone to turn his mind again and again to Socrates' words and conduct' (229).

Unlike the theological liberals in the DRC and their successors, Gandhi does not argue for a Socratic commitment to dialogue and dialectic as a means to progress or freedom. His Socrates embodies the willingness to die for virtue, rather than any specific conception of virtue. There is no evidence that Gandhi gave serious thought to the Socratic conception of virtue as knowledge. But the commitment to truth - perhaps informed more by contemporary currents within Hinduism than by Socrates - had a conspicuous role in his thought. This formed the basis of a far-reaching critique of the idea of civilisation on which British imperialism depended. It also led Gandhi to provide a very different account of free speech from that of British liberalism.

Gandhi conception of civilisation was set out in his major work, Hind Swaraj, written in 1909.[106] Hind Swaraj is a dialogue between 'editor' (Gandhi) and 'reader' (a composite of the Indian anarchist groups he had encountered in London in 1909) on the nature of freedom for India. The term swaraj is itself ambiguous, referring both to the constitutional domain of 'home-rule' and the spiritual goal of self-mastery. Gandhi exploits this ambiguity to argue against the violent overthrow of British rule in India which, he says, will result in 'English rule

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[105] Mahatma Gandhi, Collected Works (New Delhi, Government of India, 1962), vol. 8, p. 159. Further page references to this volume are given in the text.

[106] Anthony J. Parel describes Hind Swaraj as his 'seminal work ... the seed from which the tree of Gandhian thought has grown to its full stature ... the norm by which to assess the theoretical significance of his other writings' (M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and Other Writings (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xiii). Further page references to this work are given in the text.

without the Englishman' (28). Instead, he argues that a much more fundamental transformation of Indian life is necessary, which can be undertaken through satyagraha, will make British rule impossible and establish true freedom in India.

Gandhi's argument rests on a contrast between 'modern civilisation', on the one hand, and 'true civilisation', on the other. Modern civilisation, according to Gandhi, makes 'bodily welfare the object of life' (35). Its technological advances are made at the expense of any underlying moral or political purpose. Gandhi is especially scathing about the British 'Mother of Parliaments', which is 'like a sterile woman and a prostitute' (30). It produces nothing lasting and final, is always subject to new pressures, its members are hypocritical and selfish and guided by short-term advantage. This argument is quite similar to the theological liberals' critique of 'false liberalism'.

Turning the metaphor of historical maturity around, Gandhi asks of parliamentary government in Britain: 'if it has remained a baby after an existence of seven hundred years, when will it outgrow its babyhood' (32). By contrast, true civilisation is 'that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty' (67), and that path does not change with the pressures of the moment: 'India remains unmovable, and that is her glory' (66). Gandhi calls upon Indians to return to the ancient simplicity of the village, to the spinning-wheel and the hand-loom, and the unity of rich and poor (109). He calls on the Indian educated elite to 'know that action is much better than speech, that it is our duty to say exavtly what we think and face the consequences, and that it will be only then that we shall be able to impress anyone with our speech' (117).

Hind Swaraj is an amalgam of linear and cyclical views of history: calling for a return to an ancient and immovable past, ridding that past of its 'backward' elements (untouchability, poor sanitation, etc), and motivating the call by the principle that 'no nation has risen without suffering' (118). The amalgam is held together by a conception of unchanging moral truth which can be recovered from the accretions of religious tradition, and then enable social and technical advance to take place without being corrupted or overwhelmed by it. This amalgam is made possible by an attitude of enquiry which constantly questions customary ideas, in order to extract a contemporary moral sense from them. Socrates is surely not the only exemplar of such an attitude, but he is the one - along with Ruskin - whom Gandhi most explicitly commends.

Gandhi's twenty years in South Africa were crucial for the formation of his political thought, and for the independence struggle in India. He continued to stand by the arguments of Hind Swaraj until the end of his life.[107] By then he had made himself a unifying symbol of tradition and modernity, and saw less prospect of achieving that unity within Indian society. The question of colonial independence was by then being decided on different terms. His argument that the oppressed win their liberation not by convincing their oppressors that they are worthy of it, but by convincing themselves, has lived on after colonialism. Some - for example, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Franz Fanon - have developed this argument further by locating it within a consciously historical dialectic, drawn from Hegel. But the basic dialectical framework of the argument was already in place.

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[107] Gandhi-Nehru letters, in Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, pp. 149-55.

CHAPTER FIVE

WINE-FARMING, HERESY TRIALS AND THE STELLENBOSCH PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Stellenbosch and the Dialectical Tradition

During the first decades of the 20th century, the dialectical tradition in South Africa existed in fragmented and submerged form. Its characteristic themes were articulated by individuals, such as those discussed in the previous chapter, who held widely-differing political and theological beliefs. To the extent that there was any common perspective on the issues of their own time, this was provided by a moral critique of British imperialism, which tended towards a critique of the linear philosophy of history used to legitimate the growth of Empire. They believed that the Empire did not live up to its own world-historical claims; and questioned in varying degrees the coherence of the claims themselves.

Some of these individuals - van Oordt, Kolbe, Leipoldt, Jan Celliers - were committed opponents of British imperialism, and especially of its war against the Boer Republics. Olive Schreiner opposed the war against the republics, but her feminism relied on a late-Victorian optimism about the prospects of technological progress, and she sometimes argued within the framework of British imperialism and its attendant philosophy of history. Gandhi supported the British war effort, and organised an Indian medical corps to support it, but remained critical of the moral claims of the Empire. The most thoughtful of the colonial Hegelians, the young Alfred Hoernlé saw himself as an active proponent of British imperialism, although his philosophical aspirations for it were often sadly at odds with the realities of South African life.

Compared to the theological liberals of the DRC in the 1860s and 70s, these individuals had little sense of each other, or of a common political or intellectual project. A very large proportion of them were also itinerant and cosmopolitan figures, although in differing ways, without firm roots in South African institutional life. Van Oordt returned to the Netherlands in 1860, convinced that the liberal theological cause which he espoused was headed for defeat. He wrote his study of Plato after his hopes of an academic career had been thwarted and his World History after the defeat of the South African Republic had brought an end to his role as state historian. Schreiner was celebrated as a writer in England rather than in her own country. Although she was a significant public figure in South Africa, she felt herself unable to fit into any part of its social order. During her childhood her family moved from one mission station to another, and in the last decades of her life she lived in a succession of boarding-houses in South Africa and Europe. Kolbe was unusual within this group in holding conventional religious beliefs of any kind, but his standing within the Catholic Church did not in itself lend him authority within public debate at the Cape. Gandhi sought to create new forms of moral community in South Africa, finding himself not fully at home either in India or England.

This pattern continued well into the 20th century. Leipoldt lived in England for years, and travelled widely in Europe, the USA and Asia, including a spell as doctor aboard Joseph Pulitzer's yacht. Hoernlé - like Kolbe, Schreiner and Leipoldt, the child of German missionary parents - came to South Africa hoping to find a degree of social acceptance which he had not found in British academic life. He moved back to England in 1911, then to the USA, before returning to South Africa in 1923.

Once we group these diverse individuals together, the picture that emerges is of a certain kind of intellectual nomadism. Several had grown up in cities, or had their formative experiences there, and then spent long periods in rural surroundings. They did not belong fully within either the modern world of technological progress, nor yet to any organic community held together by older ties of belief and custom. They valued the ties of local forms of community above those of global commerce, but were too critically-minded ever to become wholly absorbed into any specific local context. Many were journalists, or amateur naturalists, and in that way belonged among loosely-grouped fellowships committed to travel and exploration. Their commitment to free and open discussion was as much a part of their love of exploration as their commitment to individual rights.

This intellectual nomadism found its sequel in such ventures as Roy Campbell, William Plomer and Laurens van der Post's short-lived journal Voorslag. Within Afrikaner literary life, such figures as Uys Krige, Jan Rabie and Peter Blum lived abroad for long periods, and their criticism of political and cultural ideas was both made possible by their distance from the Afrikaner cultural establishment and ensured their exclusion from its institutions. Even as widely-recognised a writer as N.P. van Wyk Louw became a more outspoken commentator during his years in the Netherlands. In more recent decades, Breyten Breytenbach was taken on the role of global nomad, and also made it a theme of his work.

These individuals were of decisive importance for the persistence of the dialectical tradition in South Africa during the 20th century. But it is difficult to know whether that fragile tradition could have been sustained through their influence alone. Rather, the themes of the dialectical tradition - its particular defence of free speech and open debate as the precondition for a good society, seen as a society in which the self is constantly in a process of conscious becoming - came to be articulated within the specific local context of Stellenbosch, in the first place. For all that the continuity of ideas is visible, there is no sign that they were consciously adopted from the generations that went before. It is more plausible to suppose that aspects of the situation which confronted a handful of intellectuals around the turn of the century, at a time when South African intellectual life was less firmly based in local institutions, now recurred in the local context of Stellenbosch.

Over a half-century or more - from about 1920 to about 1970 - the dialectical tradition in South Africa was kept alive by its assimilation into the discipline of philosophy at Stellenbosch. Inevitably, it was also transformed in the process. Questions of dialectic came to be raised within the context of a university, and within the academic discipline of philosophy above all. This meant that they were raised more systematically, and at a higher level of abstraction. It also meant that thinking about these questions was more frequently informed by conscious borrowing from Western intellectual history - both from older sources, Socrates, Kant, Kierkegaard and Hegel; and contemporary, American pragmatism, Bergson, Heidegger.

In a certain sense, the dialectical tradition was also taken back to its South African roots in theological controversy within the Dutch Reformed Church. But the role of the DRC within South African society was itself changing rapidly in this period. Where De Onderzoeker had represented a current of dissent within a church which was an essential institution of colonial progress, the DRC became increasingly identified first with the cause of Afrikaner nationalism, and especially after 1948, with the defence of apartheid. The dialectical tradition in South Africa came to be formed by Afrikaner politics - and the politics of Afrikaner dissent - in ways which continue to be felt even after the end of apartheid.

Finally, it is hard to avoid the impression that the limited and local context of Stellenbosch itself - with its own customs and conventions, its internal vendettas and rivalries - must have

lent its own inflection to its dialectic. For in its origins, dialectical thinking was intensely local. Socratic dialectic developed through irony and jest, allusion to the everyday activities of ordinary people and a more obstinate literal-mindedness about their ideas than would have been permitted a stranger. Socrates' interrogation of Athenian life was also a form of self-criticism. Stellenbosch was no 'Athens of the South', as Paul Kruger once claimed.[1] But a peculiar combination of historical circumstances and responses made it possible for the legacy of Socrates to take on a distinctive and enduring form there.

The Social Basis of Stellenbosch Philosophy

The origins of the teaching of philosophy as an academic discipline at Stellenbosch are to be found in the syllabus of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, established in 1873. It was not a syllabus which made great demands on the philosophical creativity of teachers and students. Until 1880, the prescribed book for the course in 'outlines of logic', which was compulsory for the B.A. in literature and languages, was Fowler's Deductive Logic. For more than 20 years after that, the sole prescribed philosophical text for the B.A. was Jevons's Elementary Lessons in Logic. Candidates for the M.A. in 'languages and literature, with history, logic and mental philosophy,' were expected to have read Thompson's Outline of the Laws of Thought and short extracts from Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding and Mill's Logic. Later, the syllabus expanded to include Psychology and Metaphysics, and - after reforms initiated in 1909 by Alfred Hoernlé, then at the South African College in Cape Town - Politics and Ethics as well. Until Hoernlé's arrival at the Cape at least, the syllabus made considerable allowance for learning by rote.[2]

The University of the Cape of Good Hope was an examining university, and remained the only university in South Africa until 1918. In 1878, Thomas Walker was appointed Professor of English and Philosophy at the Stellenbosch College (renamed the Victoria College in 1887) - one of the colleges preparing students for the University's examinations - and in 1904 he became responsible for philosophy alone. Walker was joined by N.J. Brümmer, a graduate of Victoria College and the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch, in 1911.[3] On Walker's death in 1916, the chair of philosophy was offered to Tobie Muller - an outstanding graduate of Stellenbosch, who had also completed doctorates at Utrecht and Edinburgh before returning to become student chaplain in the DRC and a leader of the emerging Afrikaans language movement. By then, the close association of philosophy and theology at Stellenbosch had already been established. Many of the undergraduates studying philosophy were preparing for admission to the Theological Seminary. And when postgraduate studies in philosophy began in earnest at Stellenbosch in the 1930s, most of these students were completing degrees in philosophy at the same time as studying for the ministry. In this context, Muller's appointment

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[1] H.B. Thom et al, eds., Stellenbosch 1866-1966: Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys (Cape Town, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966), p. 271

[2] These details are taken from the annual Calendar of the University of the Cape of Good Hope. For a more detailed discussion, cf. Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy, pp. 79-80, 131-46.

[3] According to Hoernlé, the Appointments Committee had preferred T.M. Forsyth, later to be professor of philosophy at Grey University College in Bloemfontein, but had been overruled by the Victoria College Council (cf. Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy, pp. 82-3).

was widely-acclaimed, and was followed by great disappointment when he eventually declined the chair.

But by then, Stellenbosch philosophy sought to define for itself a different role from that provided by the routines of the University of the Cape of Good Hope. The struggle for an autonomous university at Stellenbosch was waged on the basis that Stellenbosch accommodated the aspirations of its students and their communities in a way which could not be done by any other educational centre. This claim was given vigorous, though enigmatic, expression in the phrase of D.F. Malan in 1913: 'Stellenbosch ... is closely tied to the spiritual, moral and national life of the Dutch-speaking part of the people. It is the place where the Afrikaner people can best realise their ideals, and from which the greatest influence can be exercised on South Africa. It is the best fulfilment which the people have yet found for a deeply-felt need. It stands for an idea'.[4]

The capacity of Stellenbosch to 'stand for an idea' was determined by the peculiarities of class-formation in a society of colonial origins, settled by one imperialist power and then ruled by another. The interests of 'the Afrikaner people' were defined through complex processes of contestation, mobilisation and conflict, and varied according to their context. First, Stellenbosch not only served an Afrikaner community, but did so in the one part of South Africa in which Afrikaners had a clear and long-established stake in capitalism. Indeed, the wine and wheat farmers of the Western Cape formed the oldest stratum of the ruling-class; 'a powerful and affluent elite' which 'came into existence around 1700 and were the major beneficiaries of Willem Adriaan van der Stel's fall from grace as governor in 1707 as the result of his attempts to monopolise Cape economic life'.[5] Two centuries later, these farmers were still determined to preserve the social relations that ensured their wealth. From 1915, 'the National Party of the Western Cape developed as the most solidly bourgeois wing of Afrikaner nationalism'.[6]

The wine-farmers played the leading role within it. Their proximity to Cape Town; their orientation towards the export market, which required of them a broader outlook on their material interests; the older and larger towns that grew up in their region - all of these factors played a role in giving the wine-farmers the ascendancy among agricultural capitalists in the Western Cape. And insofar as the towns in the wine-growing area became more important as centres of trade and education (Stellenbosch and Paarl, in particular; the second- and third-oldest settlements in the colony), their position of leadership was further consolidated.

The Western Cape was also the region in which Afrikaner institutions were most firmly entrenched in society - the DRC, above all, but also district banks, newspapers and journals

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[4] Bun Booyens, Die Lewe van D.F. Malan: Die Eerste Veertig Jaar (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1969), p. 231.

[5] Robert Ross, 'The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cape Colony,' in W. Beinart et al, eds., Putting a Plough to the Ground. Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), p. 67.

[6] Hermann Giliomee, 'Aspects of the Rise of Afrikaner Capital and Afrikaner nationalism in the Western Cape, 1870-1915,' in W. James and M. Simons, eds., The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), p. 79; cf. Dan O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-48 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 31-2.

and educational institutions such as those at Stellenbosch. What distinguished the Western Cape from other regions was that many of these institutions were 'pre-political', in the sense that they dated back to before the emergence of a distinctive Afrikaner movement. This entrenchment made the communities served by Stellenbosch a force to be reckoned with; but it also deprived them of the kind of ideological flexibility which characterised Afrikaner politics in the north, where such institutions had much shallower roots. Cultural institutions could not as easily be co-opted for political causes in the Cape, precisely because they had existed before the causes and had developed around them a complex web of ideologies and interests, and a tradition of autonomy.

The regional peculiarities of the Western Cape also gave a distinctive role to intellectuals, unlike that in any other region. It is generally true that the weakness of the bourgeoisie in colonial and post-colonial societies adds to the social weight of the petty bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois intellectuals. In the Western Cape, Afrikaner intellectuals had far stronger links to a local capitalist class than in any other region, and correspondingly weaker links to Afrikaans-speaking workers. But the strength of that capitalist class did not detract from the importance of Afrikaner intellectuals. The huge extent of the sparsely-populated low rainfall area - covering most of the Cape Province - in which that class had to seek political support gave exaggerated importance to the ministers, lawyers and schoolteachers scattered across the region. Paradoxically, Afrikaner politics in the Western Cape both needed the categories of the bourgeois world-outlook in order to express the essential aspirations of Afrikaner capitalism, yet had to resist those categories in order to secure the political alliances with other classes in the northern provinces on which those aspirations depended. In no other region did Afrikaner intellectuals have as complex a relationship to modernisation, having to act as its advance guard while resisting it at the same time.

This sketch should give some idea of the forces which were to give shape at the outset to a Stellenbosch philosophical tradition which could neither wholeheartedly embrace modernity, nor yet resist it in the name of a pre-modern ideal. But to complete the picture, some indication is needed of the basic shifts which were taking place in the decades after that. The most basic of these was simply the movement of the white population to the north of the country, which has continued from the discovery of gold until the present. In the mid-1860s, it is estimated that about 75% of the whites in South Africa lived in the Cape.[7] By the census of 1904, more than 50% of whites still lived in the Cape, but by 1911 this was down to 46%.[8]

At the same time as economic development was drawing whites away from the Cape, it was also transforming South African society by creating an African working-class. Again, this impacted differently on the Cape and the northern provinces; W.M. Macmillan commented on the relative absence of Africans in the Western Cape in the early part of the century: 'This fact has no doubt materially helped to maintain the liberal tradition of the Cape Colony against the frankly repressive tendencies of the rest of the Union. The Cape, it may be said, could better indulge a philosophic calm, since the "menace" was at a fair distance.'[9]

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[7] D. Hobart Houghton, 'Economic Development, 1865-1965,' in L.M. Thompson and M. Wilson, eds., The Oxford History of South Africa (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 6-7.

[8] Thompson, The Unification of South Africa, 1902-10, p. 486.

[9] W.M. Macmillan, Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History (London, Faber, 1930), pp. 22-3.

Despite this distance, the growth of the African working-class transformed the Cape Afrikaner establishment, insofar as it transformed the character of the political alliances which they needed to make in order to advance their interests at a national level. In 1915, the National Party could win only 7 of the 51 parliamentary seats in the Cape Province; in 1934, when D.F. Malan led the 'Gesuiwerde' (Purified) NP out of the government, 14 of its 19 seats in Parliament were in the Cape. Farmers in the Orange Free State and Transvaal generally followed Hertzog into the United Party in 1934 in the hope that ruling-class unity would make it possible to ensure a subservient African workforce. The distinctive interests of Afrikaner capitalists in the Cape - Sanlam, Santam and KWV all having been established in the same year as the University of Stellenbosch - made it impossible for them to do likewise. Thus, as the question of African political rights, which was most pressing in the northern provinces, became increasingly decisive for South Africa's political future, so the leadership of Afrikaner nationalism shifted from the northern provinces to the Cape.

Afrikaans universities in the north grew up alongside the massive and hostile mining industry, and could not prepare their students to reproduce a social order dominated by this industry. Nor was there any sector of capitalist development in the Transvaal and Orange Free State relatively independent of mining. It was only through ideological mobilisation that Afrikaner nationalists in the north were able to contest that social order. That ideological mobilisation could succeed only by repudiating the secular and individualist bases of the bourgeois world-outlook. In those conditions, philosophy took on the role - at Potchefstroom, and later at Bloemfontein and Pretoria - of elaborating and reinforcing a systematic neo-Calvinism, which left little room for critical reflection on its own assumptions.[10] The English-language universities, once deprived of their imperialist mission by the need for compromise with Afrikaner nationalism, gradually lost all sense that philosophy had any social role at all, apart from that suggested by the whim of the individual philosopher.[11]

At Stellenbosch, neither of these options was really available. The social basis of Stellenbosch intellectual life was an alliance of agricultural capital, emerging finance capital and the well-established Afrikaner professional classes, and in these conditions a direct

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[10] The term 'neo-Calvinism' is used to refer to that reformulation of Calvinism - inspired largely by Kuyper and Dooyeweerd - which sought to establish itself as the theological basis for social conformism in the 19th and 20th centuries. I use the term when the context seems to make it necessary to distinguish neo-Calvinism, in this sense, from the larger Calvinist tradition. Proponents of neo-Calvinism often refer to their thought as 'Christian' and sometimes as 'Protestant'. I do not wish to suggest that there are rigid dividing-lines between Christianity, Protestantism, Calvinism and neo-Calvinism, but rather that it is often useful to distinguish these historical phenomena.

[11] On the neo-Calvinist philosophy which dominated the Afrikaans universities in the northern provinces for much of the 20th century, cf. A.L. Conradie, The Neo-Calvinist Concept of Philosophy: A Study in the Problem of Communication (Durban, University of Natal Press, 1960). On the ideological functions of neo-Calvinism, cf. I.R. Hexham, The Irony of Apartheid: The Struggle for National Independence of Afrikaner Calvinism against British Imperialism (New York, Edwin Mellon, 1981); T.D. Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975). The vocation of philosophy at the English-language universities as a form of 'practical Imperialism' was quite openly acknowledged around the time of unification (cf. Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy, pp. 64-5).

repudiation of the norms of scientific rationality could hardly be effected. Nor, on the other hand, given the rural orientation of this alliance, its need to defend itself against the interests of merchant capital regionally and mining capital in a national context, and the importance of its ideological links with Afrikaner nationalism in the north, was it feasible for Stellenbosch to take on the role of the English-language universities by serving established capitalist interests without reflection on the character of these interests.

Stellenbosch could not seek its salvation in neo-Calvinist cosmology, as did Potchefstroom, and later Bloemfontein and Pretoria; nor could it orientate itself towards science and industry, as did the University of the Witwatersrand, from its beginnings as a School of Mines, and later the University of Cape Town. Unlike Fort Hare, say, the communities served by Stellenbosch had considerable capacity to determine the university's intellectual direction. The Stellenbosch philosophical tradition emerged, then, because its material conditions allowed Stellenbosch no other way to define a role for philosophy except through seeking some kind of reconciliation of the conflicting claims of science and religion, modernity and tradition, the individual and the nation. It was by no means inevitable that a philosophical tradition would emerge at Stellenbosch. But when it did, these conditions set the parameters for its development.

The Antinomies of Tobie Muller

Many local philosophical traditions can be traced back to a founding figure: a powerful individual whose ideas and personality made so indelible a mark that it could only be erased by the disappearance of that tradition itself. In the South African context, such figures as Stoker at Potchefstroom and Hoernlé at Wits come to mind. The Stellenbosch tradition has no such founding figure. This is not in itself unusual, although perhaps surprising in a local tradition of such distinctiveness. But it is unusual, in the case of Stellenbosch, to be able to name the founding figure whose absence was so decisive for the tradition: Tobie Muller, who declined the chair of philosophy in 1916.

Muller was a legendary figure even in his own lifetime, and the legend was documented soon after his death by Keet and Tomlinson in a moving biography; to this day, one of the most powerful accounts yet written of the meaning of the philosophical vocation in South Africa. At the core of the legend were three conspicuous acts of renunciation: of the Rhodes Scholarship offered him in 1903, which he refused in protest against the imperialist politics which Rhodes symbolised; of the chair of philosophy at Stellenbosch, which he declined in order to become minister in the country town of Philippolis in the Orange Free State; and finally, we might say, of life itself, which he sacrificed by refusing to put his own health before his ministry to his congregation in the influenza epidemic of 1918.[12]

Keet and Tomlinson give an evocative account of his decision to decline the Stellenbosch chair of philosophy. He was offered the appointment in July 1916, and at about the same time he received a call to the ministry at Philippolis. Only once he had accepted the academic appointment and declined the call did he realise what this decision meant: 'He realised that the work which he had regarded as his life's calling and to which he had dedicated himself with his

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[12] B.B. Keet and G. Tomlinson, Tobie Muller: 'n Inspirasie vir Jong Suid-Afrika (Cape Town, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1925), pp. 14, 27, 35-6. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

whole heart must now make way for something else which, no matter how important, could not weigh up against the calling of the minister of the gospel. The more he thought about it, the fiercer the struggle became.' After a week in which 'he found no rest', he withdrew his previous refusal and accepted the call (27).

The force of Muller's personality invested his decision to decline the chair with a kind of philosophical significance. It was difficult to resist the impression that Stellenbosch's most gifted philosopher had concluded that the real problems of philosophy were to be addressed not through philosophical argument, but by immersing himself humbly into the everyday lives of ordinary people. Something of this is conveyed by his biographers: 'In truth it can be said of him that his crowning achievements in the intellectual arena only served to make him always more humble ... It is striking to hear members of the congregation at Philippolis tell with what anxious curiosity they awaited the new minister. Such a learned man, who had been professor of philosophy at the college at Stellenbosch! Would they be able to make anything of him? Would they even be able to understand him? And the relief when he finally arrived! Not only did they follow his first speech with rapt attention; not only did they admire his flowing words, which set out his thoughts so simply, yet with such depth of meaning and logical rigour; but they learned to love him, to love him because he practised so pre-eminently the spirit of his Master who said "learn from Me that I am meek and humble of spirit" ... Was it not that same humility which enabled him to give up a brilliant career at the university for the more everyday calling of the rural clergyman?' (88).

It is only a small step from here to conclude that Muller's crowning achievement was, in fact, his humility; and his own example predisposed the Stellenbosch tradition to such an identification of intellectual and moral achievement. But it is worth at least asking the question: if Muller had accepted the chair of philosophy, what would he have made of it? Could he have addressed coherently the fundamental problems of Stellenbosch philosophy within the framework of his previous thought?

Muller articulated both sides of the fundamental dilemma facing Stellenbosch philosophy, and he did this so instinctively and spontaneously that it is hard to see how he could have achieved any philosophical reconciliation of them. Nor would it have been possible, given the role of Stellenbosch within Afrikaner political and intellectual life, for him to have avoided the attempt. As a student, he turned to the new philosophy of pragmatism, perhaps in reaction to the Victorian Hegelianism which was so self-evidently being used as a justification for British imperialism. But pragmatism could only provide a philosophical basis for Afrikaner nationalism in such limited contexts as deciding rules of spelling and grammar (72-4).

Philosophical pragmatism expressed Muller's urge to accommodate modernisation; its basic premise was precisely that we should focus on how things worked in the present, and disregard the historical processes which had made them what they were. Afrikaner nationalism insisted, on the other hand, on recalling the past and preserving its affiliations in the present. While pragmatism depended on a historically empty concept of human purpose, in other words, Afrikaner nationalism depended on an overburdened idea of historical purpose. This conflict resulted in an essentially circular account of Afrikaner nationalism, calling for Afrikaners to be left to live out their national identity without interference from others while demonstrating at the same time that this national identity had been formed by historical interaction with others.[13]

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[13] For a more detailed analysis, cf. Nash, Colonialism and Philosophy, pp. 95-8.

Muller's philosophical pragmatism and his corresponding eagerness to abandon philosophical speculation in favour of practical action rested on a strongly-felt historical optimism. This optimism rested in turn on a view of history which was either cyclical or, at the least, sensed the contradictions of the linear idea of progress: 'Personally, I would not exchange my inheritance as a member of the Afrikaans nation for any other citizenship of the world. The great nations of Europe are doubtless old and strong and rich in experience ... but they are also already showing the signs of their age, and maturity is beginning to turn into decrepitude in more than one place ... For me, at any rate, it is much more wonderful to try to add my small part to the self-realisation and character-building of a young nation than to assist in the treatment of the chronic ills of an old nation ... In Europe, there are few things under the sun which are really new; with us, almost everything is new' (152-3).

In turning towards practical work, Muller expressed something of the spirit of the times. Within the University of Stellenbosch, philosophy as an academic discipline appears to have gone through a decline in the 1920s. R.W. Wilcocks, who was appointed to the Philosophy Department in Muller's place, soon left to head the newly-established Department of Psychology. No further appointment was made in philosophy, which remained under Brummer. New departments were also established in Anthropology (under W.W.M. Eiselen) and Sociology (under H.F. Verwoerd). While student numbers grew at Stellenbosch (from about 600 in 1918 to 1,000 by 1933) and numbers of postgraduate students at the university grew at an even faster rate (17 registered for the M.A. in 1918; in 1932 there were 40 M.A. and 18 D.Phil. students), the number of postgraduate students in philosophy declined sharply. In 1918, five of the 17 M.A. students at Stellenbosch studied philosophy; in the years from 1921 to 1930, no more than five M.A. degrees were awarded in philosophy, out of a total of 171.

The number of postgraduate students in philosophy increased rapidly in the 1930s. But the fundamental problems they sought to address had been formulated not in the context of academic philosophy, but above all in the conflicts arising from the case of Prof. Johannes du Plessis, who was eventually removed from his post at the Theological Seminary in 1932, after a six-year-long struggle. If Muller's example suggested that the real philosophical problems were to be found in the world and not in the classroom, the du Plessis case ensured that those seeking to clarify the world's problems were driven back into the philosophical classroom. The historical optimism which we have noted in Muller's thought was to be given philosophical form by du Plessis and his supporters, and to receive its decisive setback with his removal from the Seminary.

The du Plessis Case and the End of Philosophical Optimism

When Johannes du Plessis became Professor of Theology at Stellenbosch in 1916, he already had a considerable career behind him. After studying in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Edinburgh, he had served for ten years in the DRC ministry in Zastron and Sea Point. He had been active in missionary work and administration for as many years again, and had undertaken a three-year journey through Central Africa as part of this work. He had been editor of De Kerkbode, the official mouthpiece of the DRC, and was the author of important historical and theological works.

Du Plessis was the author, as the biographer of Andrew Murray, of the authoritative account of the theological struggles in the DRC during the 1860s. Ironically, in view of his own subsequent fate, his account was wholly sympathetic towards the same claims of

orthodoxy which were to be mobilised against him.[14] But it was only some years later, with the establishment in 1923 of Het Zoeklicht, a monthly journal 'for church and theology', which du Plessis was to edit until his death in 1935, that the most eventful part of his life began.[15]

In the first issue of Het Zoeklicht, du Plessis explained its aims: 'We will try to fulfill the not unimportant function of a searchlight.' The metaphor 'implies that it is dark, and who will deny that at the present moment darkness reigns all around, in the areas of politics, society and the Church?' In this context, it would be the aim of the journal 'to spread the dry light of reason and to subject current views and prejudices to an impartial examination.'[16] The journal was intended primarily for theologians, and in its early years it did not orientate itself towards a popular audience.[17] It published contributions from a range of viewpoints, including some relatively sympathetic treatments of the findings of the 'Higher Criticism' which examined Biblical texts historically, and some discussions of evolution.

But its character was to change after 1926, when the campaign against du Plessis began in earnest. In that year, a rival journal was launched, Die Ou Paaie, which consisted mainly, and sometimes entirely, of attacks on du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht. It was written for a popular, church-going audience, and it was widely distributed, often free of charge, by conservatives within the DRC. In the same year as Die Ou Paaie was launched, various presbyteries of the DRC adopted resolutions deploring the 'tendency to adopt a modern direction' and calling on the Curatorium of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch to take action against du Plessis. In 1928, after several preliminary skirmishes, the Curatorium charged du Plessis with holding unorthodox views before the Presbytery of Stellenbosch.[18]

The Presbytery found that there was no basis for the charges, and the Curatorium then appealed against this finding to the Synod of the Cape DRC, which met in November 1928. The Synod instructed the Presbytery to draw up a charge sheet and try the charges against du Plessis. The Synod also adopted several proposals concerning doctrine, rejecting as error any part of the theory of evolution which conflicted with the Bible, and rejecting the Higher Criticism, the reconstruction of the history of Israel, the view that Jesus had at any time been mistaken or had in any way accommodated his beliefs to the mistaken conceptions of his time, and various other views as well. Even after these doctrinal rulings, the Presbytery of Stellenbosch acquitted du Plessis.

A special meeting of the Synod was then called to act as a court of appeal. The Synod removed du Plessis from his post at the Seminary in 1930. The case continued in the Supreme Court, which found that the Synod decision of 1930 had been illegal. A further special

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[14] Cf. du Plessis, The Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa, pp. 208-36.

[15] The account of events in the following paragraphs is drawn mainly from F.S. Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. du Plessis (Cape Town, Nasionale Pers, 1933), and G.B.A. Gerdener, Die Boodskap van 'n Man: Lewenskets van Prof. J. du Plessis (Stellenbosch, Christen-Studentevereniging, 1943).

[16] J. du Plessis, 'Een Woordje Vooraf,' Het Zoeklicht 1:1 (January 1923), pp. 1-2.

[17] At its height, around 1930, the journal had about 2,000 subscribers.

[18] At that time, the Presbytery of Stellenbosch included representatives of the congregations of Stellenbosch, Caledon, Somerset West, Bredasdorp, Napier, Villiersdorp, Kuils River, Strand, Stanford, Greyton, Riviersonderend.

meeting of the Synod in 1932 then withdrew all charges against du Plessis, but removed him from his post in order to 'prevent friction'. He remained Professor of Hebrew at Stellenbosch, and editor of Het Zoeklicht, until his death in 1935. The Church Council of Stellenbosch barred him from preaching from its pulpit. The journal - which had been re-named Die Soeklig in 1933[19] - continued after his death, until declining subscriptions brought about its closure in 1936.

Throughout these years, a number of theological, moral and legal questions were made concretely and dramatically present in the lives of Afrikaner intellectuals at Stellenbosch and elsewhere. Was it possible for Christians to accept the findings of modern science? Did these findings conflict with the Bible? Was the Bible literally true in all its details, or were parts of it to be understood allegorically? Had Jesus laid aside his divinity in becoming human in such a way as to be capable of human error or ignorance (the so-called kenosis question)? Was it possible to gain a better understanding of the Bible through reconstruction of its historical context, or did this merely tamper with a divine message? Could more than one view on these and other matters be tolerated within the church? And within the theological seminary in which future ministers were trained? What would the consequences be if 'seeds of doubt' were not eradicated?

The way in which these questions were approached already depended on philosophical ideas and assumptions, although these were seldom made explicit. But the conflict had another philosophical dimension, which is less easily noticed. For du Plessis and his supporters developed, and depended upon, a particular philosophy of history - a vision of change within Church and society - which was in the end to prove inadequate. Above all, it was a vision of a harmonious and cumulative growth and assimilation of human knowledge and culture, without radical discontinuities or dichotomies. In effect, it extended the linear view of history into the realm of knowledge, and that of spirituality.

Where Tobie Muller's optimism rested on an idea that the historical pattern revealed in the rise of nationalities in Europe would recur in a similar form in South Africa, du Plessis' optimism had a more metaphysical basis. Du Plessis regarded the nature of human culture as such that it developed 'gradually and evenly' and without reversals.[20] For him, the nature of reality was such that harmonious and even development was the norm. All forms of knowledge would likewise prove to be consistent and harmonious. This belief - what might be called his philosophical optimism - made du Plessis receptive to the natural and social sciences, and motivated his commitment to rational debate. It made possible the peculiar combination of secular modernism and devout Christian belief which gave Het Zoeklicht its distinctive role and character.

The contrast between this belief and that of du Plessis' opponents is clearest on the question of reason and faith. According to du Plessis, 'reason is the controlling part of the human personality. And faith, what is faith? Faith is reason itself, but reason moving in a higher and purer atmosphere and judging over the most elevated and absolute truths ... How then are faith and reason to be reconciled? Our answer must be: there is no need for reconciliation, because there is no conflict. And the conflict is avoided not through a delimitation of separate territories for faith and reason - which is impossible to carry out - but

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[19] For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the journal as Het Zoeklicht throughout, rather than giving both the Dutch and the Afrikaans titles.

[20] Gerdener, Die Boodskap van 'n Man, pp. 302-6.

by regarding faith and reason as capacities which supplement each other. Reason paves the way for faith; faith completes and perfects the work of reason'.[21]

In response to press reports of a talk given by du Plessis on the same topic some years before its publication, Die Ou Paaie set out a directly opposing position: 'Reason and the faith which God has revealed to us in his precious Word will all too often come into conflict, but untrustworthy reason must yield to faith. The revelation of God in His Word ... is the guidance of the Wisdom (the Reason) of God. God's Word says rightly: the wisdom of the world is foolishness before God. A faith which does not expect faith to conflict with the reason of man will contain only very little. There is so much we cannot understand, but let us believe.'[22]

Similarly, on the question of evolution, du Plessis was certain that any conflict between science and revelation would turn out to be only apparent. He quoted Bacon approvingly: 'A little knowledge inclineth men's minds to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth them back to religion'.[23] He held that 'since Darwin's time', science had come increasingly to the conclusion 'that there is indeed a purposeful design to natural processes' which can only be explained 'by the assumption of an intelligence which uses certain means to achieve higher ends'. He reported as a 'widely accepted' view that 'evolution is, in Bergson's phrase, a creative process', quite reconcilable with the account of the creation and fall of humankind given in the Old Testament.[24]

Du Plessis insisted that knowledge had an intrinsic unity, and argued against the separation of science and religious truth, and against the idea of a Christian science put forward by Kuyper's followers in South Africa. This refusal to accept a 'double truth' - either by separating reason and faith, or by separating the science of Christian believers from that of 'natural man' - had as its corollary a separation, strangely under-emphasised in du Plessis's writings, between God's knowledge and that of humankind. 'Absolute, indisputable certainty is to be found in God alone,' he wrote. 'Only the Absolute can have absolute knowledge. For us humans, the principle laid down by the Apostle Paul remains always applicable: "We know only in part." Our knowledge is relative - not in the sense of relativist philosophy, but in the sense that it is knowledge imparted to us according to the measure and susceptibility of our capacity for knowledge. We achieve no more than an approximation of the truth, but never the full truth'.[25]

Du Plessis never attempted to explore the philosophical implications of this separation of God and humankind. He and his colleagues appear to have viewed it as no more than a

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[21] J. du Plessis, 'Geloof en Rede,' Die Soeklig 11:5 (May 1933), p. 150.

[22] D.R. Snyman, 'Rede en Geloof,' Die Ou Paaie 6:3 (1931), pp. 374-5.

[23] J. du Plessis, 'Die Veranderde Uitkyk van die Wetenskap,' Die Soeklig 11:11 (November 1933), p. 325.

[24] J. du Plessis, 'Besware teen Ewolusie,' Het Zoeklicht 8:8 (August 1930), pp. 258-61; cf. 'Die Veranderende Uitkyk van die Wetenskap,' p. 331.

[25] Du Plessis, 'Geloof en Rede,' pp. 144-7.

warning against fanaticism and intolerance.[26] This perspective was carried through, however, into their social and political thinking. Perhaps it is most clearly displayed in du Plessis's treatment of the 'racial question' in South Africa: 'People who are so quick to produce an easy and final solution for our racial questions have never thought properly and consistently about the matter. There is no simple and complete solution: there are only experimental and partial solutions. The questions before us must be addressed gradually, step-by-step, with caution and sympathy, and with a deep awareness of our ignorance and impotence'.[27] True to character, he argued that the interests of poor whites and Africans 'do not conflict with each other. On the contrary, together we all form one Christian state ... Everyone is needed, and the one may not hold the other in contempt. If we regard the natives as inferior, then we become inferior ourselves. We cannot hold them at a lower level, without remaining at a lower level ourselves. Therefore their upliftment, both mental and economic, also means our own upliftment and ennoblement'.[28] The argument provides the seeds of a dialectical figure which was to develop further in later decades. But in du Plessis' use of it, as so often, it is not based on real developments within South African society, but rather on a philosophical sense of the ultimately harmonious character of reality.[29]

This philosophical optimism - with its abstract reconciliation of all concrete conflicts and its attachment to the interests of all - was attractive, above all, to the relatively independent layers of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie. In particular, it appealed to the intelligentsia - academics, teachers, ministers, lawyers, doctors and the like - who were a stronger grouping among Afrikaners in the Western Cape than in any other part of the country. Du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht also accorded an important role to this stratum of the petty bourgeoisie (most often described, somewhat quaintly, as die ontwikkeldes - i.e. developed people) in their account of the changes needed in Church and society. Indeed, du Plessis had urged the Church to accommodate 'the spirit of enquiry and ferment among our youth' as editor of De Kerkbode in 1912.[30] At a time when conservatives within the Church were expressing their dismay at the emerging current of rationalism among university students, Het Zoeklicht welcomed this development as a crucial challenge to the Church.[31] The need to accommodate

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[26] Cf. N.J. Brümmer, ''n Karakterskets van Prof. du Plessis ,' Die Soeklig 13:4 (April 1935), p. 82.

[27] J. du Plessis, 'Maandkroniek,' Die Soeklig 13:2 (February 1935), p. 36.

[28] J. du Plessis, 'Maandkroniek,' Die Soeklig 11:3 (March 1933), p. 67.

[29] Du Plessis' treatment of racial issues was liberal in orientation without being very specific. He was especially sympathetic to the plight of the 'educated and developed native' ('Maandkroniek,' February 1935). The last issues of Die Soeklig during his lifetime included a two-part article on racial discrimination by Dr A.B. Xuma, later president of the ANC. Du Plessis also supported the multi-racial student conference held at Fort Hare in 1930, which was condemned by the Stellenbosch Church Council (cf. Die Soeklig 1930, p. 249; the Church Council's resolution is reported in Die Ou Paaie, October 1930, pp. 121-2).

[30] Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. du Plessis, p. 23.

[31] For DRC concern about rationalism, cf. T.J. Kotze, 'Godsdienstige Toestand van Studente van die Suidelike Universiteite en Kolleges,' De Kerkbode, 10 February 1932, pp. 260-2.

the specific needs of this stratum - with its critical disposition, its aversion to dogma, its desire to test knowledge for itself - is emphasised over and over again in its pages.[32]

The divisions which arose within the DRC around the du Plessis case were often drawn along lines of social class. The leading figure in the attack on du Plessis, Dr D.R. Snyman, came from a background of some poverty. He had to leave school early to earn a living in the office of an East London merchant. Snyman's journal, Die Ou Paaie, was transformed into the more substantial Gereformeerde Vaandel in 1932 with the help of a donation of £10,000 from Pieter Neethling, a wealthy Stellenbosch farmer.[33]

On the other hand, many of the supporters of Het Zoeklicht - including du Plessis - were second-generation DRC ministers: the most well-established and self-confident of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. This pattern is also visible at a regional level: the DRC Synods which were unanimous in condemning du Plessis were those of the Orange Free State and Natal, where the Afrikaner intelligentsia traditionally had less social weight.[34] Opinion in the Cape and Transvaal was far more divided.[35] And public support for du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht came consistently from academics, professionals, schoolteachers - including a resolution adopted by the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie - and students, particularly at Stellenbosch.[36] This support was reciprocated in du Plessis's vision of their role in integrating modernity and tradition, rationality and faith, the interests of all classes of society and the highest moral criteria.

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[32] E.g., W.S. Conradie, 'Die Geestelike Bearbeiding van die Ontwikkeldes,' Het Zoeklicht 7:2 (February 1929), pp. 41-8; C.C. Nepgen, 'Arbeid onder Studente,' Het Zoeklicht 7:8 (August 1929), pp. 234-8; O.A. Cloete, 'Kerklike Leiding vir die Studerende Jeug,' Het Zoeklicht 9:4 (April 1931), pp. 112-4; J.C.N. Mentz, 'Die Intellek en die Lewe van die Christen,' Het Zoeklicht 10:5 (May 1932), pp. 139-45; N.J. Brümmer, 'Afrikaner-Humanisme,' Die Soeklig 13:5 (May 1935), pp. 113-9.

[33] Snyman was a DRC minister at Woodstock in Cape Town, and after 1928 at Stellenbosch. He studied under du Plessis at Stellenbosch, but completed his degree through the University of South Africa. He dedicated his doctoral thesis, submitted at Harvard University, to du Plessis. On Snyman's life, cf. E. Greyling, 'Huldeblyk - Dr Dwight Randolph Snyman,' Die Kerkbode, 9 May 1979, pp. 605-11; E. Brown, 'Snyman, Dwight Randolph,' in C.J. Beyers, ed., Dictionary of South African Biography (Pretoria, HSRC, 1987), volume 5. On Snyman's relationship with du Plessis, cf. D.R. Snyman, Pas op dat Niemand julle Mislei nie (East London, the author, 1965).

[34] The Synod of the Orange Free State was particularly vigorous in opposing du Plessis. Significantly, the member of that synod who minuted his opposition to the condemnation of du Plessis was ds. C.H. Murray - a member of the family that epitomised the established intellectuals of the Cape DRC. John Murray was the first professor of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch; his son Charles Murray lectured in philosophy at the Victoria College in the 1880s; a grandson of John Murray, A.F. Murray, was a founder member of the Victoria College Philosophical Society in 1912 (cf. Thom et al, Stellenbosch 1866-1966, pp. 35-6, 39, 327); A.H. Murray, a grandson of Andrew Murray, gained his M.A. at Stellenbosch and was for many years Professor of Philosophy at UCT.

[35] Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. du Plessis, pp. 72-85.

[36] Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. du Plessis, pp. 279-80; E.C. Pienaar et al, ''n Openbare Protes teen die Sinodale Besluit insake Prof. J. du Plessis,' Die Soeklig 11:10 (October 1933), pp. 292-4; I.L. Ferreira, Die Teologiese Seminarium van Stellenbosch 1858-1963 (Pretoria, Makro, 1979), pp. 182-3.

Yet the increasing reliance of Het Zoeklicht on the independence of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia was the sign of its historical weakness. For its vision was premised precisely on a fundamentally co-operative relationship between intelligentsia and capitalists, such as the unique conditions of the Western Cape seemed to offer. In the name of this co-operation, Het Zoeklicht was to defend capitalism against the attacks led by Afrikaner intellectuals in the north, even as the Afrikaner capitalists of the Western Cape moved towards an alliance with these supposed opponents of capitalism.[37] This fatal disjuncture ensured that no enduring basis could be built for Het Zoeklicht as it came under challenge, in spite of widespread sympathy for its cause.

After du Plessis's final removal from the Seminary in 1932, 400 Stellenbosch students marched to his home, led by the SRC chairman, to show their solidarity with him. Ten years after his death, his friends and colleagues still felt strongly enough about his memory to erect a statue of him in Stellenbosch.[38] The social basis of Stellenbosch as an educational centre ensured that the commitment to rational and tolerant debate and enquiry would live on there. But after 1932 that commitment was to be upheld by a dissenting minority - conscious of their status as a minority, and vulnerable to the charge made against du Plessis of 'sowing seeds of doubt in the hearts of our students'.[39] That commitment could no longer base itself on the philosophical optimism which had been represented by du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht. Instead, a remarkable process was to begin of reconstructing a philosophical basis for such a commitment to rationality and toleration with the materials that lay to hand. The defeat of du Plessis ensured that, for the first time, a steady stream of Stellenbosch students would gravitate towards the academic study of philosophy, and invest that study with an unprecedented significance and intensity.

Postgraduate Studies in Philosophy in the 1930s

The most important evidence suggesting that the du Plessis case was decisive for determining the direction of Stellenbosch philosophy in the 1930s and '40s is that of the continuity of the philosophical questions and concerns which characterised this period. But it is worth pausing briefly to consider the somewhat different kind of evidence provided by the growth of postgraduate studies in philosophy in the 1930s.

We have seen that Tobie Muller's decision to undertake the practical work of the ministry rather than accepting the chair of philosophy was followed by a considerable decline in postgraduate student numbers after 1920. Measurement in these matters cannot be very precise, but what the available statistics represent is a decline from a situation in which philosophy students made up 33% of M.A. students at Stellenbosch (1918-20) to one in which they made up about 3% (1921-30). This represents a severe decline in the fortunes of philosophy at Stellenbosch; but the expansion of postgraduate student numbers after 1930 is

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[37] J. du Plessis, 'Die Kerkblad en Kapitalisme,' Het Zoeklicht 10:3 (March 1932), p. 69; cf. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp. 21-56.

[38] The statue of du Plessis has been moved from one public building in Stellenbosch to the next, but has never been accommodated at the Theological Seminary itself, or at the university buildings where he taught.

[39] Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. du Plessis, p. 57.

perhaps even more dramatic.[40]

In 1929, two students registered for the M.A. in philosophy, out of a total of 47 M.A. students registered in that year. In 1930, one registered in philosophy out of a total of 42. Then in 1931, five registered in philosophy out of 43; in 1932, six out of 40; in 1933, 13 out of 41; and in 1934, 14 out of 42. In 1932, J.F. Kirsten became the first doctoral student in philosophy at Stellenbosch, and a steady flow of doctoral candidates followed until by 1941 there were four people studying for the D.Phil. in philosophy. By 1945, there were eleven! The statistics for this period which are readily available are for registration of students rather than graduation, and it is possible that the higher proportion of theology students among postgraduates in philosophy will distort the picture slightly, by including more cases in which students registered for several years than would be the case in other disciplines. But the statistics show that in the period from 1931 to 1941, 22% of M.A. students and 13% of D.Phil. students at the university were registered in the Department of Philosophy.

Neither the growth of the university nor the restructuring of its academic departments can explain this pattern. There were no new appointments in the Department of Philosophy which help to account for it. Nor was it the case that a young professor had found his feet by the 1930s, after a difficult start: Brümmer was 65 in 1931, when the expansion of postgraduate numbers began. Nor were there noticeable changes in the philosophy syllabus, or in the character of Brümmer's published work.[41]

In the same years that philosophy expanded, the numbers of new students admitted to the Theological Seminary dropped off markedly - from 43 in 1931 to twelve in 1937 and no more than seven in 1939, before increasing again from that small number to 52 in 1946. In the aftermath of the du Plessis case, the atmosphere at the Seminary appears to have alternated between factional bitterness and intellectual boredom.[42] It is no longer possible to reconstruct accurately the currents of thought and emotion which must have carried the Afrikaner students of the 1930s in one direction or the other. But the chronology outlined here is so striking that it hardly seems possible to explain without the impact of the du Plessis case.[43]

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[40] The kind of information about postgraduate students given in the annual calendar (Jaarboek) of the University of Stellenbosch varies from year to year. For some years, degrees awarded are indicated, and for others, students registered. From 1942 onwards, there is usually no information given about the number of postgraduate students. Both examinations and a thesis were required for the M.A., but it appears that the thesis requirement was taken much more seriously after 1927. This led to students registering for the M.A. for much longer periods than before. The intermediate B.A. Honours degree was only introduced in 1957.

[41] Cf. J.F. Kirsten, 'Brümmer, N.J.,' in W.J. de Kock and D.W. Kruger, eds., Dictionary of South African Biography (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972), volume 2.

[42] Ferreira, Die Teologiese Seminarium van Stellenbosch, pp. 117, 261-2; Peter Randall, Not Without Honour: A Tribute to Beyers Naudé (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1982), pp. 8-9.

[43] A peculiar feature of these years was that precisely at the time when increasing numbers of students began postgraduate studies in philosophy, the students' Philosophical Society ceased to exist. The society was established in 1912, and its activities ceased in 1932 (Thom, Stellenbosch 1866-1966, p. 327). Another philosophical forum, the Socratic Society, was formed in 1973.

'Organic' History, the 'Whole Personality' and the Critique of Mechanism

What were the ideas which drew this new generation of postgraduate students to philosophy in the 1930s? In that decade, a transformation took place in the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition. As with all such transformations, it drew on elements already present in that tradition, but which had previously not occupied as central a place in it; and also introduced elements of its own which - with the benefit of hindsight - we can recognise as those which were later to become crucial to Stellenbosch philosophy.

Three complex ideas were crucial to this transformation. First, the idea of historical and cultural processes as 'organic' predated the struggle around du Plessis. In that struggle, the critique of mechanistic philosophy implied by this idea was made explicit in a way that it had not been before. Second, du Plessis's idea of the tentativeness of all human knowledge was accompanied by a sense - somewhat muted in his own writings - that human reason needed always to be located within the 'whole personality'. This idea was to be developed further in the 1930s. Third, out of these developments grew a focus - which had no real precedent within the Stellenbosch tradition - on the integrity of individual experience. This focus was to become increasingly intense, and increasingly central to the Stellenbosch tradition, in the 1940s.

The idea of the organic character of historical processes is probably to be dated from Tobie Muller's nationalism. He attributes the idea of the nation as a 'self-conscious organism, i.e. a personality' to Brümmer's 1903 lecture on 'the Afrikaner nation'.[44] This idea of the organic character of the nation gave to Muller's historical optimism a particular moral tone - enabling that optimism to be sustained in the face of possible defeat. This moral preference for active struggle that ends in defeat, rather than passive acceptance of the historical situation, is closely linked in turn to a specific philosophical and theological conception of time. Accordingly to Muller, God disposes over the length of our lives, but we can increase the depth of the time given to us by 'building a character that will remain for all eternity'.[45] This theme - so poignant in the context of Muller's own life - was of a piece with his conception of philosophy as essentially a daring enterprise, in which much could be lost or won.

The historical optimism which characterised Muller's thought took on a much blander, more metaphysical character in that of du Plessis, as we have seen. For somewhat different reasons, it was important for him to put forward a critique of the mechanistic world-view, insofar as mechanism seemed to eliminate the need for a creative design in the universe, and to stand in the way of reconciling science and religion.[46]

There is little more to this critique than a sense that mechanism denies God a role in the universe, and is not borne out by the results of modern science; but it is sufficient to require from du Plessis a specific account of the concept of reason. According to du Plessis, all truth - including religious truth - rested on evidence, and reason was 'the organ with which we must

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[44] Keet and Tomlinson, Tobie Muller, p. 126. It should be said that the attribution is not very convincing; cf. N.J. Brummer, Di Afrikaanse Nasie (Cape Town, Zuid-Afrikaanse Nieuwsblad Maatscappij, 1908), pp. 9-10.

[45] Keet and Tomlinson, Tobie Muller, pp. 147, 153, 177-8.

[46] Du Plessis, 'Besware teen Ewolusie,' p. 257; 'Die Veranderde Uitkyk van die Wetenskap,' pp. 329, 331.

test the value of evidence'. But he felt it essential to qualify this rationalism by adding that reason 'must be helped and strengthened by all the capacities of the human soul ... a co-ordination of the intellectual, emotional and volitional capacities of our personality'.[47] Elsewhere, he was to define the relationship of science, philosophy and theology by asserting that they rested on the evidence of the senses, reason and faith respectively; and added that 'senses, reason and faith are elements in the composition of one undivided personality. They work on each other, they work with each other, and cannot be separated from each other'.[48] But this conception of the 'whole personality', for all that it was essential to his reconciliation of science and religion, received no real elaboration in du Plessis's own writings.

Yet there was a distinct strain in the tradition of Het Zoeklicht which gave greater prominence to this idea of personality. Perhaps its most vivid expression is to be found in a five-part Socratic dialogue by Nico Hofmeyr, which appeared in the journal in 1928-29. Socrates is represented here as one who 'was destined to become a minister, but a sermon delivered in his university town scared him from that difficult office, and caused him to decide to become a schoolmaster instead'.[49] For five days, Socrates and his interlocutors - including a traditionalist and anti-intellectual elder in the Church, an atheist doctor recently returned from studies in Europe and various others - gather on the sand-dunes at the Strand to discuss the 'commotion in the Church' around 'a certain case' - doubtless that of Professor du Plessis. In the end, Socrates proves capable of reconciling all points of view, demonstrating that the basic spiritual impulses underlying them are all essentially in harmony.

Hofmeyr's Socrates turns out to be a very different figure from the one depicted by Plato. In this account, Socrates is an ardent, if unorthodox, defender of the legacy of Luther and Calvin.[50] At the same time, he is deeply sympathetic to the needs of young intellectuals to question received doctrine for themselves.[51] He is able to bring together diverse opinions in admiration for the humanity of Jesus, with its appeal to both 'heart and mind'.[52] In reply to disputes about the grounds of religious belief, he exclaims: 'Heart and mind, feeling and reason, intuitions and logic, faith and knowledge - the full, rich, wonderful "I" of every person, if he or she only has the will and the nerve to give all these things free play - are and remain the royal road to truth in any area of life ... If we only had the courage and the faith to listen to all the sounds and chords of this divine musical instrument - our own soul and personality - then we will all gain wonderful wisdom and be drawn closer and closer together, the more we think

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[47] Du Plessis, 'Geloof en Rede,' pp. 148-9.

[48] Du Plessis, 'Die Veranderde Uitkyk van die Wetenskap,' p. 330.

[49] N. Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates in Ons Porseleinkas (1),' Het Zoeklicht 6:11 (November 1928), p. 344. Hofmeyr - the son of Professor N.J. Hofmeyr of the Theological Seminary - was himself a schoolmaster.

[50] Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates (1),' p. 345; ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates in Ons Porseleinkas (2),' Het Zoeklicht 6:12 (December 1928), p. 363; ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates in Ons Porseleinkas (4),' Het Zoeklicht 7:3 (March 1929), p. 75.

[51] Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates (2)', p. 362; ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates in Ons Porseleinkas (3),' Het Zoeklicht 7:1 (January 1929), pp. 76, 78.

[52] Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates (3),' pp. 24-7.

and experience'.[53] For Hofmeyr's Socrates, 'the heart understands what is most important long before reason rationalises and formulates it ... First life, then doctrine; ... that is the royal road for us all'.[54] It is difficult to know whether this proto-existentialist Socrates always remains within the bounds of the Calvinism he professes, but there is no doubting the vigour with which this idea of personality is put forward.

Perhaps closer to the mainstream of Het Zoeklicht was an article by D.J. Malan, DRC minister at Darling and a regular contributor to the journal, on the question: 'Is Christendom Christian?' Malan's article is largely a discussion of missionary work, which argues that the Church itself is in need of conversion if it is to be 'truly Christian'. Intensity of experience rather than correctness of doctrine is the focus of his concern: 'When Paul was converted, he did not just come to change his opinion about Jesus, but his whole person and character changed ... What happened to Paul must still happen to the Church'.[55] There are sufficient echoes of Kierkegaard in the title, idiom and argument of the article for it to seem likely that the ideas of the Danish philosopher were making themselves felt in the liberal wing of the DRC - promising a new and larger framework for the idea of personality which was surfacing at that time.

Kierkegaard was already known, indirectly at least, as a major influence on the theology of Karl Barth. Barth had been introduced to theological circles in South Africa a few years before in articles by Keet and Moorrees.[56] Neither discusses the ideas of Kierkegaard, but Keet introduces the notion of dialectics, a conceptual tool that was to reshape conceptions of the relationship of faith and reason within the Stellenbosch tradition. Theology is called dialectical, in Keet's account of Barth, because of the limited and relative character of all knowledge, including theological knowledge. 'It is knowledge which consists of questions and answers, "so that the discussion is never broken off, so that the answer is always another question ... so that there is no last word which is free of this movement of question and answer" ... God alone is the truth; He alone speaks the undialectical word; he alone speaks the last word.'[57]

Although both this emphasis on individual experience and the idea of dialectics occur in Stellenbosch in this period, it was not until the late 1940s that they were to be brought into any clear relation to each other. Although the idea of individuality was given little philosophical edge in the 1930s, it was put forward with considerable vigour in the student politics of the time, in particular in the newspaper Pro Libertate, which was produced anonymously from 1932 to 1934. Its opening issue announced that 'in the awakening of the consciousness of individuality of every student at this university lies the best prospect for the future. Pro Libertate seeks to hasten that awakening with all the power at its disposal, and to protect it

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[53] Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates (3)', p. 22.

[54] Hofmeyr, ''n Hedendaagse Sokrates (2),' p. 362.

[55] D.J. Malan, 'Is Ons Christendom Christelik?,' Die Soeklig 11:5 (May 1933), p. 134; cf. J. du Plessis, 'Word ons Beskawing Heidens?,' Het Zoeklicht 10:8 (August 1932), pp. 225-8.

[56] B.B. Keet, 'Teologiese Herlewing in Duitsland,' Die Ou Paaie 3:4 (1928), pp. 260-72; F.D. Moorrees, 'Karl Barth,' Het Zoeklicht 7:3 (March 1929), pp. 80-3.

[57] Keet, 'Teologiese Herlewing in Duitsland,' p. 271.

where necessary'. The newspaper consistently attacked intolerance, uniformity, 'lack of individualism' and domination of the SRC by students of the Theological Seminary. For its pains, it was charged from the pulpit with 'practical atheism'. The official student newspaper found it necessary to confirm its support for the ideals of Pro Libertate, even while opposing it.[58]

The 1930s was a period of transition not only in Stellenbosch intellectual life, but in South African society more generally. South Africa was rapidly becoming an urban, industrial society, and intellectuals of all stamps were battling to come to terms with this reality, and express the visions of contending classes within it. As in any such period, many more new possibilities emerged than could be realised. Yet something of the general direction of change can be seen even from the titles of the M.A. and D.Phil. theses in philosophy completed at Stellenbosch in these years. Again and again, these titles reveal an emerging concern with the inner springs of individual experience, focussing on problems of conscience, the immortality of the soul, culture and tradition, evil, and an increasing range of moral issues.[59] In general, thesis topics show that students are willing to formulate contemporary problems for themselves, rather than returning to the stock topics which they would have known from their undergraduate courses.

Both the expansion of student numbers and the shifting focus of philosophical studies helped to prepare the ground for the developments of the 1940s. That reconstruction would be undertaken by the generation of the 1940s, who would not argue that rationality and toleration were preconditions for removing doubt from human life, but that doubt and uncertainty itself - on a scale never imagined in Stellenbosch's theological disputes - was an essential part of the human condition. The claims of reason could only be restored within the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition by locating reason within a different, much more self-conscious conception of the human person.

The ground was prepared in another sense, in that the successor to Brummer in the chair of philosophy at Stellenbosch, J.F. Kirsten, was himself the product of this period. Kirsten registered for an M.A. in 1929, with a thesis on the ethical implications of Bergson's philosophy. In 1932, he became Stellenbosch's first-ever doctoral student in philosophy. His thesis on Bergson's concept of purpose was completed in 1935, the year of du Plessis's death. In 1933, he graduated with distinction from the Theological Seminary, and after a period of study in Europe he was to serve in the DRC ministry until his appointment at Stellenbosch in

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[58] B.J. Marais, 'Pro Libertate,' Die Stellenbosse Student 33:3 (1932), p. 87; cf. Thom, Stellenbosch 1866-1966, p. 356. Beyers Naudé was active in producing Pro Libertate as a student; thirty years later, after he was expelled from the DRC for taking the post of director of the Christian Institute of South Africa, the Institute's publication was named Pro Veritate.

[59] On conscience, cf. W.C.O. du Toit, Die Gewete; C.C. Nepgen, Die Sosiale Gewete van die Afrikaanssprekende; on the immortality of the soul, B.J. Marais, Die Probleem van die Ontwikkeling van die Onsterflikheid in die Griekse Filosofie; D.J. Redelinghuis, Die Tyd van Beliggaming van die Onsterflike Siel van die Mens; on tradition and culture, D.J. Barnard, Religie en Kultuur; P.J.J. van Rensburg, Tradisie as Faktor in die Vorming van 'n Nasie met verwysing na Suid-Afrika; on evil, S.W. Burger, Die Probleem van die Kwaad, G.J. Retief, Die Probleem van die Sedelike Kwaad; on morality, W.L.D. Venter, Moraliteit van Wette; J.J. Jordaan, Die Sedelikheid van Sport, D.J. Barnard, Die Etiese Waarde van Individualiteit. The list could be expanded. Many - but not all - of these theses are in the library of the University of Stellenbosch.

1942. Kirsten's philosophical orientation - which was to play a crucial role in deciding the character of the Stellenbosch tradition for the next 30 years or more - was essentially a response to the stormy events of the 1930s.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW KIERKEGAARD CAME TO STELLENBOSCH

J.F. Kirsten: Epistemology of Flux; Anthropology of Stasis

J.F. Kirsten was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch in 1942. By the time of his appointment, the basic character of the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition had been given its form. Kirsten had himself been formed by its concern with overcoming the divisions of Afrikaner political and religious life, and his appointment to the chair was a sign that this concern was widely shared within the university.[1] He had been a student at Stellenbosch throughout the years of the du Plessis case, and was one of the first of a whole generation of theology students who turned to philosophy as orthodoxy imposed its restrictions on the study of theology. His initial philosophical work focused on the French philosopher Henri Bergson.

Du Plessis had referred approvingly to Bergson's idea of 'creative evolution', although he had never made any serious effort to get to grips with his thought.[2] Kirsten, in his turn, referred approvingly to du Plessis's treatment of faith and reason, although equally without much sustained attention.[3] The real continuity lies in the way in which the problem of evolution is conceived and located. For du Plessis had linked the question of evolution with the question of the appropriate uses of human reason, in the first place, and the extent to which reality conformed to the norms of reason, in the second. It was these questions which drew Kirsten to the study of Bergson, at a time when the theory of evolution had been declared erroneous by the 1928 Synod of the Cape DRC and, more roundly still, by the Synod of the Orange Free State in 1931.

The context of official condemnation by the DRC must surely explain the way in which Kirsten approaches his topic. From the earliest times, he argues, people have noticed the phenomenon of change, and Darwin's theory of evolution is simply the contemporary form in which this phenomenon is understood. He quotes Höffding to this effect: 'It is a sign of the times that nowadays every philosopher has to take up a position with respect to the concept of evolution ... A philosophy is essentially characterised by the position which it accords to this concept, and the way in which it is applied' (iv-v). Having accepted this premise, Kirsten then distinguishes between materialists who reject the teleological concept of development, and idealists who accept the idea that there is a purpose in the universe. A new tendency within idealism, however, gives greater emphasis to 'the personality and essential freedom of the human being'. According to this new tendency, 'we must take the volitional and emotional life of the human being as a point of departure for our enquiry, and explain the universe in

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[1] Kirsten's rival for the position was Nico Diederichs, who had been Professor of Philosophy since 1933, and was later Minister of Finance and then State President. Diederichs was far more closely linked to the neo-Calvinist wing of Afrikaner nationalism in the northern provinces.

[2] J. du Plessis, 'Besware teen Ewolusie,' Het Zoeklicht 8:8 (1930), pp. 258-61.

[3] J.F. Kirsten, Die Doelbegrip by Bergson: 'n Filosofies-kritiese Ondersoek (unpublished D.Phil thesis, Stellenbosch, 1935), p. 372. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

terms of it' (v-vi). As one of the leading exponents of this tendency, Bergson merits special attention.

This is a peculiarly ahistorical mode of introducing his protagonist to the reader. Kirsten does not explain when this requirement of locating all philosophy in its relation to the problem of evolution arose, nor whether it is appropriate, nor why his predecessors at Stellenbosch have not really met it. By introducing Bergson in this way, however, Kirsten defines very specifically the relationship of author (Kirsten) and protagonist (Bergson): it is made to seem that the time he is living in requires the author to pay attention to Bergson, whether he wants to or not; indeed, to defend the concept of design against materialism, in times such as these, requires that Bergson's idea of evolution be taken seriously. This relationship is presented, in other words, as if Kirsten is acting in defence of theological conservatism in adopting a secular set of premises. There can be little doubt that this is a distorted presentation of the matter, and the distortion has the effect of protecting the author from the controversy he hopes to address. It gives him a standpoint outside the controversy - the standpoint of the philosophical requirements of the present day - from which he can address that controversy without himself enduring its vehemence. To do this, it is necessary to accept those requirements as they are stated by the spokespersons of European academic philosophy (in this case, Höffding), rather than as they emerge from the live contestation of philosophical positions taking place then in South Africa - indeed, in Stellenbosch itself.

Insofar as the argument is addressed to the concrete situation in which it is made, Kirsten's misrepresention of the relationship of author and protagonist at the same time misrepresents the relationship of author and reader. Kirsten presents himself and his reader as in agreement on the need to keep up with the philosophical requirements of the modern day. This is made easier for the reader to accept by Kirsten's eventual demonstration that Bergson's idea of creative evolution cannot meet these requirements. The reader is essentially offered the reassurance of traditionalist conclusions, and in return can turn a blind eye to the modernist premise of the enquiry.

In the context of his doctoral thesis on Bergson, this has the curious effect of giving Kirsten's conception of philosophy a dual meaning: on the one hand, philosophy is conceived as an activity which is given its questions and available responses to them through impersonal historical processes, determined largely by books written in contemporary Europe; on the other, insofar as Bergson's premises are accepted, philosophy is an expression of the inner spiritual need of every individual. This dual effect is heightened by the quality of Kirsten's writing itself: he sets out his argument in a philosophical Afrikaans of great clarity and concreteness, showing a real flair for translation of difficult concepts; and yet the long quotations from Bergson on which the entire argument depends are given only in the original French, which very few people in Stellenbosch would have understood. (English translations of Bergson's major writings were available at the time, and Kirsten never suggests that any dimension of Bergson's meaning would be lost in a language other than French.) Again, one is left with the impression that this is essentially a mode of shielding himself from the controversy which he is, unavoidably, addressing.

These strains and tensions provide the background to an achievement - a sustained and systematic philosophical confrontation with a major body of thought - which probably had only one precedent within the Stellenbosch tradition: Tobie Muller's thesis on pragmatism, written in the Netherlands in 1910-12. And in a crucial respect Kirsten's work surpasses that of Muller: where Muller had given a sympathetic account of some of the ideas of pragmatism, and then indicated his disagreement with others (especially its idea of religion), Kirsten is able

to give a sympathetic account of the ideas of Bergson which he is about to criticise, in a way which shows the essential unity of his thought. Kirsten consistently begins such an immanent critique, and then introduces criteria of his own by which to measure Bergson's work. But these criteria are philosophical rather than theological, and this enables Kirsten to defend certain parts of Bergson's work while rejecting others, and yet - unlike Muller's treatment of pragmatism - recognise the integrity of the body of work as a whole.

Above all, it is Bergson's insistence on the essential freedom of the human spirit that Kirsten values. He holds that Bergson's philosophy is 'a healthy cure for all exaggerated forms of rationalism' (348), an effective rebuttal of 'one-sided intellectualism' which fails to see that 'the deed exceeds the word and life exceeds all argumentation about it' (359), and an adequate demonstration that 'if the mechanical interpretation of the process of evolution is correct, then the world is nothing else but a madhouse' (396). But Kirsten argues that Bergson's very indeterminism eventually leads him to the mechanical conception of the human spirit which betrays his own conception of freedom (381-5).

Kirsten never considers the possibility that this idealist conception of freedom might be at fault, but seeks instead to reconstruct it on what he sees as firmer ground. 'Whether this self-controlled process [of affirming human purposes in freedom] can be equated with development, depends on whether the emerging plan which gives it direction accords with the law of the universe or not. There are only two alternatives, and it is this which makes life so particularly serious: either the process of change tends in the direction of the immutable character of the Absolute Order, which is the same as development and self-preservation, or it moves in the opposite direction, which is identical with degeneration and eventual defeat. No permanent resistance to the inexorable demands of the universe can ever be possible. Only he who is willing to lose himself by subjecting himself to those demands will find himself' (457).

Although Kirsten has previously argued for the necessity of such an Absolute Order or God in our conception of reality (320-326), his concluding argument is essentially anthropological: 'The philosophy of creative man in the emerging universe,' he holds, 'must eventually lead to pessimism' (459). It creates a universe in which 'man cannot possibly be at home, as it imposes burdens too heavy for him to bear', and leaves him with a 'limited, imperfect God, who can give no guarantee of success'. For only in belief in a God who 'executes his plan with infallible certainty', can humankind find peace and happiness (460). It is this anthropology which holds Kirsten's argument together, and it was through this resort to anthropology that philosophy was justified.

One basic argument of Kirsten's thesis takes on increasingly concrete form in his subsequent writings. This argument is that because humankind is faced with such a multiplicity of ways in which to understand the world and act in it, it is all the more necessary for it to find a firm anchor in religious belief in order to satisfy its need for stability. The epistemological flux in which we find ourselves is brought to rest in anthropological stasis. Whatever changes take place in Kirsten's subsequent philosophical outlook, this basic figure of thought endures. And in it, Kirsten presents a philosophical synthesis of the forward-looking impulse represented by du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht, on the one hand, and the traditionalism which resisted it, on the other.

The character and outcome of this synthesis is well-illustrated in Kirsten's later work. In 1943, soon after his return to Stellenbosch, Kirsten gave a talk to a teachers' organisation on 'the foundations of Christian and national education'. His starting-point was that we are living

in the midst of a 'revolution of thought'.[4] Where previously there had been certainty in our conception of the world, modern science - in the persons of Einstein and Heisenberg, rather than Darwin - had shown this to be untenable. Modern thought is characterised by an uncontrolled proliferation of vantage-points, creating ever more confusion until life becomes no more than a 'sickness unto death'. For this, 'a cure must be found ... If no agreement is reached on the aims of all education, the consequences can only be fatal'. But the nature of this revolution is such that agreement can no longer be established by philosophical argument alone, or 'the rigoristic method of demonstration', as 'man is not simply intellect ... but also emotion, conscience, will and aspiration'.[5]

As in his thesis on Bergson, this admission misrepresents the relationship of author and subject-matter, and consequently of author and reader. Neither Kirsten nor the Afrikaner schoolteachers to whom the text is addressed had pinned their hopes on philosophical argument alone, in the manner of Descartes, to establish their conception of the world. But by explaining that these hopes are not realisable in any case, it is made easier to give the impression that they are common cause. What is achieved, once more, is effectively to establish the need in principle for a rational conception of the world, subject to philosophical scrutiny and correction, by insisting that no such conception is sustainable in practice, except in a special sense which leaves all traditions and preconceptions intact.

How is this conception of the world to be established? 'Not logical argumentation, but the personality of the human being, is decisive here. It is impossible to separate the intellect from the organic unity of which it is an aspect ... We can never hope for general agreement. All we can do is to make our convictions known and give the reasons why we hold them.' The human personality can develop truly, however, only within its 'national group', and we are told that 'all scientists of repute' are in agreement on this. The 'rational implication' is that 'for a true Afrikaner, there can be no other ideal for the Afrikaner child than an education which is both Christian and national'. The meaning of 'Christian' in this context, Kirsten adds, is 'the Christian world and life-view of the Afrikaner, as set down in the Confessions of all three Afrikaner churches and accepted by almost the whole of Afrikanerdom' (60-61).

Kirsten reminds the reader that there is no way of demonstrating that this is true. Yet he does feel called upon to give three reasons why Afrikaners regard Christianity (in this specially-defined sense) as true: it is the most comprehensive view of human life; it takes account of experience; and it satisfies the deepest human needs. Only a glance at the argument is necessary in order to see that these reasons stand or fall together, if indeed they are not simply three formulations of the same point. All of them stand or fall on the basis of Kirsten's anthropology, already evident in the Bergson thesis and now restated: 'Man has just been created in such a way, and experience confirms it, that he can find no lasting peace in that which is changing and transitory. His deepest need can only be satisfied by those values which are not subject to the fluctuations of the stock exchange of life. He can find peace only in values which are eternal, and which serve as an anchor for his lifeboat as it is shaken by the waves of uncertainty and change' (61). To find such peace, belief in God is needed, and maintenance of God-given national identity, and, as Kirsten concludes somewhat weakly,

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[4] J.F. Kirsten, 'Die Grondslae van Christelike en Nasionale Onderwys,' Die Unie, 1 September 1943, p. 59; cf. Kirsten, 'Bestaansdenke,' Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Kuns 13:2 (1953), p. 96.

[5] Kirsten, 'Grondslae van Christelike en Nasionale Onderwys,' pp. 59-60. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

dual-medium schools must be vigorously opposed. In more dramatic form than before, we are presented here with the same synthesis: a world in which nothing can be known for certain and in which knowledge is constantly changing and unstable; and psychological need to find the certainty which the world cannot provide.

It is an inherently unstable synthesis, which could only have been born out of a crisis as deep as that precipitated by the du Plessis case. It is an attempt to reconcile in the sphere of philosophy what has been torn asunder in the struggles of church and society. To the extent that such a philosophical reconciliation succeeds, it removes philosophy from any real contact with the conflicts of the time. And from this contradictory situation, new contradictions are born. Thus, Kirsten upholds the philosophical optimism which was at the core of the thought of du Plessis and Het Zoeklicht, but finds no rational basis for it, and reduces it to an anthropological necessity, without which human existence would become too grim. He secures the principle of open-minded philosophical enquiry, but does so on terms that ensure that such enquiry will always endorse the dominant ideas. For he never sought to provide a basis for challenging these ideas, and the conflicts of reality could only be reconciled philosophically by accepting them.

Kirsten's synthesis can only really be conceived of as a holding action: it establishes the principle of philosophical enquiry in a world in which dogmatic certainty cannot be found; but does so by exempting the most contested and ideologically-entrenched concepts of the day from the flux of our knowledge, and making them into anthropological necessities. Such a strategy only makes sense if it is undertaken with the idea that these concepts will become less contested at some time in the future, and available for philosophical scrutiny once more. And yet these concepts - the Afrikaner nation, Christianity 'as accepted by almost the whole of Afrikanerdom' and the like - were being made to bear a greater ideological load as the years went by. The day of philosophical criticism never came for Kirsten, and a decade later he was repeating basically the same argument in somewhat different trappings.[6]

It was by no means inevitable that the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition would survive, and even flourish, in the changed conditions brought about by the rise and consolidation of Afrikaner power in the 1940s and 50s. The evidence of the 1920s shows us that this tradition could as easily have declined and collapsed, reducing philosophy to little more than an academic curiosity with no real weight within Stellenbosch intellectual life. Kirsten's synthesis played a crucial, though paradoxical, part in ensuring its survival. Yet in spite of Kirsten's extremely influential presence in Stellenbosch philosophy until his retirement in 1973, he was to remain essentially alone in upholding this synthesis.[7]

So unstable a synthesis provided a way forward for the Stellenbosch tradition only insofar as its instability could be redressed. Kirsten combined an epistemology of flux with an anthropology of stasis; either his epistemology or his anthropology could be retained, but not both. This was the dilemma which confronted the first generation of Kirsten's students, after his appointment in 1942.

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[6] Cf. Kirsten, 'Bestaansdenke'.

[7] There is perhaps a sequel to Kirsten's work within the Stellenbosch context: the work of his student, H.W. Rossouw, Die Sin van die Lewe (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1981). Rossouw's work is not a conscious continuation of Kirsten's, but reproduces many of the same conceptual strategies, in an updated idiom.

The Philosophical Horizons of the mid-1940s

By 1942, when Kirsten was appointed, the Department of Philosophy had a decade of continuous expansion behind it. In that decade, the focus of Stellenbosch philosophy had shifted from a relatively academic concern with philosophical systems towards increasingly personal involvement with questions of the integrity of individual experience. Kirsten himself, as a postgraduate student, had helped to initiate this shift, and his appointment as professor reinforced it. The university calendar for 1943 indicated a number of changes to the formal syllabus for philosophy, including a significant addition to the fourth-year course: its first section was entitled 'constructive philosophy: building up an own life and world-view'.[8] A minor change in itself, it indicates a new centre of gravity for academic philosophy at Stellenbosch, giving the individual student responsibility for 'an own life and world-view' and making this the culmination of philosophical study.

It is easy to imagine how the expansion of the philosophy department over the previous decade could have created a new confidence among students of philosophy at Stellenbosch in the 1940s. A solid basis of postgraduate research had been established, a definite focus given to the syllabus, many leading figures from the student body had been part of this effort and one of their number was now the professor; there was no apparent reason to doubt that this pattern would continue indefinitely. Philosophy was opening dramatic new horizons for students arriving at Stellenbosch. Yet even as these horizons were opening up, events were making them increasingly unattainable.

This was most visible at an ideological level. The intellectual ferment of the 1930s was making way for the ideological consolidation of Afrikanerdom. The re-enactment of the Great Trek in 1938 signalled an upsurge in nationalist sentiment, and the outbreak of world war in 1939 provided the occasion for re-unification of the National Party. The resulting transformation of Afrikaner political life could not leave Stellenbosch untouched.

This transformation soon made itself felt in Stellenbosch student politics. In 1930, when elections were held for the student parliament set up by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), Stellenbosch students elected five supporters of the NP, one of Smuts' SAP, one socialist and two Progressives. In 1933 the northern Afrikaans universities (Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Bloemfontein) left NUSAS, and in 1936 Stellenbosch followed them, after the NUSAS Council refused to accede to its demands that 'no Coloureds, Natives or Asians be allowed in NUSAS'.[9] By 1940, the whole of the local Afrikaner Nasionale Studentebond (ANS) executive was elected to the Stellenbosch SRC. Racial and anti-war sentiments fused in the 'Battle of Andringa Street', when Stellenbosch students attacked coloured supporters of South African involvement in World War II in 1940. In 1941, when the ANS launched its own newspaper at Stellenbosch, Die Matie, it came out in support of the

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[8] The term 'constructive philosophy' was probably taken from J.A. Leighton, The Field of Philosophy (New York, Appleton-Century, 1923). This section of the course was re-titled 'systematic philosophy' in 1945. The calendar for that year indicated that three hours of teaching were to be devoted to it for every week of the year - far more than for any other section of the course. In 1949 there was a major revision of the syllabus, and the section which effectively replaced 'constructive' or 'systematic' philosophy was entitled 'Christian anthropology', and dealt with the work of A.E. Loen. Loen's writings came to dominate graduate teaching in the department in the 1950s and 60s.

[9] Thom et al, Stellenbosch 1866-1966, p. 357.

Ossewa Brandwag (OB), which was openly hostile to all forms of parliamentary democracy. The ANS and the OB declined along with the hopes of a German war victory, but Stellenbosch student politics remained effectively within the confines of Afrikaner nationalism.

At an institutional level, the horizons of Stellenbosch philosophy were to be transformed by the expansion of the university itself. New academic disciplines - commerce in 1925, engineering in 1941, medicine in 1956, after a long campaign - orientated the university towards the newer professions, altering the terrain on which the role of philosophy had to be defined.[10] Expansion of the Afrikaans universities in the north, particularly after 1948, reinforced this pattern.

This ideological and institutional transformation was given its specific meaning for Stellenbosch by the changing position of Cape Afrikaners within the broader political economy. Rapid industrialisation during the war years had weakened agricultural capital as a political force in South Africa, forcing Afrikaner farmers to rely on their alliance with urbanised workers and the petty bourgeoisie. It was an alliance held together by the construction of a supposedly eternal and unchanging Afrikaner nationalist tradition. At the same time, it had to orientate itself increasingly to the rapidly changing demands of an industrial economy.[11] The Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie in the Cape, which had developed in a symbiotic relationship with agricultural capital, had to balance itself between these contradictory demands. The changing political climate of Afrikaner nationalism gave impetus to the increasingly dogmatic assertion of traditional values, while industrial growth also made room for the acceptance of modernity.

In a certain sense, the conflict within Kirsten's philosophy - between his anthropology and his epistemology - mirrored the conflict taking place within the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie in this period. However much the conflict was addressed philosophically, reality would keep on renewing it. The new horizons opened up to students of these years were always being threatened at the same time. Kirsten's philosophy emphasised the dilemma facing Stellenbosch students and cast it in philosophical terms; but it did not resolve it.

Nor was there an easy way out of this dilemma within the field of philosophy. To retain Kirsten's anthropology, it would have been necessary to find epistemological foundations for it by providing an account of how certain knowledge of eternal truth could be gained. This would have denied the flux which Kirsten's epistemology acknowledged, but it would also effectively have denied the need for philosophy, except as a dogma isolated from the activities of modern science. The other option was to retain his epistemology of flux and develop an anthropology which conceived of humankind as able to accept - even welcome - the uncertainty of our knowledge and its capacity for change and diversity. While this would have restored the role of philosophy, it was likely to have the consequence of weakening its links to theological orthodoxy, at a time when that orthodoxy was resurgent at Stellenbosch. The need for philosophy would have been preserved at a cost of severing the discipline from the mainstream of Stellenbosch intellectual life.

In such a context, the philosophical construction of 'an own life and world-view' was necessarily an ambiguous enterprise: it emphasised the idea of individual choice as it became increasingly difficult for Afrikaner students to exercise that choice at all meaningfully. But in the years before the limits of that enterprise became apparent, its promise was to attract a

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[10] Thom et al, Stellenbosch 1866-1966, pp. 132-50.

[11] O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp. 134-48.

remarkable generation of philosophy students. The fate of the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition for decades to come was decided by their choosing to accept Kirsten's epistemology of flux, rather than his anthropology of stasis. They were able to do this because at the very moment of that dilemma, the work of Soren Kierkegaard - with its uncompromising account of a human existence in which the peace of Kirsten's anthropology could never be found - became available to them.

The boldest and most innovative of this generation were James Oglethorpe, Daantjie Oosthuizen and Johan Degenaar. Oglethorpe began his studies at Stellenbosch in 1942, Oosthuizen in 1943, and Degenaar in 1944. Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen completed their degrees in theology, while Degenaar was to abandon his theological studies. All three were to complete M.A. theses in philosophy.[12] In 1946 Oosthuizen had completed his M.A. examinations with a mark of 90%, and Degenaar had gained his B.A. with distinction. Oglethorpe, a year older than Oosthuizen and two ahead of Degenaar, was making his first interventions in student journalism. Degenaar was far less prominent in student life than Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen, and indeed than other philosophy students who shared in some part of their project at least.[13] By about 1947 this generation was no longer primarily assimilating what Kirsten had to teach them, but was finding a voice of its own. In the following few years, they were to transform the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition.

Kierkegaard Comes to Stellenbosch

Against this background, it should not be difficult to see the attraction that Kierkegaard held for Stellenbosch philosophy students of the time, concerned as they were with establishing the grounds for religious faith, close enough to a modernising economy not to be attracted to neo-Calvinist orthodoxy, and prevented by the legacy of the du Plessis case from seeking to assimilate religion directly into the modern world-view. Where Kirsten had asserted the need for eternal values, Kierkegaard showed how authentic maintenance of any values required immersion into the flux of modern life, in which individual commitment had always to be actively renewed.

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[12] Oglethorpe later became a DRC missionary, and worked for many years in Zambia. Degenaar was appointed as a lecturer in philosophy at Stellenbosch in 1948. (The post was created in 1945, and filled for a few years by G.S.J. Möller.) Oosthuizen replaced Degenaar temporarily in the Philosophy Department in 1949-50, while Degenaar was studying in Groningen in the Netherlands. Oosthuizen then continued his studies in Amsterdam, and was appointed a lecturer in philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State in 1955. From 1958 until his death in 1969, he was Professor of Philosophy at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

[13] D.J. Kriel put forward views very close to those of Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen in student publications ('Oor Engheid en Breedheid,' Die Stellenboschse Student, October 1946, pp. 24-6; 'Die Tragiek van Ons Eensydigheid,' Die Stellenboschse Student, April 1948, pp. 36-9). Apart from the M.A. theses of Oglethorpe, Oosthuizen and Degenaar, a considerable number dealt with existentialist themes, with H.F. Conradie, Eksistensie en Selftranskendesie (1950) and D.J. Hattingh, Keuse as Waagstuk (1950) drawing extensively on Kierkegaard. A number of prominent student leaders - including G.S.J. Moller and Tobie de Clerq, both theology students who were SRC presidents for several terms - were caught up in the philosophical atmosphere of the time, but apparently without having anything serious to contribute to it (cf. de Clerq, 'Kierkegaard - en 'n Uiteensetting van sy Dialektiek op Skrifkritiek', Polumnia 6 [1949], pp. 13-6).

Other philosophers - from T.H. Green during Brümmer's early years to Karl Heim during Kirsten's - had occupied a more prominent place within the Stellenbosch tradition than did Kierkegaard in the late 1940s. Far more than any other figure, however, Kierkegaard could not simply be incorporated into an existing tradition; the assimilation of his ideas and arguments required a transformation of that tradition itself. This can be explained in part by his assimilation being initiated 'from below'. But it is also the product of the character of Kierkegaard's philosophy itself. 'Even thinking of Kierkegaard as a philosopher,' writes Richard Bernstein, 'or as expressing a philosophic outlook can mislead us, although Kierkegaard certainly uses philosophy and dialectical argument. If we think of philosophy as a discipline that is committed to articulating an objective truth - no matter how remote this may be from common sense or ordinary beliefs - and that the primary function of philosophy is to explicate and defend this objective truth, then Kierkegaard's main preoccupation was not philosophical ... Kierkegaard uses philosophical devices along with a variety of poetic devices ... to force us - his individual readers - and to force himself to face up to the painful existential dilemmas that confront every one of us as unique individuals.'[14]

German translations of Kierkegaard's major works were undertaken in the first decades of the 20th century, and began to attract attention in the 1920s. It was only after 1935 that translation of Kierkegaard's works into English began in earnest. By 1943, no fewer than 30 of his books had appeared, 'at a rate,' as one of the translators commented, 'which exceeds the capacity of the public to assimilate them'.[15] The circumstantial evidence suggests that Oosthuizen was the first person at Stellenbosch to start reading Kierkegaard seriously - probably in 1947.[16] In 1949 Kierkegaard was included in the formal syllabus for the first time, as part of a fourth-year course offered by Kirsten on the philosophical presuppositions of various theological systems. By then, a growing number of M.A. theses were being written either on Kierkegaard or on topics inspired by his work, articles about him were being

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[14] Richard Bernstein, Praxis and Action (London, Duckworth, 1972), p. 97; cf. S. Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 71-2.

[15] W. Lowrie, 'Translator's Preface,' in S. Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1944).

[16] In 1943, Kirsten quoted a 'German thinker' as having described the spiritual condition of the time as one of 'sickness unto death' ('Die Grondslae van Christelike en Nasionale Onderwys,' p. 59). As Kierkegaard was Danish, and had used the phrase to describe the situation of almost a century before, it is fair to assume that Kirsten had by then no real knowledge of his work. In 1947, Oosthuizen published an article on mysticism in the student journal Polumnia, which made no reference to Kierkegaard in spite of dealing with themes close to his work. At that stage Oosthuizen's projected M.A. thesis was entitled Die Kontemporêre Mistisisme. The following year it was retitled Die Verklaringsdrang, suggesting that its topic must have been revised in late 1947. That year saw the completion of Degenaar's M.A. thesis, with its lyrical account of Kierkegaard as the 'jewel' of philosophy (Kennis as Lewe [unpublished M.A. thesis, Stellenbosch, 1948], p. 87). The earliest text to show Kierkegaard's influence was Oglethorpe's critique of church segregation, published in November 1947. But the intensity of Oosthuizen's involvement with his thought makes it overwhelmingly probable that he took the lead in the reception of Kierkegaard.

published in student journals, and he was being quoted in the editorial columns of the student newspaper.[17]

How, then, did Kierkegaard come to Stellenbosch, if he could not arrive under professorial auspices, armed with a philosophical doctrine which could be taught to students? At no stage was there a conscious strategy for the assimilation of Kierkegaard into the Stellenbosch tradition. Instead, Oosthuizen and others responded intuitively to his appeal, sensing that it addressed their situation and conveying that sense to others, without grasping that situation itself as a specific moment in the Stellenbosch tradition with its themes and contexts. But it is possible for us, nonetheless, to set out the seven basic features of this assimilation, which defined the character of the most innovative philosophical activity at Stellenbosch in the years from about 1947 to 1950.

Seven Philosophical Premises of the New Generation

(i) The rejection of objective knowledge

What bound this generation of philosophy students together most closely was a belief that philosophy had discredited itself through most of its history by its aspiration to objective knowledge. This aspiration was based, in their view, on a distinction of the subject and object of knowledge, which presented human beings as mere spectators of their own existence.

Following the lead provided by Kirsten,[18] Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen began by arguing that the findings of modern science had discredited the idea of objectivity: 'The main result of the revolution in science is the definite rejection by science itself of its claim to pure objectivity. Einstein has demonstrated irrefutably that, in the observation of the physical world, the subject must be recognised as the most important factor.'[19] But this argument soon made way for a more robust denunciation of the idea of objectivity itself. Thus Degenaar affirms Berdyaev's judgement: 'Philosophers have too often tended to overlook the fact of their own existence as distinct from their power of intellection, and the fact that their philosophy is little more than a translation of their existence.' He recalls Kierkegaard's image of the philosopher building a palace for thought, and then choosing to live in the hut alongside it. 'Our problem,' according to Degenaar, 'is to consider ... which philosophers busied themselves only with the objective, and which threw themselves into life itself, in order to grasp the meaning of life itself. The latter are the true philosophers'.[20]

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[17] Oosthuizen was editor of Die Stellenboschse Student (sic) in 1949-50. He was Oglethorpe's successor in this post. During his term as editor almost every editorial began with an epigraph from Kierkegaard (later abbreviated to S.K).

[18] Kirsten, 'Grondslae van Christelike en Nasionale Onderwys,' p. 59; 'Bestaansdenke,' pp. 96-7.

[19] James Oglethorpe, 'Aantekeninge na aanleiding van die Tydsbegrip in die Kontemporêre Wetenskap,' Die Stellenboschse Student, July 1947, pp. 21-5; cf. D.C.S. Oosthuizen, 'Die Mistisisme in die lig van Moderne Beskouings oor die Tyd,' Polumnia 4 (1947), pp. 15-20.

[20] Degenaar, Kennis as Lewe, pp. 2, 46, 9; cf. Degenaar, Die Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Stellenbosch, 1951), p. 182.

(ii) Christianity without certainty

What the 'true philosophers' of Stellenbosch found, once they had asserted the need for philosophy to forgo objectivity and throw itself 'into life itself', was their need for Jesus. The philosophical premises of this need were altogether at variance with those which had previously been advanced at Stellenbosch, and their assertion of it was altogether more personal in tone. Most of the basic themes which were to animate this assertion were drawn together in Oglethorpe's argument: 'Man[21] is caught up, by the nature of his existence, in two basic relationships. This is the product of the fact that man cannot remove himself from the stream of time.' The first relationship, with the past, is objective, knowable and without mystery. But 'there is a being towards whom man must adopt a completely new attitude. This being is also a centre of perspectives, and on those grounds he cannot be fitted into the reference scheme of another centre of perspectives'. The link between individuals 'does not come into being through the choice of either of us. It is given to us, as an act of grace'. Without this, each of them stands alone, and 'cannot bear the responsibility for the past'. They can do this only if there is 'an existence, different from my existence in the stream of time, to which I can refer my decision - an existence in which the transition from the present to the past is captured in one conspectus'. In the moment of decision, it is God's existence which 'makes it possible for me to choose in full freedom and independence, because He has commanded me to do so ... When I decide responsibly in answer to His call, I realise the inexplicable paradox of my existence.'[22]

This argument was to be elaborated in various ways over the next few years, and its tone increasingly personalised, but without changing its essential thrust. In particular, Kierkegaard's ideas made possible an increasing emphasis on 'the tremendous risk of objective insecurity' facing each individual.[23] Kirsten had argued that the Christian had in his belief an 'anchor for his boat of life, as it is shaken by the waves of uncertainty and change'.[24] But his students denied that there was any such anchorage. Instead, they stressed the necessity for the Christian to forsake all such assurances and accept that 'he constantly lies over a depth of seventy thousand fathoms'.[25] They argued that God confronted each individual with a choice, which could never be finally made, for 'the word of God creates each moment as a new moment of decision'.[26] Every moment of life was thus a moment of crisis. And as the argument was taken to its conclusion, so the choice faced by each individual became

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[21] In describing this episode, or in translating its writings, it is sometimes impossible to avoid the use of male generic pronouns. Plural pronouns would obscure its intense focus on the individual, while alternating between male and female pronouns would make already complex sentences almost impossible to understand.

[22] Oglethorpe, 'Aantekeninge n.a.v die Tydsbegrip,' pp. 23-4.

[23] Oglethorpe, 'God, die Onbekende,' Polumnia 6 (1949), p. 37.

[24] Kirsten, 'Grondslae van Christelike en Nasionale Onderwys,' p. 61.

[25] De Clerq, 'Kierkegaard - en 'n Uiteensetting van sy Dialektiek,' p. 16.

[26] Hattingh, Keuse as Waagstuk, p. 87.

increasingly stark and fundamental. Individuals who are only able to choose because of God, are paradoxically in the end able to choose only the form of their relationship to God. 'The task of the subject ... is to will, in all responsibility, to be itself before God ... The self is only a self before God'.[27] The ever-increasing emphasis on the discontinuity of human life led to a new kind of continuity. Discontinuity so endemic that no merely human activity could withstand it became, with the disintegration of futile human goals and achievements, an absolute continuity of being before God.

(iii) Discontinuity and dialectic

The crucial concept, taken from Kierkegaard, for articulating discontinuity, and at the same time conveying that it was not merely random, was that of dialectic. In this vein, Kierkegaard spoke of 'the omnipresence of the dialectical' in reflective thought: 'Let it be a word, a proposition, a book, a man, a fellowship, or whatever you please: as soon as it is proposed to make it serve as limit, in such a way that the limit is not itself dialectical, we have superstition and narrowness of spirit ... As soon as I take the dialectical away, I become superstitious, and attempt to cheat God of each moment's strenuous reacquisition of that which has once been acquired.'[28]

For this generation, there was perhaps no philosophical concept as daunting as that of dialectic.[29] They approved of the dialectical, but shrank away from giving it any real meaning. Tobie de Clerq, noted more for his eminence in student politics than for his philosophical acumen, devoted an article in Polumnia to 'Kierkegaard's dialectic on Biblical criticism', but appeared to mean by 'dialectic' little more than 'opinion'. Degenaar and Hattingh use the term with a similar approving vagueness.[30] Perhaps the meaning which that generation felt confident in attributing to the term is made clear by Conradie: 'Philosophy ... is thought at the brink of the abyss ... This risk may never be forfeited, and therefore this thought must express itself by means of a certain dialectic, in which oppositions are not bridged and dangerous tensions not reconciled, but left to be what they are.'[31]

This concept of dialectic as resistance to artificial reconciliation or closure is lacking in content, insofar as it provides no account of how tensions and oppositions might still be

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[27] D.C.S. Oosthuizen, Die Verklaringsdrang, p. 104.

[28] Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 35.

[29] The idea of dialectic had been introduced to Stellenbosch intellectual life by way of the theology of Karl Barth. A major attack on Barthian dialectic - conflating it at various points with that of Socrates and Kierkegaard - was subsequently made on behalf of Calvinist orthodoxy by P.G.W. Snyman , who describes it at various points as Deism, religious nihilism, and agnosticism ('Die Barthiaanse Teologie (Dialektiese Teologie),' in Federasie van Calvinistiese Studenteverenigings in Suid-Afrika (ed.), Koers in die Krisis (Stellenbosch, Pro Ecclesia, 1940), vol. 2, pp. 110, 113, 114).

[30] Degenaar, Kennis as Lewe, p. 91; Hattingh, Keuse as Waagstuk, p. 4.

[31] Conradie, Eksistensie en Selftrankendensie, p. 14.

transformed without doing so artificially.[32] Or if this concept of dialectic had a content, it was limited to the activity of philosophers, who could keep their own arguments dialectically open-ended, but could never identify any dialectical movement in the objects of their thought.

Among the writings of these years, however, there is one text which tries to grasp this nettle; the text which stands out as both the most complete expression of this Kierkegaardian philosophy and the most considerable attempt to halt its slide towards a formless discontinuity. This is Oosthuizen's M.A. thesis, Die Verklaringsdrang,[33] subtitled 'Aesthetic-comical and fragmentary considerations concerning the philosophy of explanation in the direction of an existential dialectic'. It is a text which requires special attention in this context, both for its centrality to the philosophical project of the time and for its dazzling virtuosity.

(iv) Dialectical movement from concrete to abstract

At first, Oosthuizen appears to hold the same somewhat vacuous concept of dialectic as resistance to artificial reconciliation or closure which has been described above. Because human life continues, and because the urge to explain is part of human life, his study cannot reach a conclusion but 'can, at most, move in the direction of an existential dialectic'.[34] But the problem which Oosthuizen formulates forces him onto different ground. For his thesis deals with 'the final problem of philosophy', namely 'the search for an explanation for the universe' which 'will banish completely the mystery in which existence is shrouded, and at the same time also explain itself, i.e. which is universal and necessary' (6-7). Having posed this problem, Oosthuizen rejects the solution to it offered by Kantian dualism. 'Because the phenomenal world is the real world,' he argues, 'reason is capable of knowing itself intuitively'(13). A complex and original critique of Kant is developed, which leads to the conclusion that reason 'operates dialectically, i.e. through contradiction. Contradiction, contrary to the conception of the Understanding, does not mean the complete exclusion of the other, but rather the meaningful limitation of the other' (17). The originality of this critique lies in its use of Kierkegaardian ideas concerning the necessity of ignorance as a presupposition of knowledge; but the conclusion of the critique is, at this stage, Hegelian.[35]

At this stage, however, Oosthuizen's argument moves off in an entirely different direction. Instead of describing how dialectical reason provides the universal and necessary explanation of reality of which he claims it is capable, he argues instead that all explanations of reality

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[32] Cf. James Oglethorpe, Die A Priorisme van Karl Heim (unpublished M.A. thesis, Stellenbosch, 1949), p. 2.

[33] The Urge to Explain is a loose translation, as the term verklaring is made to suggest explanation in a more comprehensive sense than usual.

[34] Oosthuizen, Die Verklaringsdrang, p. 4. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

[35] I leave aside here the possibility that the conclusion of Oosthuizen's first chapter might be ironical, in part at least. This possibility must certainly be taken seriously whenever a follower of Kierkegaard writes of Hegel. But if irony is intended here, it is not clear what its effect should be. The later argument does not undermine Oosthuizen's claim that 'Hegelianism is a logic of philosophy' (Verklaringsdrang, p. 39), although it would question Hegel's claims for the scope of philosophy.

require a certain attitude, and that the sources of this attitude - the subjective foundations of the urge to explain - must now be investigated. This attitude underlying the urge to explain is described as 'the will to freedom' and it is to this phenomenon that Oosthuizen now turns.

The will to freedom is described as the 'determination to withdraw from the immediate relations in which man finds himself, and then to ground those relations anew through his own power and insight'; it makes use of doubt to 'free man from his ties to God, man and world' (42). In this sense, Oosthuizen holds, 'the will to freedom is dialectical, it seeks through negation to establish an unconditional beginning which can serve as foundation for the grounding of the cosmos' (43). But it turns out that the dialectical character of the will to freedom is such as to recognise dialectical movement only once: when negation of existing ties leads the subject back to the 'I', in which the cosmos is to be grounded. No explanation is given of why this should be the only movement of which this dialectic is capable; but its result is that it cannot provide the foundation for the cosmos which it seeks. The rest of the thesis shows how, without this foundation, doubt leads on to despair, the will to freedom becomes no more than a disguise for the real lack of freedom of the subject, and man is left with no choice but to cast himself in despair before God, where his true self is uniquely realised (51, 98, 105).

Even so brief an exposition should be sufficient to show that Oosthuizen's argument is, in large measure, the victim of its own abstraction.[36] His dialectic of the will to freedom leads to an ego which is deprived of all concrete determinations. His argument is precisely that, in willing freedom, man wills his own removal from all existing ties (with God, man and world). Oosthuizen does not ask how this might create a new concrete situation, and new ties, for this ego; for even this abstract ego is not abstract enough to provide the unconditional beginning which he seeks: 'A process of abstraction from that which exists cannot establish the immediate Beginning of the system, as every principle of explanation established by abstraction from the existing is itself not outside the dialectic of existence' (45).

Oosthuizen attempts, then, to express the sense of life's discontinuity, which characterised this generation, with the concept of dialectic from which the rest of his generation shied away. But his attempt was never more than partial. He displayed considerable skill in dialectical analysis, but his dialectic moved always in the same direction: towards ever greater abstraction. It showed the will to freedom depriving the individual of existing ties, in Oosthuizen's terminology, to 'God, man and world'; and then showed this development re-creating new and unforeseen ties to God, while never again finding any ties to 'man' and 'world'. There is an entirely different sense in which one's ties to God can be severed, from that in which one's ties to human society or material reality can be, and Oosthuizen consistently overlooks this difference. In the somewhat unreal atmosphere of Stellenbosch in the 1940s, it might have seemed that all of these ties were equally concrete. But once this

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[36] The format of Oosthuizen's thesis was highly unusual, and allowed for an unusual degree of abstraction. The text of the thesis was no more than 39 pages, containing no reference to any philosopher, apart from a brief discussion of Kant. The text was accompanied by 82 pages of endnotes, providing a stream of references to Kierkegaard, above all, and to Kant, Hegel and various commentators (especially Stace and Mure on Hegel). But the relationship of the notes to the text is often puzzling: passages quoted or cited in the notes provide parallels to Oosthuizen's argument, or stand in contrast to them; but readers are left to work this out for themselves. The compelling quality of the thesis is in part the result of its intense but highly unstable relationship to the concrete history of philosophical ideas.

assumption is made, it need come as no surprise to find the will to freedom leaving the individual increasingly alone and powerless before God.

(v) Philosophical pessimism

The conclusions of Oosthuizen's Verklaringsdrang are accordingly pessimistic. Human freedom is presented as a chimera; despairing submission to God as the only authentic mode of human existence (98, 106). Indeed, Oosthuizen regards his own philosophical enquiry as equally futile: 'A study with an aim such as this is intensely personal; the individual thinker can understand the human urge to explain only from within his own life ... To publish such a study is comical, because in that way the thinker wants to get the approval of other people, when such approval is a misunderstanding; or wants to tell others what essentially concerns himself alone, revealing that the thinker stands in an aesthetic relationship to matters which he should take seriously' (3).

Indeed, philosophical pessimism characterised the work of this entire generation of students. Once again, Oglethorpe was the most forthright in setting out the mood shared by them all: 'The highest to which the intellect can aspire is to understand that it is not possible, after all, to understand ... The completest insight would be the Socratic "knowledge of my ignorance, knowing that I do not know". But even this insight does not come through the intellect.' According to him, God remained unknowable to man, accessible only through a Kierkegaardian passion; and if firmer knowledge was possible, belief would become unnecessary.[37] In his M.A. thesis, Oglethorpe dealt with the work of Karl Heim, from which his mentor, Kirsten, had extracted the assurance that God had revealed himself in Jesus.[38] For Oglethorpe no such assurance was possible. For him, two conceptions of human knowledge were possible: either that of the external relation of subject to object, or that of the internalisation of the object which became one with the subject that knew it. He stated: 'It is the main theme of this dissertation that both conceptions are valid, but that it is impossible for philosophy to maintain both at the same time. The best which philosophy can achieve is to show that any one of the two conceptions must necessarily lead to an inadequate account of knowledge. But it is impossible to remedy this defect by integrating the two conceptions, as they completely exclude each other. Philosophy can therefore never provide a satisfactory account of knowledge.'[39]

The merit which Oglethorpe finds in Heim - one which brings him together with Kierkegaard - is that he shows that the possibility of 'living' a relationship with another cannot be excluded, even if that other cannot be known.[40] The basic argument is echoed, perhaps in a form closer to theological convention, by Hattingh: thought can gain no rational grasp of

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[37] Oglethorpe, 'God, die Onbekende,' p. 35.

[38] J.F. Kirsten, 'Probleeminhoud en Probleemstelling,' Oudstudent, April 1945, p. 13.

[39] Oglethorpe, Die A Priorisme van Karl Heim, p. 1.

[40] Oglethorpe, Die A Priorisme van Karl Heim, pp. 78, 80, 81.

God; man in his temporal condition cannot choose God, who is eternal; choice is absurd, after the Fall, and all that remains is acknowledgement of guilt.[41]

For Degenaar, these questions took on a somewhat more secular form, but the same deliberate pessimism is present in his work. Human thought, according to him, is at its midnight hour, 'the hour which is actually the dark unrest of his heart'; although truth must be sought, 'if you do not already have the truth, you will never find it'; instead, 'intellectual masks are turned to conceal existential unrest'.[42] His M.A. thesis, Kennis as Lewe, surveys the history of philosophy from Thales to Sartre, reprimanding those who had hoped to gain objective knowledge (Plato, Descartes, Hegel), praising those who accepted the existential unrest of human life (Socrates, Pascal, Kierkegaard) and awarding a mixed verdict to those who came close, but never quite achieved this insight (the Sophists, Bergson). The thesis insists, rather than arguing, that philosophers' aspirations to knowledge are idle; but it seems that the author's temperament rebels in the end against the pessimism which he found philosophically appropriate.

In a poignant epilogue, Degenaar manages to uphold his premise of the idleness of philosophical knowledge, while avoiding despondency about his own efforts. He does this by recalling 'an event ... so important that this story of mine would have been impossible without it'. Alone in his room, he senses the presence of 'the centuries, and more than the centuries'. The ghosts of the philosophers pass by, and leave him behind; indeed, they do not notice him. Then Jesus, who has been with him in his lone vigil, forces him to recognise his loneness by asking: 'Do you not want to leave as well?' But there is nowhere else to go, as Jesus is the knowledge which is life itself. And yet it is necessary to go, for 'then I knew that God will only be with me if I go, and live out his presence. I can never possess his presence. I must be actively in the midst of life, otherwise the holy mystery of it will be lost and it will become an intellectual problem' (117-119).

In this extraordinary fusion of himself with the apostle Peter, told that he will deny his master, and with Socrates, confronted with his personal daimon, Johan Degenaar makes use of the philosophical premises of the time in such a way as to circumvent the quietistic conclusions to which they led. Although Degenaar still shares the basic orientation of his contemporaries, the direction in which he will move away from their concerns is already evident here: the 'philosopher-prophet', he argues, must serve God 'precisely in my relation to my fellow-man' (1948:108).

(vi) The history of philosophy as the history of Protestant Christianity

The philosophy of this generation stood in a peculiarly tense relationship to the history of philosophy. Above all, it was prone to interpretation as so many episodes within the history of Protestant Christianity. Degenaar's M.A. thesis was the most extended attempt to reinterpret the history of philosophy in the light of their shared philosophical concerns, placing the long-neglected figure of Kierkegaard at the centre of the philosophical tradition. On the whole, this was a weaker piece of work than those of Oosthuizen, Oglethorpe and perhaps one or two others of that generation. But the exercise which Degenaar attempted was crucial for this whole generation. Such a reinterpretation of the history of philosophy - along the lines

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[41] Hattingh, Keuse as Waagstuk, pp. 81-3, cf. p. 92.

[42] Degenaar, Kennis as Lewe, p. 1. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

attempted by Degenaar, even if others might have executed it differently - was necessary if they were to develop a consistent orientation towards their discipline.

How did they interpret the history of philosophy? To begin with, they put aside any idea of philosophy as one intellectual discipline among many. 'The history of philosophy,' according to Conradie, 'is the history of human thought.'[43] 'The urge to think is a human urge,' wrote Oosthuizen, 'and the history of philosophy is the history of the outstanding products of this human urge.'[44] But if the concept of philosophy was expanded to include all human thought, this did not mean that philosophy students were to concern themselves with the development of physics and biology, music and mathematics, agriculture and engineering. In practice, human thought was contracted to exclude all but thought about the self and its relations to several abstractly-conceived entities - the most prominent of which was God.

In practice, the history of philosophy and the history of Christian theology were integrated under the guise of including within the ambit of philosophy all that arose from genuine human need. Thus Degenaar's quest for the 'true philosophers' who grasped 'the meaning of life itself' (9) leads to the discovery of five figures: Socrates, St Augustine, Luther, Pascal and Kierkegaard (77-90). Two others are mentioned, though not discussed: Sophocles and Calvin (77, 82). Of these seven, only two - Socrates and Kierkegaard - would ordinarily be regarded as philosophers. And all of them - with the possible exception of Sophocles, whose status is unclear - owe their inclusion to their relation to Jesus, either by anticipating aspects of his life and teaching or by grasping its meaning after the event. What each of them affirms is the necessity for the individual risk of commitment, in conditions where no certainty is possible.

In this way, an appropriate lineage is provided for the philosophical concerns of the day. But it is difficult not to notice the extent to which this lineage is constructed by sleight of hand. It presents Stellenbosch existentialism as the logical outcome of Protestant Christianity; and yet, by identifying Protestantism with philosophy, it avoids having to defend that existentialism as theological orthodoxy. The Kierkegaardian act of commitment is brought within the walls of theological convention, but as an ally, as it were, rather than a serious contestant for supremacy.

(vii) Form and content

This re-interpretation of the history of philosophy was based on a highly overstated distinction between form and content in philosophy, originally provided by Kirsten. Its starting-point was the denial that any separation of life and interpretation of its meaning was possible: 'Just as little as man can separate himself from his own life, so he cannot escape the question of the meaning of life, because it is life itself.' Whether we recognise this or not, problems of meaning force themselves upon us. Because we cannot avoid them, 'we must distinguish carefully between the content of the problem and the way in which it is posed. The former is unchanging. The problem remains in its essence what it is. It is independent of man. The latter is changeable, and varies from time to time, because the way in which a problem is posed is determined individually as well as historically. Thus there are problems which are posed at a

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[43] Conradie, Eksistensie en Selftranskendensie, p. 1.

[44] Oosthuizen, Die Verklaringsdrang, p. 2.

particular time, which could not have been posed at all in an earlier period, although the phenomena that determined their content existed from the beginning.'[45]

This distinction between the unchanging content of philosophical problems and their varying form was never elaborated in any coherent way, and no real account was ever given of the problems that were indeed perennial. But it was seized upon, nonetheless, by Kirsten's students and gave them the sense that the real concerns of the philosophical tradition were, in fact, their own concerns.[46]

This distinction could, however, be used in two different ways. It could be used, as we have seen, to identify the real content of philosophy, and then to point out which philosophers had grasped it and which had not. It could also be used to discover new and unconventional forms of argument in which the content of philosophy could be conveyed, and effectively to create a new style of philosophical writing. There can be little doubt that the academic writing of this generation was much affected by the example of Kierkegaard: their irony, their self-deprecation, their method of putting forward a 'point of view' which was to be superseded dialectically and their somewhat confessional mode of autobiography were all modelled on Kierkegaard, and had never before had any place in the Stellenbosch tradition. This new style of writing soon found new forms - in the autobiographical excursuses and theological interludes of their academic theses, and in journalism in particular. Indeed, it was in this sphere that their claims that philosophy dealt with the pressing questions which face every individual were to be put to the test.

University Apartheid and the New Philosophers

How was this new philosophy to address the concrete questions of the day? Once more, Oglethorpe took the lead in setting out the real implications of the Kierkegaardian philosophy in the Stellenbosch context. In 1947, he published an article in the student newspaper openly and directly rejecting the DRC's support for apartheid. In supporting apartheid for the sake of 'the right of the nation to survive', Oglethorpe argued, 'the Church has forfeited its most precious possession, its faith'.[47] Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac provided a model of faith as 'the forfeiting of your most fundamental right, that of survival'. Oglethorpe has found the means of turning the most basic claims of Afrikaner nationalism against its most basic practices, and he did so with extreme forcefulness. This time, however, he found no followers, and was himself to withdraw from such direct comment on the question of racial domination for many years to come.[48]

Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen were both active in student journalism, and each of them served as editor of Die Stellenbossche Student during the years after the NP election victory of

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[45] Kirsten, 'Probleeminhoud en Probleemstelling,' p. 8.

[46] Cf. Oosthuizen, 'Die Mistisisme,' p. 15; Die Verklaringsdrang, pp. 1-4; Degenaar, Kennis as Lewe, pp. 8-11; Die herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie, pp. 2-4; Conradie, Eksistensie en Selftranskendensie, pp. 1-7.

[47] Oglethorpe, 'Segregasie in die Kerk,' Die Stellenbossche Student, November 1947, pp. 34-5.

[48] James Oglethorpe, 'Bely - of Sterf!,' Die Gereformeerde Vaandel, June 1956, pp. 35-6.

1948. These were years of intense controversy about the future of university education in South Africa, and Stellenbosch had a central role in this controversy. One would not have known this from the pages of Die Stellenbossche Student, however; the Kierkegaardian philosophers had a certain amount to say about the university, but nothing at all about the specific topic which dominated the pages of Die Matie: university apartheid.[49]

The annual congress of the Afrikaner Studentebond, held at Stellenbosch in 1949, came out in vociferous support of apartheid. After the congress there were calls for moderation in the columns of Die Matie, and heated replies. In the following year or so, two positions on university apartheid emerged at Stellenbosch. The first position, that of the ASB, supported the establishment of separate universities for whites and blacks ('non-whites') in their separate territories. It deplored the presence of black students at such liberal universities as UCT and Wits, and called for this to be ended. It called for Stellenbosch to break off contact with the liberal universities until they had the assurance that these would only be represented by whites. The second position was more liberal, but it too supported the ideal of separate universities. It did not oppose the presence of black students at the liberal universities, but regarded this as a temporary measure until separate black universities had been established. And it supported contact between universities, in which each university could choose its own representatives, with the proviso that there should be no 'social mixing'. As far as I have been able to establish, there was no opposition at Stellenbosch to the ideal of university apartheid itself. It was only in May 1951, after two years of controversy, that the liberal position was defeated and the ASB position endorsed by the SRC.

What did Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen have to say about the university in this time? First, that it was not really a university in the full sense of the word, but a 'people's university'. For that reason, it would be mistaken to expect it to do anything other than meet the needs of 'the Afrikaner' - first for teachers and ministers, and now for economists, agriculturalists and medical doctors.[50] Perhaps Oglethorpe expected some response to this provocation; but none appears to have been forthcoming. He called for open-mindedness. He called for passionate commitment, quoting Kierkegaard's complaint that the age was not so much wicked as without passion. But he did not himself put forward any ideal to which such commitment could be won.[51]

Oosthuizen also addressed the question of the ASB and NUSAS, but so obliquely that it is difficult to know whether any of his fellow-students knew what he was saying. According to his elaborate parody, both ASB and NUSAS sought to speak for 'us', or for 'Mr Everyone'

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[49] Die Stellenbossche Student (with various spellings) was a quarterly journal which included cultural, literary and academic material, and a certain amount of university gossip and the like. Die Matie was first established by the ANS in 1941, and re-established as an SRC newspaper, brought out every two weeks, in 1947. The account of debates on university apartheid given in the following paragraphs is drawn from Die Matie between May 1949 and June 1951.

[50] James Oglethorpe, 'Universalia versus Koeimelk en Sokkiesstop,' Die Stellenbossche Student, June 1949, pp. 10-11.

[51] James Oglethorpe, '"Beheer" oor ons Universiteite,' Die Stellenbossche Student, September 1949, p. 9; 'Redaksioneel,' Die Stellenbossche Student, June 1949, p. 9.

(another borrowing from Kierkegaard), and feared the individual.[52] In a subsequent article, he admits that his individual was a 'dream theory' of a unique individual consciously seeking the meaning of his own life, rather than 'lifelessly vegetating in the common deadness of an abstraction such as "the Matie".'[53] Although he manages to get a good deal of irony and some bravado into his account of his own failure, he does not provide any account of a cause which such an individual could have stood up for.[54]

It is likely that this body of journalism had a more important effect on the academic philosophy done at Stellenbosch than academic philosophy ever had, by means of this journalism, on student opinion. At the same time as philosophy became a more demanding and complex discipline at Stellenbosch, it also became, in a sense, less technical. In contributing unashamedly philosophical arguments to student publications, Oglethorpe and Oosthuizen affirmed that philosophy had a certain responsibility towards the world of public affairs. Their efforts did not go much beyond this general affirmation. The task they outlined was to be continued at Stellenbosch in the following decade by their contemporary, Johan Degenaar.

A Lasting Transformation?

What were the results of this reception of the work of Kierkegaard? Did it have an effect beyond the sphere of academic philosophy at Stellenbosch, and beyond the student years of those involved? Questions of this kind can be asked of any intellectual exploration in a relatively abstract field of thought, which plays itself out in a limited and local context, among young people whose real working careers still lie ahead of them. At the least, this was an unusually innovative and energetic generation. But that does not in itself tell us whether their efforts were primarily a kind of fermentation, or what resulted from them.

The most immediate result of this process was to present young Afrikaner intellectuals with a choice, where none had existed before - that is, where no terms had been available before in which to articulate that choice. It presented a choice between loyalty to an established order and its values, or to the self in whose name that order had been established.

This was not, in itself, a choice between supporting and opposing the established order. For the weakness, but also in a sense the strength, of this philosophical project was that it offered alternatives which could not be located straightforwardly on any existing political, social or theological spectrum. The leading figures in this project were not supporters of racial domination. Degenaar recalls that Oosthuizen played the main role in making him an

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[52] D.C.S. Oosthuizen, 'Wie is Ons?,' Die Stellenbossche Student, September 1950, pp. 9-10.

[53] D.C.S. Oosthuizen, 'Die Apologie van 'n Ongekultiveerde aan U, die Gekultiveerdes,' Die Stellenbosschse Student, November 1950, pp. 9-10.

[54] Oosthuizen's last editorial in Die Stellenbossche Student concludes: 'You have voted me out, and I accept my exclusion from your cultural organisations ... After all, my individual and my culture do not exist. It was only a dream' ('Die Apologie van 'n Ongekultiveerde', p. 10). I have not found any information about a real event (such as Oosthuizen's dismissal from the post of editor) to which this could refer, and assume it is simply part of his parody of the consciousness which seeks to decide cultural issues by voting.

opponent of apartheid.[55] Oglethorpe, at least, was willing to challenge it openly. But their project was essentially concerned with offering Afrikaner intellectuals a different role within Afrikaner institutions, rather than orientating them towards the institutions of monopoly capital, dominated by English-speakers, or towards the movement for the liberation of the black majority, which was then only beginning to emerge.

At the same time, this was also not simply a choice between conformity with the collective project of Afrikaner nationalism, on the one hand, and individual self-advancement, on the other. It did not in itself present a challenge to capitalist society, but it was also not a mode of adjusting Afrikaner identity to the needs of capitalism. For the individual identity which this generation presented as a counterweight to the established order and its value was an identity constituted by ceaseless enquiry into the self in its relations to others, a commitment to upholding the authenticity of that identity regardless of consequences, and an acceptance of the risks which they saw as intrinsic to any such commitment. What they offered was a philosophical conception of selfhood capable of autonomous choices which were at the same time historically conscious.

With the wisdom of historical hindsight, it is not difficult to see that this generation of young Afrikaner philosophers, and their commitment to re-thinking their own cultural identity in fundamental terms, were in a kind of cul-de-sac. Their relative failure to take any clear political stance in the conflicts of the times was perhaps the result of a sense of their own historical isolation. There was no larger historical movement which offered a clear alternative, nor was one to emerge in the Cold War years that lay ahead.

It is hard to avoid the comparison with the much more politicised generation of students at the English-speaking universities in the 1960s and early 70s - formed not in the decade between the re-unification of the NP and its election victory of 1948, but in that between the crushing of African political organisation after Sharpeville and the Durban strikes of 1973. The later generation turned to the writings of the young Marx, to Sartre and Marcuse with a similar enthusiasm. Their politics were deeply informed by a sense that the individual could choose an identity in defiance of the needs of the established order. Their choices had a far greater degree of ideological clarity. Above all, their defiance of the established order could be harnessed within a global and South African context in which a real alternative to bourgeois conformity was possible. Their energies could more readily be absorbed by the practical tasks of building a movement for change. Perhaps that is one reason why their assimilation of philosophical ideas was more hasty, even superficial.[56]

Among the radical students of the later generation were some who were influenced by Daantjie Oosthuizen at Rhodes, or Martin Versfeld at UCT. But they could have had little or no sense of the ferment and energy of the 1940s. Indeed, the ferment and energy of the time is also a measure of how much had to be crushed and stifled in order to create the cultural monolith of Afrikaner political and intellectual life in subsequent decades.

Breyten Breytenbach, who was a student at UCT in 1958-9, later commented on Cape Town in that period: 'How alive the Mother City used to be before fascist political engineers and other black-shoed Broederbond planners destroyed it! I used to think of it as an Alexandria in the southern Atlantic ... The cosmopolitan make-up of the city facilitated its

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[55] J.J. Degenaar, 'Die Betekenis van N.P. van Wyk Louw vir my Eie Denke,' Standpunte 173 (October 1984), p. 53.

[56] On the generation of the 1970s, cf. Chapter Nine below.

sparkling artistic and political life. '[57] Stellenbosch in the 1940s, in contrast, was an Afrikaner university town, and the existentialist philosophers of that generation almost certainly attended DRC church services on Sunday evenings. But there too cultural diversity and vibrancy, and a burgeoning philosophical culture, had to be reduced to more modest proportions.

[57] Breyten Breytenbach, Return to Paradise (Cape Town, David Philip, 1993), p. 141.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOHAN DEGENAAR AND THE POLITICS OF 'OOP GESPREK'

The Problem of Freedom in the Stellenbosch Philosophical Tradition

Modernity of thought has been the guiding light of the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition from the time of Tobie Muller's study of pragmatism. It motivated Kirsten's appropriation of Bergson; it recurred again, in a different register, in the way in which the generation of Oosthuizen, Oglethorpe and Degenaar responded to Kierkegaard in the 1940s. In each case, the most innovative thinkers of this tradition have sought out that which is modern in philosophy, and interpreted the larger Western tradition in its light. But the philosophical modernity of Stellenbosch was characterised by the absence of the central problem of modern philosophy: until the work of Johan Degenaar in the 1960s, it includes almost no serious reflection on the problem of freedom.[1]

The problem of freedom has occupied a central place in the philosophical discourse of the West since the 17th century. Many of the formative works of modern philosophy - the political thought of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau; Kant's three critiques; Hegel's reconstruction of world history - can be seen as attempts to vindicate human freedom, define its meaning and conditions of possibility, and assist in the movement towards its realisation. The conception of free individuality is a defining feature of modern philosophy.

This paradox was the result of Stellenbosch's own contradictory relationship to capitalist modernity (described in Chapter Five above) and the liberal conception of freedom embedded in it. From the beginning, the Stellenbosch tradition contained within itself two potentially conflicting conceptions of freedom: the secular conception inclined naturally towards liberalism; the theistic was to be given increasingly definite neo-Calvinist content. A distinctive local philosophical tradition emerged as an attempt to negotiate the delicate balance between them.

In this context, J.F. Kirsten conducted a holding action: he praised Bergson for his assertion of the value of human freedom, but upheld a more constrained account of the human condition which allowed no other human fulfilment than that provided by obedience to an omnipotent God. According to Kirsten, any other conclusion would lead to an intolerable pessimism. The first generation of Kirsten's students was to embrace this pessimism, while continuing to hold, as he did, two incompatible accounts of human freedom - as the capacity to decide your own fate, and as submission to God - without ever openly addressing this incompatibility. The outstanding philosophical product of that generation - Oosthuizen's Verklaringsdrang - treated the 'will to freedom' as central to human thought, but saw it as a certain route to the solitude and despair of the individual, who could do no more than to embrace this fate as his own freely-made commitment. Johan Degenaar's philosophical work

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[1] The exceptions go some way to proving the rule. N.J. Brümmer's main discussion of the concept of liberty is concerned more with setting out the limitations on freedom than with freedom itself. Apart from holding that freedom should not be granted to individuals, races or nations which are 'as yet not developed sufficiently highly to make the best use of it', he includes the general proviso that 'our use of liberty must be proof of our right to, and our worth of, it' (Brümmer, South African Citizenship (Cape Town, Juta, 1925), p. 111, 116).

always had a more activist perspective, asserting the need for engagement with the world rather than withdrawal. In the 1950s and 60s, this perspective led him to address an ever-widening range of topical theological and later political issues - with results which he could hardly have foreseen.

By 1959, a separate stream within the Department of Philosophy had been created, in order to ensure that students preparing for the DRC ministry could be kept from Degenaar's influence. By 1961, a separate Department of Political Philosophy was created alongside the existing department, with Degenaar as its sole member. Within a few years, his enquiries into political concepts were considered as 'dangerous' as his theological interests. He was almost certainly the main target of attacks in the newspaper of the National Party's student branch in 1963 on lecturers who 'abuse their positions in order to indoctrinate their students in a subtle way, in order to create "thinking" or liberal Nationalists, who use the lecture-hall as a podium for their perverse ideologies, and who thereby make themselves guilty of treason against their people'.[2] Rossouw's praise of Kirsten, on his retirement, for never using his philosophical insights 'to unload problems on unripe spirits who could be brought into confusion by them', captured the academic ethos which Degenaar was felt to violate.[3]

The persistence of this charge against Degenaar was also an index of the reverence in which he was held by generations of students.[4] They did not look up to him for telling them what they wanted to hear, but rather for his capacity to enable them to find their own voices in the context of Socratic dialogue, in which any point of view could be defended as long as it was sincerely held. In that dialogue, many of them experienced a kind of freedom which seemed both to provide a larger ideal to strive for, and yet to be incapable of the kind of articulation which could make that possible.

Three Conceptions of Freedom

The 1950s provided a very different context for philosophical argument from that of the1930s, when the du Plessis case had first given philosophy its prominent role in Stellenbosch intellectual life. The National Party election victory of 1948 had decided the question of whether Afrikaner nationalism could win state power. The unfolding policies of apartheid also made clearer than before the practical meaning of its high-sounding ideals. The Cold War defined the stakes in the struggle for Afrikaner power in the cataclysmic terms of national survival or extinction, and the prospect of decolonisation gave these terms their racial content. In the 1930s, the question of freedom had related largely to the limits of theological enquiry within the DRC. In the more deeply politicised 1950s, even the question of academic freedom

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[2] A.R., 'Liberalisme: Die Vyand in Ons Midde,' Die Pieke 7:1 (1963), pp. 1-2.

[3] H.W. Rossouw, 'By die Aftrede van Prof. J.F. Kirsten,' Nederduitsch Gereformeerd Teologiese Tydskrif 14:4 (September 1973), p. 26.

[4] For first-hand accounts of Degenaar as a teacher, cf. F. van Zyl Slabbert, The Last White Parliament (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1985), pp. 24-5; J.C. Kannemeyer, Die Rym kan ook 'n Lewe in Beslag Neem (Cape Town, 1990), pp. 42-4; Lina Spies, 'Sy Beiteltjie was Skerp Genoeg,' in André du Toit, ed., In Gesprek: Opstelle vir Johan Degenaar (Stellenbosch, Die Suid-Afrikaan, 1986), pp. 118-9; Vincent Brümmer, 'Kronkels in Mijn Denkweg,' in G. van den Brink et al, eds., Wijsgerige Theologie in Beweging (Franeker, T. Wever, 1992), pp. 7-27.

was unavoidably focused not on questions of heresy and orthodoxy, but on racial destiny and national survival.

In this context, two opposing conceptions of freedom were vigorously articulated by leading Stellenbosch intellectuals, mainly in response to apartheid policies. An outline of these opposing conceptions will enable us to grasp the background against which Degenaar's work sought to define a third conception of freedom, which followed neither the Calvinist nor the liberal trajectory.

The Calvinist conception was put forward with unprecedented forthrightness - at least in the Stellenbosch context - by Prof. F.J.M. Potgieter of the theological seminary.[5] While serving in the ministry at Steynsburg, before his appointment at Stellenbosch in 1946, he had contributed to Koers in die Krisis, the influential three volumes of essays, inspired by H.G. Stoker. Once at Stellenbosch, Potgieter continued to draw on the basic arguments of Stoker and his colleagues, and to present their ideals as the authentic cause of Afrikaner nationalism.

Potgieter's central philosophical argument was first formulated in a South African context by Stoker in his influential booklet Kristendom en Wetenskap. Stoker sought to defend the idea that science could be practised on a Biblical foundation against the charges that this would restrict freedom and promote intolerance. In a wide-ranging historical and philosophical argument, Stoker articulates and defends a distinctive conception of intellectual freedom: 'The freedom of the Christian researcher consists of seeking the truth in accordance with his holiest and deepest convictions, as he is convinced that he should seek it, and to find it where he is convinced it is to be found. The authority of the Word of God is for him no external authority, which he must follow slavishly, but through his faith it is a free acceptance, and a true acceptance, of what Scripture offers him. The authority before which he bows is that of the truth, as he accepts the truth, given in Scripture and in nature.'[6]

Freedom lies, in short, in obedience to God, with the proviso that it is the result of free acceptance of the duty to obey God. The effect of the proviso is to undo the definition, reducing it to an assertion that each individual can choose their beliefs in matters of religion. But the proviso itself is rapidly undone in Stoker's discussion of tolerance. For he goes on to argue that tolerance and intolerance of opposing views is relative to the context in which they occur: 'Intolerance towards hostile elements in your own circle is a duty, and tolerance is treason. But towards hostile elements who do not find themselves within the circle of the church, intolerance is a violation of their freedom of belief and conscience and is not defensible' (122-3).

Establishing the need for intolerance within your 'own circle' raises the question of how such 'circles' are to be defined. Stoker still gestured towards the principle of allowing the individual the freedom to leave the circle in which they found themselves (178). It is not clear that his views on racial and national identity allowed for such voluntary affiliation in all cases. Others who were to make use of this argument, avoided this difficulty by calling for righteous

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[5] Conservatives had often looked to the church for leadership at Stellenbosch, but usually to the ministry rather than the seminary (D.R. Snyman in the 1930s, J.S. Gericke from the 1940s to the 70s, A.P. Treurnicht in the 1950s). In part, this was because the conservative cause often required a degree of anti-intellectualism which was more difficult for an academic to espouse.

[6] H.G. Stoker, Kristendom en Wetenskap: Galileo en Servet (Potchefstroom, Kristelike Unie, 1929), p. 122. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

intolerance 'within the circle in which the Lord has placed me'.[7] This meant effectively that any claim the right to dissent should be seen as disobedience to God.

In its original context, this argument was given its liberal veneer because, as Stoker makes clear, it was made on behalf of a movement which was only just emerging (108, 187). He wrote in the midst of the du Plessis case, and aimed his arguments specifically against the calls for a conscience clause at South African universities made by Het Zoeklicht (182). In the 1950s, Potgieter could do without that pretence of allowing individual choice, and make Stoker's plea for the 'right to exist' of neo-Calvinist science (111) into a full-blown account of academic and political freedom.

Potgieter's paper on 'the Protestant university' made no appeal for tolerance of diversity. He wrote: 'It is my firmest conviction that the crisis in the university in Western democracies is an immediate and inevitable consequence of the failure to recognise the idea of God as corner-stone of the university ... The only real solution lies in the recognition that in countries predominantly Christian, like our own, there should be one type of university, the theocentric, but with maintenance of the freedom of conscience'.[8] This 'freedom of conscience', he adds, cannot justify giving 'dissentients' the opportunity to state their views, as 'eclecticism will ... not be allowed to work the havoc which we now witness in western civilisation, by leaving immature and mediocre minds in the lurch, instead of pointing out to them the way of truth'.[9]

In a subsequent article, Potgieter seeks to define academic freedom: 'Anyone who is not theocentric in their thinking cannot solve the problems surrounding the concept of freedom, or even grasp them correctly ... As one created in the image of God, man is the bearer of authority, and was also free before the Fall. Man thus has the authority and freedom of a created being, in accordance with his nature. The relative nature of his authority requires obedience on his part as a correlate of authority - obedience to God and to all authority ordained by Him. The freedom of man, as a created being, consists in remaining true to his own nature and developing in accordance with it ... Precisely to the extent to which he remains true to his own created nature, he is free.' On this basis, Potgieter concludes that academic freedom should be upheld, not in the liberal sense, but as 'the inalienable right to self-realisation in accordance with their own nature as created beings, as they have been recreated in Christ and called to obedience to the revealed truth, which will make them truly free in their practice of science as well.'[10]

Much the same argument underlies Potgieter's justification of apartheid as the will of God. He argues that 'it would be in direct conflict with the revealed will of God to advocate mixing between whites, Coloureds and Bantus'; instead, they should strive for 'true freedom in Christ', guided by the motto: 'Be yourself; be what God has willed that you should be - also as

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[7] J.F. Mentz, 'Neutraliteit en Verdraagsaamheid,' in Federasie van Calvinistiese Studentekringe in Suid-Afrika, ed., Koers in die Krisis (Stellenbosch, Pro Ecclesia), vol. 2, p. 162.

[8] F.J.M. Potgieter, 'The Protestant University,' in F.J.M. Potgieter, M. Versfeld and A.H. Murray, The Concept of a University (Cape Town, NUSAS and UCT Department of Philosophy, 1953), pp. 3-4.

[9] Potgieter, 'The Protestant University,' p. 5; cf. F.J.M. Potgieter, 'Akademiese Vryheid - 'n Waardebepaling,' Nederduitsch Gereformeerd Teologiese Tydskrif 1:1 (December 1959), p. 60.

[10] Potgieter, 'Akademiese Vryheid,' pp. 56-7, 62.

an individual within the group in which He has placed you, and perform true national service there'.[11]

The most forceful rejection of such arguments for apartheid in Stellenbosch of the 1950s came from Potgieter's colleague at the theological seminary, B.B. Keet.[12] Keet was one of the most illustrious figures in the history of the university. Together with Tobie Muller he had been one of the leaders of the struggle for Afrikaans language rights early in the century. He had also played a leading role in the translation of the Afrikaans Bible, after his appointment as professor at the theological seminary in 1919. He belonged neither in the camp of the Kuyperians nor among the theological liberals. Although he testified in defence of du Plessis at the enquiry of the Stellenbosch Presbytery in 1929, he clearly did not share his theological views.[13]

Keet's theological writings before 1948 deal with the concept of freedom with the ambiguity which was characteristic of Stellenbosch in those years: 'Freedom applied to an act of will means that the act comes from the person himself, is his own deed, so that his entire personality is responsible for it, because no one else has imposed it on him'.[14] 'Christian freedom' is described as the result of the individual accepting Christ as the source of moral guidance. But the distinction between Christian freedom and 'freedom in general', on which much of the argument of the book depends, is far from clear. Keet holds that we are 'by nature' sinful, and consistently motivated by our sinfulness.[15] We are not told what remains, then, of our 'natural' freedom.

The concepts of sin and conversion play a very different role in Keet's critique of apartheid, Suid-Afrika - Waarheen?. Keet rejected out of hand the Biblical justifications for apartheid, and the moral claims of even the more liberal conceptions of territorial separation then proposed by the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs.[16] What he argues for is white trusteeship: 'an admirable conception, provided it does not imply that the guardian will remain a guardian always. The time must arrive when the ward comes of age' (45). It is at that point

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[11] F.J.M. Potgieter, 'Veelvormige Ontwikkeling: Die Wil van God,' Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 26:1 (March 1958), pp. 14, 15; cf. F.J.M. Potgieter, 'Is die Apartheidsbeleid Moreel te Regverdig?', in H.B. Thom et al, eds., Grense: 'n Symposium oor Rasse- en Ander Verhoudinge (Stellenbosch, Universiteits-uitgewers en Boekhandelaars, 1961), pp. 28-32.

[12] The other prominent Stellenbosch academic to be associated with liberal opinion at various points in the 1940s and 50s was A.C. Cilliers, a long-serving Professor of Physics (cf. P.W. Grobbelaar, 'Cilliers, Andries Charl,' in C.J. Beyers, ed., Dictionary of South African Biography (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1987), vol. 5).

[13] Malan, Ons Kerk en Prof. Du Plessis, p. 141-57.

[14] B.B. Keet, Sedelike Vraagstukke (Cape Town, Suid-Afrikaanse Bybelvereniging, 1945), p. 7.

[15] Keet, Sedelike Vraagstukke, pp. 8-9; cf. B.B. Keet, Ons Redelike Godsdiens (Stellenbosch, Christen-Studentevereniging, 1945), pp. 110-3.

[16] B.B. Keet, Whither South Africa? (Stellenbosch, University Publishers and Booksellers, 1956), pp. 19-33, 50-1. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

that apartheid fails by insisting that each individual be treated according to race, rather than on their individual merits (47, 56-7). According to Keet, 'there are highly-civilised people among the coloured races of South Africa today, in no way inferior to the whites, who are as deeply concerned as they are, or more so, in the struggle to preserve what they possess culturally' (10-11).

This metaphor of culture as possession is crucial for the entire argument. Thus, 'proper provision must be made to defend and safeguard our spiritual heritage'. There must be 'an opportunity for non-whites who meet certain requirements' to share responsibility for 'the protection and development of our highest cultural possessions'. Such 'non-whites' should be welcomed as 'allies in the fight against everything that threatens our Christian civilisation' (48-9).[17] Apartheid policies propose instead to create separate, but unequal, nations, and Keet warns: 'The time must come when the one that is subordinate gains its freedom: will it then be ready to make proper use of its liberty?' (54) His call for a change of heart among Christians (92-3) implies that Christian commitment can bring freedom about, but never suggests that such commitment constitutes freedom. Whatever his theological commitments, Keet finds himself working with the traditional liberal conception of possessive individualism, even if he gives that conception his own cultural bias.

On the face of it, this conception of freedom was diametrically opposed to the Calvinist conception of freedom as obedience to God. And yet these two conceptions of freedom had an essential core in common. For each of them, the identity of the subject of freedom is defined and fixed in advance of the attainment and exercise of that freedom. Each of them depends on a static conception of the individual (or collective) subject whose freedom is an essentially external attribute.

The Calvinist argument hypostatises identity by insisting on the irreducibly religious presuppositions of human agency.[18] It is this which led Potgieter to assert that no argument is possible with those who disagree in matters of principle.[19] For if the freedom of the agent is defined as the capacity to act 'in accordance with his holiest and deepest convictions', then that freedom depends on a rigid dividing-line between principled and other convictions, and necessarily excludes any development or change in matters of principle.[20]

The liberal conception of freedom as unencumbered possession of one's self and one's heritage allows for development and change. But it is indifferent to the content of that development or change. Freedom, once possessed, is unaffected by the ends for which it is used. Keet's critique of apartheid depends on the idea that the 'civilised' will seek to 'protect and safeguard' their cultural possessions, but can specify no other content for their freedom.

The transformation of the Stellenbosch philosophical tradition effected by the generation of Oosthuizen, Oglethorpe and Degenaar had at its heart an account of Christian belief, inspired

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[17] I have quoted the published English translation of Keet's book. The Afrikaans original refers to the maintenance of geestesgoedere and kultuurgoedere (literally, spiritual goods and cultural goods), reinforcing the metaphor of possession.

[18] E.g., Stoker, Kristendom en Wetenskap, p. 110.

[19] Potgieter, 'The Protestant University,' p. 3; 'Akademiese Vryheid,' p. 53.

[20] Stoker, Kristendom en Wetenskap, p. 122.

by Kierkegaard, which was radically incompatible with both the Calvinist and the liberal accounts of human agency. It was not that this generation explicitly rejected the Calvinist concept of sin or the liberal model of possessive individualism. What they rejected was the concept of a fixed or eternal human nature, which could be defined on the basis of either its sinfulness or its possessiveness.

This critique of an eternal human nature formed the basis of the third conception of freedom to emerge in Stellenbosch during the 1950s: a concept of freedom as transcendence, which took form in the philosophical work of Johan Degenaar. This conception was developed initially in Degenaar's doctoral thesis - largely on the basis of a particular reading of Kant's Copernican revolution - as part of his account of the philosophical vocation. In the peculiar moment of the Stellenbosch tradition in which he found himself, this conception of freedom was soon extended into the realm of theology, and used to criticise the transcendentalism of neo-Calvinist philosophy and traditional notions of immortality. Increasingly, he explored the links between this concept of freedom as transcendence and the solidarity required by open and unconstrained communication, arguing that it was only on the basis of such solidarity that we could develop the transcendent self-knowledge that made a free society possible. It is perhaps appropriate that an enquiry which depended so much on Socratic themes should eventually have integrated its theological and political concerns in a consideration of death which argued that the person who took his own possibilities upon himself 'was made free for his own death' and experienced eternal life in the moment of the present.[21]

At the same time, this conclusion gives some impression of how uncertain was the trajectory of this concept of freedom, and how changeable - at times almost intangible - was its political orientation. Nonetheless, Degenaar's work provided a fundamental philosophical challenge to Calvinist and liberal thought. Its sustained awareness of the individual as an agent in the processes in their own formation kept alive the question of how the life of Socratic dialogue might most fully be realised in society, and negated any incorporation of that individual into the harmonious workings of God's providence, national destiny or the capitalist market.

Transcendence without Transcendentalism: Three Kinds of Copernican Revolution

Degenaar completed his M.A. thesis in 1948, and was appointed to a post in the Department of Philosophy in the same year. In 1949-50 he completed his doctoral studies at Groningen in the Netherlands, and in 1951 gained the D.Phil. degree at Stellenbosch, with a thesis entitled Die Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie.

In some ways his doctoral thesis built on the arguments of his M.A. thesis, and in others it departed from them. His M.A. thesis had provided a brief survey of the entire tradition of Western philosophy, from the pre-Socratics to Sartre, which was largely concerned to classify individual thinkers according to whether they sought objective knowledge, or saw knowledge as an existential act based on the personal commitment of the individual. The point of the distinction was to identify the latter as 'the true philosopher.'[22] In contrast, his doctoral thesis starts from the assumption that 'the essence of philosophy is present in every act of

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[21] J.J. Degenaar, Sekularisasie (Pretoria, Academica, 1967), pp. 95, 101.

[22] Degenaar, Kennis as Lewe, p. 9; this work is discussed in Chapter Six above.

philosophising'.[23] It then asks what this essence is, by means of a 'repetition' of the question - in the phrase which he takes from Heidegger[24] - as it is found in the work of Kant, Heidegger and Jaspers; that is, an uncovering of the hidden assumptions which give the question its meaning (89-90).

The thesis defends a conception of philosophy which does not depend on identifying a unique object or method for it, nor on the pretended autonomy of reason. It argues that what is essential to philosophy must be sought 'in the existential involvement of the person in his questioning of being' (181). An important purpose of this conception is to make possible an account of the relationship of philosophy and theology which neither reduces philosophy to the role of handmaiden of theology nor negates the claims of theology; a conception, in other words, which preserves the independence of philosophy, but does not do so by displacing theology. It is not difficult to see how this concern corresponds to the situation of the dissenting intellectual at Stellenbosch in the increasingly conformist 1950s, seeking to legitimate their own critical enquiry without at the same time directly challenging the theological conformity in whose name that critical spirit is most readily stifled; indeed, while needing the theological sphere in order to make their concerns heard.

Crucial to the development of this conception is a reading of Kant which casts his work in a proto-existentialist light. Kant's aim of restricting knowledge in order to make room for faith had a dual character. The insight which he regarded as constituting his Copernican revolution - that it is only insofar as objects of experience conform to the constitution of our minds that we have knowledge of the world - had two sides to it, corresponding to this dual aim. On the one hand, it questioned the pretensions of any account of the final character of reality; on the other, it sought to show how, without those pretensions, we might still hold rational beliefs about that reality. Degenaar's reading of Kant focuses almost entirely on the first aspect of his Copernican revolution, treating it as a foundation for 'showing in Socratic manner the ignorance and unscientific character of all dogmatic assertions ... and reducing their claim to absoluteness to silence' (57). Whether Kant's Copernican revolution can provide a foundation for systematic philosophy is, however, an 'open question' (68; cf. 72, 93, 106, 148). According to this reading, the Copernican revolution establishes 'that knowledge transcends its objects and objectivity as such because it possesses the conditions of objectivity itself' (160). Degenaar concludes that 'in this fact of transcendence lies the real nature of philosophising' (172).

Heidegger and Jaspers serve to expand this account of philosophy, rather than modifying it. From Heidegger is taken the concept of Being, as distinct from existent beings, and the idea of truth as the 'unconcealment of Being'. Although Degenaar draws back from any engagement with Heidegger's major work, Sein und Zeit, he affirms the necessity of its task: 'to prepare a way for thought to think the truth of being' (111; cf. 109).

From Jaspers is taken an account of how we might transcend the objectively given in our knowledge through communication, openness and recognition of the uniqueness of each such moment of communicative transcendence. Jaspers provides the initial form of the conception of freedom as transcendence which was to be developed further in Degenaar's subsequent

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[23] Degenaar, Die Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie, p. 1. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

[24] Cf. Martin Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 211.

work: 'The self must determine its attitude towards the world freely ... Its choice brings solidarity with other selves ... I am determined and I determine myself. My historicity binds me to my past. Existence also requires, however, a real contact in the present with an other. Existence requires that I stand constantly open towards the other ... Real existence is achieved in communication ... Only when I express my standpoint towards the other in responsibility does my task become clear to me. To exist in this way, is to be free' (125). But the focus of Degenaar's argument is such that this account of freedom is not pursued, except insofar as it is assimilated with the requirements of philosophy, so that transcendence and dialogue come instead to 'open the way to the freedom of philosophising' (136; cf. 127, 133).

Degenaar also draws from Jaspers an account of the tension between philosophy and religion. But this tension is played down within the larger reconciliation of philosophy and theology which the thesis seeks to achieve. The argument for this reconciliation - showing that theology inevitably involves philosophical presuppositions - draws support from a Heideggerian account of philosophy being 'in the way of truth' (191-4).

The weakness of this reconciliation of philosophy and theology is, however, its dependence on Heidegger's highly personalised account of truth and knowledge in dealing with disciplines with their own objective institutional logic. The only apparent basis for the reconciliation which he argues for, would be individual insight into the cogency of its philosophical premises. In this sense, it depends on a conception of how philosophical ideas are formed which had little historical basis, and which was to be cruelly disappointed in the South Africa of the 1950s.

In the years from 1954 to about 1960, Degenaar's thought developed through engagement in debate on at least three fronts: first, in his writings on art, ranging from a critical response to Martin Versfeld in 1954 to a series of essays on the poetry of N.P. van Wyk Louw, which were first published in 1959; second, in contesting with E.A. Venter the question of whether neo-Calvinist philosophy provided an adequate account of the history of philosophy, and at the same time continuing to make known religious thinkers who stood outside the limits of traditional theology and whose work was often overlooked (Kierkegaard, Tolstoy); third, and most extensively, in generating and responding to a controversy which was to run from 1955 to the early 1960s on the question of the immortality of the soul.

Degenaar's exchange with Venter, rather than Venter's arguments themselves, were to expose the limitation of his attempted reconciliation of philosophy and theology. Venter was Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Orange Free State, a leading exponent of the neo-Calvinist philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd and the author of the first history of philosophy to appear in Afrikaans, Die Ontwikkeling van die Westerse Denke. His book depends on a different reading of Kant's Copernican revolution, which emphasises the essential character of our presuppositions for our knowledge of the world, and then gives these presuppositions an exclusively religious content. Indeed, Venter attributes the Copernican revolution in philosophy to Dooyeweerd rather than Kant - a revolution in which 'for the first time the standpoint of immanence adopted by humanism is completely overcome'.[25] The essential element taken from Kant is the idea that these presuppositions are transcendental in the sense of not being available for rational scrutiny. Where Degenaar had argued that the

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[25] E.A. Venter, Die Ontwikkeling van die Westerse Denke. 'n Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Filosofie oor 26 Eeue (Bloemfontein, Sacum, 1955), p. 139.

limits of our knowledge compel us to adopt a hesitant and provisional attitude towards transcendental questions, Venter argued that these limits create the need for a religious stand which must be exempted from all critical questioning.

The basic premise of Venter's book - that all philosophical thought is the expression of a religious motive - depends on a circular argument: he claims that religion determines human thought; and proves it by defining that which determines thought as religion. What is made to follow from this is an arbitrary classification of all philosophical thought into four currents: Greek, Christian, Thomist and humanist. Venter comments quite accurately that this makes the study of the history of philosophy 'remarkably easy', as all that remains to be done is to place each philosopher into one of these four categories! He does this to his own apparent satisfaction, and then concludes by calling on the reader to choose which of the three contemporary currents of thought to support in the 'gigantic struggle for the spiritual leadership of Western culture'.[26]

It is clear from the subsequent exchange that it was in his capacity as andersdenkende that Degenaar was invited to contribute a short review of Venter's book to the conservative theological journal, Die Gereformeerde Vaandel.[27] His review makes a strongly-worded contrast between the dogmatism, arbitrariness and dishonesty of the method of transcendental criticism employed by Venter, and the openness and 'honesty towards the object' made possible by the phenomenological method which he recommends instead. But Degenaar also defines the target of his attack more broadly, taking on 'the whole Calvinist way of thinking' and then the discipline of theology itself, in response to Venter's attack on existentialism: 'From theology, and especially a certain sort of theology, this is what you can expect, because has there ever been a theological understanding of philosophy?'.[28]

This was followed by a further exchange of articles in Die Gereformeerde Vaandel, in which Degenaar responded more fully to the method of transcendental criticism and Venter replied (a procedure which ensured that the last word went to Venter). Venter's arguments depended entirely on categories of obedience and guilt, rather than seeking clarification or explanation of any issue recognisable outside of his own framework. Nor could the real power of his arguments be challenged by counter-arguments, as that power depended on their capacity to secure obedience for established power in church and state, and to marginalise those who questioned its authority. The unspoken part of Venter's appeals to the authority of God and the Bible, which Degenaar could not challenge, was the embodiment of that authority

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[26] Venter, Ontwikkeling van die Westerse Denke, pp. 9, 142.

[27] The journal had begun life in 1926 as Die Ou Paaie, with the almost exclusive aim of combatting du Plessis' journal, Het Zoeklicht (cf. Chapter Five above). After du Plessis had been removed from the theological seminary in 1932, a substantial donation made it possible to expand the journal, which was re-named Die Gereformeerde Vaandel. Both E.A. Venter and F.J.M. Potgieter were members of its editorial board and regular contributors during the 1950s. (Die Gereformeerde Vaandel of June 1959 contains no fewer than five articles by Venter.) In December 1959, it became the Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif. Degenaar mentions his role as andersdenkende in the pages of the journal in ''n Paar Opmerkings t.o.v. die metode van Transsendentale Kritiek,' Die Gereformeerde Vaandel, June 1956, p. 3.

[28] J.J. Degenaar, 'Boekbespreking: Die Ontwikkeling van die Westerse Denke,' Die Gereformeerde Vaandel, September 1955, p. 29.

in the apartheid state.[29]

In this context, Degenaar's review and his subsequent response must be seen as willingness to stand up to a bully, rather than a fruitful polemic. His own polemical style, as it was to develop over the years, depended on paradox, irony and a certain playfulness, which were useless weapons in this context. He is sometimes too strident, sometimes too apologetic. His objections to Venter's labelling of his opponents do not deflect him from this practice for a moment.[30] And at an intellectual level, he had done little to clarify his own demand for openness and the honesty towards the objects required by the phenomenological attitude. Indeed, to some extent he was to fall into Venter's trap by invoking a different authority on his own behalf: not the authority of the Christian religion, but that of 'modern thought'. None of this could prevent Venter from having the last word: Degenaar 'will have to wrest himself away from his radically negative attitude towards Calvinism - which, in spite of all the weaknesses of Calvinists, still was and is the source of all that is beautiful and noble in our Afrikaner nation - and from the unmistakable dogmatism which mars his work. He will have to be inwardly freed from the religious ground-motive which controls his thought.'[31]

Degenaar's exchange with Venter must surely have echoed many other, less formal, such exchanges, of which no written record remains. And for every one supporter of Venter's arguments, there would have been many who would simply have argued for the need to defer to what Venter represented, rather than the arguments themselves.[32] But the exchange makes concrete at least four important problems in Degenaar's original account of philosophical transcendence, forcing upon him shifts in the arguments of his subsequent work. These shifts were often gradually made, and were quite probably not conscious responses to the forces which Venter represented. But the path indicated by Degenaar's initial argument for transcendence as the precondition for freedom was blocked off by events, and we can see in retrospect how this forced him to rethink its premises, in such a way as to relate the argument not only to theology, but increasingly to South African politics as well.

The first of these four problems concerned the concept of communication. It is here that the path of Degenaar's argument is most obviously blocked. The transcendence foreseen in the

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[29] The neo-Calvinist philosophers sought on several occasions to provide philosophical justifications for apartheid (e.g., P. Dreyer, 'Die Filosofiese Grondslag van die Beleid van Afsonderlike Ontwikkeling,' Tydskrif vir Rasse-Aangeleenthede 22:4 [October 1971], pp. 145-54). Philosophers of other persuasions often simply took existing relations of domination for granted, and in that way provided a kind of naturalisation of apartheid which was perhaps more difficult to challenge.

[30] For Degenaar's stridency, cf. 'Boekbespreking', p. 29; for his tone of apology, cf. 'Paar Opmerkings,' pp. 3, 4, 12. He objects to Venter's technique of labelling throughout his second article ('Paar Opmerkings,' pp. 4, 6, 10, 11). Venter dismisses this objection in his reply; cf. E.A. Venter, 'Transsendentale Kritiek en Fenomenologiese Openheid,' Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 24:2 (June 1956), p. 23.

[31] Venter, 'Transsendentale Kritiek en Fenomenologiese Openheid,', p. 29.

[32] The case for pragmatic deferral to established power, and against any examination of the arguments on the issue at stake, was forcefully made by Stellenbosch's long-serving DRC student chaplain and vice-chancellor, J.S. Gericke; cf. 'Die Taak van die Kerk in Krisistye,' in Thom et al, Grense: 'n Symposium oor Rasse- en Ander Verhoudinge, pp. 14-21.

argument he had drawn from Jaspers was specific to each situation, and necessarily incapable of generalisation. 'This transcendence knows no generality,' according to Degenaar. 'It is original, untransferable, incommunicable, concrete and historical. Its truth can indeed be expressed in thought, but this can only play the role of a sign which appeals to the possible existence of another. In real communication, I can try to stimulate the transcendence of the other. But I cannot bring it about through my own efforts.'[33]

In contrast, Venter and the neo-Calvinists were precisely concerned to communicate a transcendental point of view which was collective, rather than individual - and whose binding authority on Afrikaners could be denied only at the cost of disobedience to God and alienation from their people. This creates the following dilemma for Degenaar: either communicate in those general terms, and deny the conception of human agency that you wish to communicate; or avoid the argument, and allow Venter and others to hold the field. Faced with this dilemma, he seeks to discredit Venter and to make an appeal for openness which, at least in the context of their exchange, he cannot exemplify. If he were to ignore Venter, then he risks finding those with whom such communication might be more feasible (for example, his students) responding to him on the basis of Venter's portrayal.

The difficulty with Degenaar's Socratic model of communication, in other words, is that it is insufficiently social. The concept of communication simply cannot carry the weight imposed on it by the larger argument without specifying who is communicating with whom, in what relations they stand to each other and to the larger society, and without grasping how their communication takes place not in isolation, but at the same time as many other communications are occurring. The argument for transcendence both requires the individualism of this concept of communication (without it, the given reality would not have been transcended) and yet is undone by it (on its own, it cannot describe the conditions in which such communication is possible). The argument was intended to show how freedom could result from communicative transcendence, but ends up assuming that the freedom already exists which allows such communication to take place unhindered.

The second problem concerns the concept of transcendence itself. Degenaar drew from Jaspers an account of how philosophy conflicts with religion when religion 'degenerates into materialisation of the transcendent and thus denies the human person in his freedom'.[34] Religion, in other words (mine, not Degenaar's), appropriates the human capacity to transcend the given, and this appropriation is performed by locating a deity in the space of transcendence, making this space the material site of the ritual, dogma, routine and subordination which - along with the sentiments of upliftment and sense of cosmic purpose - constitute the religious life.[35]

Once again, this account is insufficiently social. It does not ask how such a capacity can be formed, and how it can constitute 'the human person in his freedom' if it is at the same time capable of such appropriation. In the article which opened the debate on the immortality of the soul, in the same year as the publication of Venter's book, Degenaar shows a far clearer

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[33] Degenaar, Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie, p. 137.

[34] Degenaar, Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie, p. 141.

[35] On the ambiguities of Jaspers' account of transcendence, cf. J. von Rintelen, Beyond Existentialism (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1961), pp. 197-218.

awareness of the historically ambiguous character of transcendence.[36] He explains the emergence of the dualism of body and soul in terms of the individual's wish to preserve their distinctively human capacities from the vulnerability of their animal bodies. The false transcendence offered by this dualism both empowers and restricts those who pursue it. We might speak of this as a dialectical conception of transcendence, in contrast to the more linear conception offered by Jaspers. It is developed in an explicitly theological voice, drawing on the figure of Jesus as its exemplar, and stressing the moment of service, solidarity and selflessness in his life.[37]

This emphasis did not require a fundamental departure in Degenaar's work, but rather an accentuation of themes already present in it. Of crucial importance for it is a critique of possessiveness which dates from his student years in the Netherlands, but which now takes on a new significance. His first published article calls for a 'Christian-dialogical dialectic' as the precondition for true knowledge of the self, arguing that 'knowledge of the self exists not in possession of it, but in participation in the Truth which is the gift of unconcealed Being'.[38] In the final chapter of his doctoral thesis, the contrast is made in slightly different terms, so that philosophy is presented as a constant quest for knowledge which can never end in possession.[39] In this context Socrates, rather than Jesus, serves as the model of philosophical transcendence. But Degenaar's work on the idea of immortality shifts the focus of this critique of possessiveness: it concerns possession not of knowledge, but of life itself: 'The Christian gospel ... wants to free the human body from self-preservation and from the maintenance of self which reveals itself in the idea of immortality'.[40] And this focus was to remain central to the development of his conception of freedom in the political context as well.

The third problem which was brought to the fore in Degenaar's exchange with Venter was that of the character and necessity of philosophical presuppositions. Venter and the neo-Calvinists argued that human thought was governed by ineluctable religious presuppositions. Degenaar did not claim possession of a preferable set of presuppositions, but rather that it was possible to avoid 'violating' the phenomena through such presuppositions.[41] The whole question of philosophical 'openness' turned on this contrast, and Venter's argument on this point is coherent and forceful: 'Openness is not the same as the absence of presuppositions. The philosopher is also a person, a person who is only free existentially once he lets himself be controlled by the deepest forces of his inner existence.' He holds that the 'humanist' belief in the sovereignty of reason always results in intolerance, as it cannot permit two differing conclusions to issue from the same source. The neo-Calvinist, in contrast, recognises the

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[36] J.J. Degenaar, Die Sterflikheid van die Siel (Johannesburg, Simondium, 1963), pp. 18-19.

[37] Degenaar, Sterflikheid van die Siel, p. 83; cf. J.J. Degenaar, 'Transcendence as Freely Choosing to be Human,' Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 14 (1976), p. 56.

[38] J.J. Degenaar, 'Waarheid as Uit-spreking van die Syn,' Vox Theologica, 20:3 (1950), p. 59.

[39] Degenaar, Herhaling van die Vraag na die Filosofie, pp. 218-20.

[40] Degenaar, Die Sterflikheid van die Siel, p. 89; cf. J.J. Degenaar, 'Bid sonder Ophou,' Die Wekroep, November 1956, p. 11.

[41] Degenaar, 'Boekbespreking: Ontwikkeling van die Westerse Denke,' p. 29; cf. ''n Paar Opmerkings,' pp. 11-3.

sources of different philosophical views and is capable, for this reason, of 'true openness'.[42]

Degenaar never appeared to take this argument very seriously, but was gradually moved away from his initial position, until the phenomenological attitude remained only as a vague colouring for his arguments. But his colleague J.F. Kirsten sought to defend the idea of a presuppositionless philosophy.

As far as I can tell, Kirsten was never the direct target of attack from the neo-Calvinist philosophers. But he was also clearly not accepted by them. In particular, Venter kept up a sustained attack on existentialism, Christian existentialism and, above all, the work of A.E. Loen, both in his book and in an extended series of articles in the Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif throughout the early 1960s.[43] At that stage, Loen's work, De Vaste Grond, formed the focal point of the honours course offered by Kirsten at Stellenbosch. Kirsten remained silent while Degenaar stood up to Venter's cracking of the whip. But Kirsten did offer an extended discussion of philosophical presuppositions, at the invitation of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, in 1957.

Kirsten's argument starts from the premise that there is no 'universal person', but only 'particular individuals, each in a concrete situation'. Philosophy can only clarify the concerns of such concrete individuals through concepts which take account of the 'data' of science and theology. The capacity for conflict between these data, which forms the starting-point of neo-Calvinist philosophy, is simply overlooked by Kirsten. Instead, he argues that because it is impossible to suspend your concrete individuality, it must be seen as a 'self-positing presupposition' of philosophy. And this individuality, and indeed the world of which it forms the centre, is 'private, self-enclosed, so that I can never take a single step out of it'. A demand for a shared, common truth, in that context, is 'a denial of the fact that your world is the only reality for you, of the fact that you are the centre around which your own world unfolds, of the fact of your unique, concrete human existence'. It is only through God, the transcendental condition of my human existence, that I can overcome this isolation without violating my own nature.[44]

This is the third account of the Copernican revolution, which completes our picture of the philosophical possibilities of the 1950s. In many ways, it is more elegant and focused than that of either Degenaar or the neo-Calvinists. But it is also fatally removed from reality; it depends too much on sleight of hand. It is, in the end, a way of balancing between two options: insisting on the reality of God, but treating God's existence as the 'self-positing presupposition' of human existence rather than a presupposition to be defended in its own right, so that the human existence of the Christian conformist can be defended as the emptiest of tautologies. The argument shifts the focus of observation in philosophy - in the manner of Kant's

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[42] Venter, 'Transsendentale Kritiek en Fenomenologiese Openheid,' p. 25; there is a valuable discussion of this argument in Vincent Brummer, 'Is 'n Transendentale Kritiek Religieus Bepaald?', in Brummer et al, Truth and Reality (Braamfontein, de Jong's Bookshop, 1971).

[43] These articles were re-published in D.F.M. Strauss, ed., Wysgerige Temas. 'n Keur van Christelik-wysgerige opstelle uit die Pen van wyle prof. dr. Erasmus Albertus Venter (Bloemfontein, Sacum, n.d.).

[44] J.F. Kirsten, 'Aannames, Voorveronderstellings en Vooroordele in die Wysbegeerte,' Bulletin of the Department of Philosophy, University of Cape Town 7 (1957), pp. 46, 49, 50, 53.

Copernican revolution - from the reality being observed to the concrete individual who is observing. But the price of this shift is to trap the individual in a private, self-enclosed world, awaiting the rescue of a God whose identity has already been claimed by established authority. The individual is protected from the examination of their presuppositions, but ends up adopting whatever is required in any case.

It is not difficult to see why Degenaar should have refused this option. At the same time as he moved away from the argument against presuppositions, and towards an argument for declared presuppositions openly contested in debate, he also became more critical of the individualism underlying the idea of a presuppositionless philosophy. His reply to Martin Versfeld's contribution to the immortality debate introduces this critique: 'The human being is both himself and the human race. If he was only himself, we would land in individualism. If the human being was made identical to humankind, this would lead to determinism ... The believer is himself and the church. If he was only himself, we would land in individualism again and everyone would say what he wanted. But if the believer was only the church, we would end with a dogmatism where only the pope could give the final opinion ... If the believer is only himself, it leads to heresy and anarchy; if he is only the church, it leads to the hunt for heretics and imperialism. But the believer is both himself and the church, and we are given both freedom and determination'.[45]

To some extent, this critique of individualism grew out of Degenaar's earlier commitment to dialogue and communication as preconditions for philosophical transcendence. But it came to be given more definite form in his arguments against the idea of immortality. For individualism was just another form of the possessiveness of self which he saw as the crucial obstacle to human freedom. This critique also gave a new, more political content to Degenaar's commitment to openness and dialogue. On the one hand, that commitment became increasingly concrete, as it was removed from the existential and located in the real historical context in which arguments were conducted and suppressed. On the other, it prevented his commitment to dialogue from being drawn into the classical liberal defence of freedom of opinion, with its marketplace of ideas in which each competes without regard for the other.

N.P. van Wyk Louw and the Dialectic of `Oop Gesprek'

At the same time as engaging in polemic on several fronts within Afrikaner intellectual life, Degenaar also began to draw on the thought of the foremost Afrikaner intellectual of the 1950s and 60s, N.P. van Wyk Louw. Much later Degenaar was to give Louw credit for showing him the significance of the Afrikaans language for his own thought. Degenaar recalls a discussion with Louw and Martin Versfeld during the years when `critical Afrikaners, in the face the of injustice which the National Party, as the party of the majority of Afrikaners, did to their non-white fellow citizens in the name of apartheid, said that they were ashamed to be Afrikaners'. In the course of their discussion Degenaar surprised himself by saying that the only time that he was proud of being an Afrikaner was when he read Afrikaans poetry, and the poetry of Louw in particular.[46]

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[45] Degenaar, Die Sterflikheid van die Siel, p. 66.

[46] Degenaar, `Die Betekenis van N.P. van Wyk Louw vir My Eie Denke,' pp. 55-6.

Degenaar has spoken elsewhere of reading Louw's poetry in his school years.[47] But it is likely that it was only during the mid-1950s that he came to see his own philosophical work as in any way affiliated with Louw's intellectual project. The task of the student generation of the 1940s was to separate the realm of philosophical enquiry from the collective and conformist demands of Afrikaner nationalism. Louw had acquired a reputation in the 1930s and 40s as an outspoken champion of the cause of Afrikaner nationalism, and his literary achievements made him a powerful cultural icon. The earliest writings of Degenaar, Oosthuizen and their generation were concerned to locate themselves within a larger Western tradition - from Socrates to Kierkegaard - and found no clear affiliations within South African literature.

Daantjie Oosthuizen became part of Louw's discussion circle in Amsterdam while studying there in 1953-4, and began an enduring friendship with the older man.[48] After 1954, Degenaar wrote regularly for Standpunte, the quarterly journal which Louw and others had established in 1945. In 1959 Degenaar published a series of articles on existentialism and the philosophical framework of Louw's poetry. These articles - later published as a book, Eksistensie en Gestalte - began an engagement with the thought of Louw which was to continue for many decades.

Degenaar's first engagement with Louw's thought was not entirely successful. Its virtue is its willingness to see the familiar landmarks of Afrikaans literature against the background of European currents of thought. Some years before, Degenaar had expressed the view that D.J. Opperman was the Afrikaans poet in whose work the 'philosophical climate' of existentialism was most directly present.[49] This is at the same time an implicit challenge to the Afrikaner nationalist view of Afrikaans literature: the view that Afrikaans literature is primarily an expression of Afrikaner nationhood, and is unrelated, or related only accidentally and in secondary ways, to the world of contemporary thought. But this challenge is made only implicitly, without any clear statement of what is at stake, this is done only at the cost of a disabling lack of clarity about the nature of the analysis. Louw's poetry may have themes in common with existentialism without being an instance of it. Degenaar explicitly disavows the intention of showing that the poetry is existentialist, but this produces many qulaifications: 'I am concerned only to understand the structure of his [Louw's] thought with the help of a climate of thought while keeping in mind all the diverse experiences of a phenomenon which may be relevant'.[50]

Degenaar's analysis emphasises the non-dogmatic aspects of Louw's thought: his metaphysical anxiety, his sense of the finitude and mortality of the individual, his reluctant acceptance of his own subjectivity and the limits it places on his knowledge of the world. In all of this, according to Degenaar, Louw's poetry belongs within a tradition which extends

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[47] Johan Degenaar, 'Om die Wêreld te Ontdek: 'n Onderhoud met Pieter Duvenage,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 7.

[48] Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, pp. 730-2.

[49] J.J. Degenaar, 'Sören Kierkegaard 1813-1855,' Standpunte 10:2 (October-November 1955), p. 37.

[50] J.J. Degenaar, Eksistensie en Gestalte: Aantekeninge by die Eksistentialisme en by die Poësie van N.P. van Wyk Louw (Johannesburg, Simondium, 1962), p. 24.

from Socrates to the modern theologian Rudolf Bultmann.[51]

There is undoubtedly a certain validity in this approach. Louw's own engagement with this tradition extended back to his student years. His poem praising Socrates as 'the one who struggles against thousands and millions, standing like a mountain with clouds about his head' was first published in a student journal in 1928. But his conception of Socrates, and indeed of himself, as a thinker committed to the heroic effort of the creative mind is conveyed by the poem later being revised and renamed 'Shelley', and then acquiring its final form as 'Nietzsche' in 1937.[52] In the 1930s Louw poked fun at 'cultural leaders without culture', but believed that only a small intellectual elite were truly fitted for the tasks of thought.[53] Degenaar is generally inclined to recognise those aspects of Louw's thought which are closest to his own. But the more serious oversight is that he overlooks the central theme of Louw's literary politics: his commitment to Afrikaner nationalism.

Louw himself played a considerable role in the creation of the Afrikaner nationalist view of Afrikaans literature, which Degenaar was opposing - at least by implication - in linking Louw's poetry to existentialism.[54] In the 1930s Louw upheld the ideal of 'great art' as an ideal whose achievement was essential in order to justify the 'right of existence' of the Afrikaner people: 'From this silent land, a few must also be part of the "elevated discussion" which the great spirits conduct with each other across the centuries ... If we cannot create such a literature in Afrikaans,' he writes, clearly placing that prospect in the future, 'then in all honesty we should cease our struggle for the maintenance of our language and regard it as a dangerous particularism.'[55] But by 1940 Louw no longer spoke in the future tense of the task of justifying the Afrikaner 'right of existence'. In a long essay to mark Leipoldt's 60th birthday, Louw speaks of Leipoldt's role in 'creating our right of existence' through his poetry.

The essay was written in December 1940, in the aftermath of the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands, and Louw clearly has this event in mind in speaking of 'this time in which the

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[51] Degenaar offers a somewhat implausible distinction between 'existentialist' thought - namely that of Jean-Paul Sartre - and 'existential thought', which is that of the more inclusive tradition from Socrates to Bultmann (Eksistensie en Gestalte, p. 18; cf. pp. 23-4).

[52] N.P. van Wyk Louw, 'Sokrates,' Kwartaalblad van die Universiteit van Kaapstad 11:1-2 (June 1928), p. 43; 'Nietzsche,' in Versamelde Gedigte (Cape Town, Tafelberg/Human & Rousseau, 1981), p. 75. The evolution of the poem is described in D.J. Opperman, Digters van Dertig (Cape Town, Nasou, 1953), pp. 195-6. In an important essay of 1938, Louw compares Socrates to Napoleon as a 'great man' animated by an 'illogical passion' (Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 162).

[53] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 12-4, 72-9.

[54] This is not to say that Louw initially established what I am calling the Afrikaner nationalist view of Afrikaans literature. His main predecessor in establishing this view, E.C. Pienaar, was in fact hostile to the 'individualism' of Louw's early poetry. But Louw may have shared more of Pienaar's assumptions than he knew (cf. J.C. Kannemeyer, Die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur (Pretoria, Academica, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 100-1, 272).

[55] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 164-5.

right of existence of peoples is being weighed anew'.[56] The Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 had a major impact on Louw's political views, finally bringing to an end his residual sympathies with the German cause, awakening critical questions about Afrikaner nationalism and reminding him of the fragility of 'small peoples'.[57] This changed attitude came to fruition in the establishment of Standpunte in 1945, in Louw's plea for oop gesprek (open-ended discussion) in his column of that name in Die Huisgenoot during 1951-3, while he was living in Amsterdam, and in his subsequent political writings.

In a later study of Louw's politics, Degenaar placed the emphasis on this aspect of his thought; on the quest for a dialectical method, rather than the isolated search for spiritual truths. Engagement with Louw's work is enriching, Degenaar argues, 'because of his Socratic style through which he succeeds in taking the part of his own critical questioner and in keeping the dialectic of discussion constantly in motion'. Louw 'taught the Afrikaner to cultivate radical criticism as an attitude to life' and to think 'more inclusively'.[58] Although Degenaar's engagement with Louw's thought was initially located in the context of existentialism, it proved to be more enduring as he came to see Louw as a participant in a collective dialectical enterprise.

Degenaar's own conception of dialectic took on new emphases during the 1960s and early 70s. His account of Kierkegaard in 1955 gave the central role in the dialectical process to the subjectivity of the individual. He describes Kierkegaard as a 'Danish Socrates' who used dialectic to create 'knowledge of their own ignorance' among the public of Copenhagen and to inspire them to 'authentic existence and original thought'.[59] Kierkegaard rejected the idea of objective knowledge as a form of 'ventriloquism' in which already established systems of thought reproduced the knowledge required by their own systemic needs (35). Instead he set out a 'dialectic of human existence' in which time and eternity are linked 'in the sphere of the deed' and the individual must constantly choose that which is eternal while existing only in the finite realm of time (36).

Degenaar's Kierkegaardian picture of Socrates stands in sharp contrast with the account of Socratic method developed by his older colleague B.B. Keet at around the same time. For Keet, Socrates' achievement was to 'expose the hollowness' of the subjectivism of the Sophists, and 'call the human spirit back to the search for truth'. For Keet's Socrates, truth is 'not individualistic, it does not belong to the single person but is the common property of all people'. Through dialogue, we are 'freed of our subjective opinions' and enabled to establish norms on the basis of 'clear concepts'.[60]

Degenaar's polemic in the Eikestadnuus of 1962 treated Socrates as the founding figure of the liberal tradition which treated people as 'infinitely more important' than abstractions

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[56] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 2, p. 223; cf. his obituary for Leipoldt, p. 251.

[57] Cf. Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 1, pp. 286-97.

[58] Degenaar, Moraliteit en Politiek, pp. 89-90.

[59] Degenaar, 'Sören Kierkegaard 1813-1855,' pp. 30, 34. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

[60] B.B. Keet, 'Die Sokratiese Metode,' Polumnia (1953), pp. 4, 5, 6.

such as Christianity, nationalism and the like.[61] In this respect, Degenaar's 'liberal' Socrates still resembles his existentialist predecessor: dialogue and dialectic are as much a means of confirming the dignity and autonomy of the other as they are a search for truth. This is evident also in Degenaar's fullest treatment of the idea of oop gesprek in an article first published in 1966.

Here Degenaar argues that oop gesprek requires an acceptance that meaning is always relational and never absolute.[62] It calls upon people to examine their own lives, as the 'unexamined life is not worth living' (11). Because meaning is the product of a process, traditional values can never be adequate in their own right, but must always be critically questioned (11-2). This questioning takes the form of dialogue, in which the person who holds a different view is not seen as a threat but as 'an essential element for the situation of seeking meaningful co-existence and shared understanding in one world'. Where monologue treats the other as a function of the speaker's system of thought, dialogue 'meets other people as autonomous beings who have their own roles to play, which does not fit into the monological system'. The dialogical form requires the other 'because of the importance of contact with other people, and especially with differently-minded people, in order to be part of that meeting and learning for yourself' (13).

Degenaar stresses that meaning is the product of an ongoing and creative process, but the nature of that process is never clearly specified. The oop gesprek implies a specific conception of time, but all we are told of it is that it is 'open to the future'. In this context we need to be conscious that 'things can turn into their opposite' (14). We need to avoid a 'possessive' attitude towards our ideas and our own identity, and instead 'live in the daily sphere of service' (15). The argument suggests a certain kind of historical process, and uses that suggestion to counter any dogmatic fixation of meaning. But the process is left undetermined, or is determined only by the choices taken by those who encounter each other in dialogue.

Put differently, Degenaar's conception of oop gesprek has a weak reliance on history and a strong reliance on the lewenshouding (attitude to life) of the individual. [63] This is a central term which Degenaar shares with Louw, but uses with a somewhat different sense and application. For Louw, in his most direct treatment of this concept, establishing such an 'attitude to life' was a way for the individual to 'keep alive a core of resistance in the midst of the omnipotence on all sides'.[64] In more confident vein, Degenaar proposed an attitude to life not for the embattled individual, but for Afrikaner politics in general. Contrary to the nationalist defence of freedom against external enemies, he held that 'unfreedom is the result of the absence of a correct attitude to life'. The mistaken attitude which had to be overcome

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[61] J.J. Degenaar, 'Liberalisme,' Eikestadnuus, 30 March 1962; cf. Degenaar, Sekularisasie, p. 31; Degenaar's depiction of liberalism in the 1960s is discussed in Chapter One above.

[62] J.J. Degenaar, 'Die Oop Gesprek,' in J.J. Degenaar, W.A. de Klerk and M. Versfeld, Beweging Uitwaarts (Cape Town, John Malherbe, 1969), pp. 9-10. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

[63] This translation is intended to match the English idiom. Lewenshouding has a somewhat more active connotation: 'life attitude' or 'attitude of life' might be more exact.

[64] Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, p. 170.

was that which seeks to preserve the preconceptions of the individual, rather than allowing the truth of a situation to emerge: 'Man is immediately bound to himself and his view of the situation. His loss of freedom comes about through being bound to himself. His freedom is regained, in contrast, by his liberation from himself and his own importance, and his being bound to the truth of the situation.' This also made possible 'the acceptance of otherness' as an essential attribute of freedom. 'Freedom seeks, cultivates and protects the freedom of the opponent.'[65]

Degenaar's collaboration with de Klerk and Versfeld in producing Beweging Uitwaarts represented a kind of turning-point in his thought: a moment in which the themes of his philosophical work were given their most political expression, and yet did not take up any clear position in relation to politics. Perhaps his fullest discussion of dialectic - in a paper on literature and society, presented to the UCT Summer School on the sestigers in 1973 - the concept is treated almost entirely in its formal aspect. The relationship of literature and society is dialectical, Degenaar argues, in the sense that its two poles are autonomous and yet interrelated. This 'dialectic or progressive interrelationship includes tension, the overcoming of tension and the creation of new tension'.[66]

If the relationship of literature and society is seen dialectically, rather than in a one-sided way, then we can see that the writer serves society 'even when he goes creatively against society' (157). A dialectical point of view also enables us to view humanity in concrete terms, as 'the concrete person is the structural person' and the structures which define humanity concretely are political (158, 159). But Degenaar's call for South African writers to 'give attention to the political dimension of their society' (159) stops short of any account of its politics.

Solidarity without Division: The Politics of 'Oop Gesprek'

For Louw, oop gesprek was a mode of preserving intellectual integrity in the midst of the pressures of political conformity. For Degenaar, oop gesprek was a mode of engaging in politics, and actively resisting its conformist pressures. In Degenaar's thought, the attitude of solidarity makes possible this activist view of oop gesprek. His fullest account of this attitude is developed in an article written in 1962.

Degenaar introduces the concept of solidarity in answer to the question of the attitude to life which is called for from 'the modern person'. 'Solidarity is taking seriously the fact of isolation; it is an attitude of free involvement, a conscious way of standing in solidarity with a situation, the responsible acceptance of the idea that people are not there just for themselves, but for the other'.[67] He argues that the process of secularisation has made solidarity necessary and has also made it possible. The secular world is one in which individuals are isolated and responsible for themselves. It is also one in which we are able to 'accept this world as the only

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[65] J.J. Degenaar, Op Weg na 'n Nuwe Politieke Lewenshouding (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1963), p. 24, 11, 54.

[66] J.J. Degenaar, 'Die Verhouding tussen Letterkunde en Samelewing,' in James Polley, ed., Verslag van die Simposium oor die Sestigers (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1973), p. 155. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

[67] Degenaar, Sekularisasie, p. 10. Further page references to this article are given in the text.

and irreplaceable world' (10). Decolonisation and the decline of European global power makes necessary 'free co-existence' based on 'acceptance of otherness, acceptance of the freedom of the other' (16).

The demands of solidarity are violated by traditional religious conceptions which place God 'outside the world' and give some religious doctrines priority over others (10-11). These demands are also violated by ideology: 'a monolithic ideological solidarity is no true solidarity, because it leads to the exclusion of the differently-minded' (16). Despite Marx's intentions, Soviet Marxism has become a form of 'solidarity within an ideology'. Ideological thought is 'the enemy of freedom, humanity and solidarity, regardless of what kind of ideology it is' (20).

Against religion and ideology, Degenaar proposes an 'existential faith' which views solidarity as the precondition for humanity and self-knowledge' (21). This faith overcomes the need for a 'preconceived doctrine of salvation in which meetings should function and a preconceived conceptual apparatus in which discussion should take place'; it 'seeks the word which lives and not the word which agrees'. This faith is 'solidarity with the world'; it 'demands solidarity which circumvents state and church in an unconditional love for this world and all its possibilities' (24).

The basic conceptual problem with Degenaar's argument, however, is that it can take no account of social division. For solidarity is in large part the outcome of social division. Solidarity is a form of alignment with one side or another which becomes possible only when there are different sides to a conflict. 'Solidarity with the world' might be a coherent figure of speech insofar as it is opposed to the hope of salvation in a better world to come. But the choice which the religious believer might make between this world and the next is a more exceptional choice than Degenaar realises. The question of solidarity is far more likely to arise - and arises in a far more widely applicable sense - when we take sides in the context of an actual struggle. On occasion Degenaar seems to recognise this, in asserting that freedom implies struggle: 'There is no such thing as ready-made or self-evident freedom. Ready-made freedom would not be chosen and so would lose its meaning' (15). Similarly, his concern that the differently-minded should be included within the sphere of human solidarity implies a recognition of division within this world rather than between this world and the next. But this is line of argument never consistently followed.

The inspiration for Degenaar's call for solidarity came partly from the writings of Albert Camus. In his short book on Camus, Degenaar takes further his discussion of solidarity. Degenaar introduces Camus as modern world's foremost proponent of 'solidarity with the oppressed and the victims'.[68] In his discussion of Camus' writings, Degenaar returns to questions concerning secularisation and the avoidance of the demands of solidarity through belief in a reality which transcends human concerns. He also explores new problems concerning the role of solidarity in creating meaningful forms of community, and concerning the artist's solidarity with the oppressed. But it is difficult to know whether he grasps the central problem of his earlier argument.

Camus' solidarity with the victim turns out to be hedged about with qualifications. It opposes the absolutism of the 'German ideologies' with 'the Mediterranean attitude of relativity in which rebellion is tempered by moderation' (41). It is a form of 'solidarity with the totality of life' insofar as it 'refuses nothing which has to do with life' (48). It does not

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[68] J.J. Degenaar, Die Wêreld van Albert Camus (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers Boekhandel, 1966), p. 10. Further page references are given in the text.

take sides in the Algerian conflict, or takes sides only with 'the Algeria of the future where French and Arabs will associate freely together' (61). But at this stage the conceptual problem simply becomes deeper: solidarity with others is required in order to transcend the situation in which you find yourself; and that solidarity is now directed in turn towards an ideal which already transcends the historically existing situation.

Whatever the limitations of this framework, it forms the basis for a powerful critique of nationalism. Degenaar's critique of nationalism is distinctive in its focus on the ethical problems which arise from nationalist forms of politics. Without limiting itself to a critique of apartheid, it exposes the theologism, romanticism and racism to which nationalism so easily lends itself.[69] In this he draws on the later writings of N.P. van Wyk Louw, in which Louw warns that a nation which chooses its own survival above 'survival in justice' will eventually become 'something hateful and evil' to the best of its own people and those outside it.[70]

But Degenaar does not share Louw's Afrikaner nationalist politics. In his major assessment of Louw's political thought some years later, he argues that 'the political philosophy of the oop gesprek' is pluralism rather than nationalism.[71] Degenaar takes his distance from Louw without condemning him for his complicity with Afrikaner nationalism and the policy of apartheid. But the question of the extent of his complicity or dissent is one which will continue to be debated.[72]

There is a sense in which Degenaar's critique of Afrikaner nationalism is both more and less faithful to the dialectical impulse of Louw's idea of oop gesprek. Louw emphasised the difference between the freedom of speech, on the one hand, as a formal right entrenched in law and, on the other hand, as a practice embodied in a discursive community within which argument would be respected and its conclusions lived out. His peculiarly literary and cultural commitment to Afrikaner nationalism was in part the result of his belief that no such discursive community could be established among all South Africans, across divisions of language and race. He turned towards Afrikaner nationalism partly in the hope that it would establish such a community, and in the belief that oop gesprek within such a discursive community was a precondition for a rational resolution of South Africa's conflicts. Having done so, however, he was trapped into defending the increasingly irrational needs of Afrikaner power, including those of conformity and repression.

But the first premise of this position - the belief that discursive community could only be established within ethnic limits - was shared by almost all of Louw's contemporaries. It forms the basis for the Africanism of the ANC Youth League in the 1940s, which sought to recover and modernise the legacy of the tribal imbizo in a democratic South Africa.[73] It forms the basis of the account of racial division in South Africa in Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country in

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[69] J.J. Degenaar, 'Nasionalisme,' in Degenaar, de Klerk and Versfeld, Beweging Uitwaarts, pp. 127-56, especially pp. 139-45.

[70] Degenaar, 'Nasionalisme,' p. 156; cf. Louw, Versamelde Prosa, vol. 1, pp. 462-3.

[71] Degenaar, Moraliteit en Politiek, p. 88.

[72] Cf. note 49 in Chapter One above.

[73] Cf. Andrew Nash, 'Mandela's Democracy,' Monthly Review 50:11 (May 1999), pp. 18-28.

which white and blacks can speak to each other only across the tragic divide of wasted lives.[74] Degenaar turned away from the trap of defending Afrikaner power. But he contested the premise of Louw's Afrikaner nationalism at a philosophical level alone. As a result, the distinction between the concrete freedom of the dialectical tradition and the formal freedom of liberal capitalism became increasingly less central to his work.

Peter Blum's Critique of 'Oop Gesprek'

It is worth considering briefly the contemporary response to Louw and Degenaar which most forcefully called into question the practice of oop gesprek: Peter Blum's often scornful account of the cultural and literary politics of Afrikaner dissent in this period. Blum was an active presence in Afrikaans literature for hardly a decade. His family had fled fascism in Europe in 1936. He began writing verse in Afrikaans around 1950, published two path-breaking collections in quick succession, then left South Africa in 1960, soon after the Sharpeville massacre and the refusal of his application for citizenship.

Blum's first volume of poetry, Steenbok tot Poolsee, was defended by Opperman and Louw against the calls of the Afrikaanse Skrywerskring for the publishers to withdraw it from circulation as an offence against morality. Blum responded that religious belief was not a condition for art, although many Afrikaners still think that 'the poet is the assistant of the preacher'.[75]

Blum may have shared with Louw and others a commitment to literary freedom, but certainly did not see himself as close to Louw in other respects. He derided Louw's 'lower Drakenstein arrogance' with its cult of the long-established landowners of the Western Cape, claiming that Afrikaners were nomadic rather than 'sons of the soil' (15). He regarded Louw as intellectually shallow, 'stagnating in a rapture of self-contemplation' (21). He did not believe that Louw was genuinely committed to critical enquiry: 'I'm always amazed at the fact that in such a critical society as ours, there is one man who no one dares to criticise - our greatest poet,' he wrote to Opperman after his satire on Louw's Klipwerk had been rejected for publication in Standpunte (56-7).

Where the Louws articulated an idea of the poet as prophet, Blum saw the demands of prophecy in the South African context very differently. 'The only prophet in Afrikaans,' he wrote to Ernst Lindenberg in 1957, 'would be he who rejected the whole Nat-Kalf [Nationalist-Calvinist] complex and openly attacked it' (93). 'What does it help,' he wrote to Jan Rabie in 1947, 'to drone on about world culture and internationalism and the great European past if you buggers at every election, like lemmings storming suicidally into the sea, vote for precisely those Christian Nationalists who are set on restricting your spirits and harnessing your intellects for the greater glory of the national unculture?' (36). In his view, the luminaries of the Cape literary establishment were 'men of culture who have given an essentially anti-cultural movement much of its confidence'. Their equivocal relationship to Afrikaner nationalism explained the 'middle-aged and professorial nature' of Standpunte. 'A

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[74] Cf. Andrew Nash, 'The Way to the Beloved Country: History and the Individual in Alan Paton's "Towards the Mountain",' English in Africa 10:2 (October 1983), pp. 11-28.

[75] J.C. Kannemeyer, Wat het Geword van Peter Blum? (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1993), p. 72. This work contains extensive extracts from Blum's published and unpublished writings which are unavailable or not easily available elsewhere. Further page references to it are given in the text.

lively literature has always taken a position on the issues of the day ... For us that means: for or against the Nats. No developed person could be for them - and they do not dare be against them. Partly for fear of their daily bread (party press, party appointments at universities, etc); partly out of misplaced loyalty. No wonder that lot is so lifeless' (124-5).

Blum's response to Degenaar's articles on Louw and existentialism was not sympathetic, but did more to clarify his own perspective. Blum's concern was to defend the integrity of aesthetic judgement against philosophical exegesis. The main question of literary criticism, he argued in Die Burger, was whether a poem or a story was well-made or not, and the question of the 'structure of thought' behind it did nothing to answer that question (209-11; cf. 136).

In his subsequent correspondence with Degenaar, Blum explained that he regarded excessive intellectualism as a defect of Louw's poetry - especially his earlier work. Blum added: 'There is a definite danger in the Afrikaans cultural world today that "existential" is being equated with "good" - broad definition of it (not only yours) adds greatly to this danger. "Existentialism" is often used as a word of praise - mainly by those who would no longer dare use "Calvinistic" as a term of praise'.[76]

Blum's letters contain many harsh personal judgements. He defends his aestheticism without ever reflecting on its basic assumptions. But his poems create a universe of meaning in which a far more precise and telling picture is presented of the historical conditions in which the independent life of the mind can flourish. In doing this, his crucial metaphor is that of the 'enclave' or 'borderland'. His poem 'Voltaire at Ferney' situates the fertile mind in the 'haven against disorder' provided by Voltaire's estate:

> He who orders and thinks, farms always between two empires,
> so I breathe freely in this borderland air
> half outside France, great in malpractices,
> which takes offence at my thought, as I do at its frivolity,
> while every night Geneva, small and surly,
> closes its gates against me as if against the devil.[77]

But such enclaves are always vulnerable. Elsewhere Blum describes four 'brief moments of light' across many centuries: the building of the basilica of Ataulf as Goths invade Spain, Vandals threaten the Mediterranean and Saxons pillage Britain; King Koloman of Hungary's denial of magic during the 12th century 'haunted by dragons and giants'; the five days of Hungarian resistance to the Soviet invasion of 1956; and finally his own marriage. The poem brings these four moments into a single, entirely unsentimental view. These 'enclaves of light' are always 'besieged' and vulnerable. Yet they deserve fame. While they last, they provide 'no fire, but an enlightened peace'.[78]

In 1963, some years after he had settled in London, Blum wrote a wide-ranging letter to

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[76] Degenaar, 'Die Betekenis van N.P. van Wyk Louw vir My Eie Denke,' p. 51.

[77] Peter Blum, Enklaves van die Lig (Cape Town, A.A. Balkema, 1958), p. 8; cf. Steenbok tot Poolsee (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1955), pp. 33-6.

[78] Blum, Enklaves van die Lig, pp. 38-9.

Louw, in which he responded to Louw's poem on the Soviet invasion of Hungary.[79] 'Concerning Hungary, you and I were apparently on the same side,' he said, 'a rare and gratifying occasion. Of course, for me it was a more complicated matter than for you ... I am deeply aware of the relativity of the "freedom" of small nations, knowing that Hungary since Mohacs has always been someone's satellite: Turkey, Austria, Germany, Russia in that order, and that in 1956 it could at most have become America's or "Western Europe's", although perhaps under a less hard-hearted regime. I also find it hard to draw a line between nationalism and imperialism: the conduct of small nations can be just as shitty as that of great ... To tell the truth: small nations inevitably have a kind of narrowness and smallness of soul which would also oppress, or at least hinder, various freedoms and values, if there were not always a few larger political units in the world'.[80]

For Blum, in short, there was no oop gesprek in South Africa. The discussions which were passed of as such took place within a specific circle. The historical equivocation of dissenting Afrikaners prevented them from drawing clear conclusions. Their circle was held together by their defence of that equivocation. Their freedom within the restricted context of Afrikaans intellectual life was ensured only by the existence of larger and more powerful cultures, which Afrikaner nationalism wished to emulate or whose disapproval it feared. Finally, the whole configuration was kept in place by a view of culture as progressive - rather than episodic and 'besieged' - which Blum considered both hypocritical and self-defeating.

For Blum, Afrikaans literature provided no 'enclave'; no 'haven against disorder'. His own sensibility was deeply informed by Europe: Kannemeyer comments that in his poetry 'the whole of western European literature and intellectual life vibrates as never before' in Afrikaans.[81] After he left South Africa, he welcomed every challenge to racial power in South Africa.[82] He never identified himself with any project within the struggle against racial oppression in South Africa. His alternative was withdrawal and a deliberately obscure exile from the language and literature of Afrikaans.

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[79] Louw, Versamelde Gedigte, pp. 320-1.

[80] Kannemeyer, Wat het Geword van Peter Blum?, p. 222.

[81] J.C. Kannemeyer, Ontsyferde Stene (Stellenbosch, Inset, 1996), p. 126.

[82] Kannemeyer, Wat het Geword van Peter Blum?, pp. 151-2.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BREYTEN BREYTENBACH AS DIALECTICAL THINKER

The Crisis of the Dialectical Tradition

From the1850s until sometime about 1970, the distinctive themes and presuppositions of the dialectical tradition described in this study were continuously present in South African political and intellectual life. At some times these themes were more coherently organised and forcefully articulated; at others more dispersed and marginal. At some times they cohered into collective projects, consciously defined in opposition to the ruling ideas of the day; at others they were pursued by individuals in relative isolation. But the central tenets of this tradition, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this study, endured: free and ongoing discussion as a precondition for the good society; self-discovery as an essential part of human liberation, and the self as process rather than essence; human liberation as a process requiring conscious recovery of an ancient past, and especially the legacy of the Greek city-state.

These ideas were never disowned or abandoned by their main proponents. And there was always a new generation who took them up again - never fully understanding their own debt to the generation before - gave them a new inflection, sought to develop them for new purposes, drew on new sources in order to keep these central arguments alive.

Sometime about 1970, however, this tradition entered a period of crisis - a crisis whose outcome, three decades later, is still far from certain. The origins of this crisis are not reducible to a single event or process, and it must be described at several different levels.

First, at the simplest level, this crisis was the result of a decade or more of increasing pressures for conformity among Afrikaners, and hostility towards dissent. By the time of the National Party's election victory of 1948, the dialectical tradition itself - although it long pre-dated apartheid - had come largely to be identified with Afrikaner dissent from apartheid ideology. Not all dissenters could be located within the dialectical tradition, but dissent - or the possibility of dissent - was the soil in which the dialectical tradition was rooted.

In earlier disputes, such as that around Professor du Plessis and the Dutch Reformed Church in the 1920s and 30s, Afrikaners, including National Party (NP) leaders, openly took opposing sides.[1] The context of urbanisation, the creation of interlocking ethnic organisations covering all spheres of Afrikaner life, and the massive increase in Afrikaner employment in government service after 1948, created the means through which a deadening uniformity could be imposed.[2] Soon after Verwoerd became leader of the NP in 1958, dissent came to be seen as disloyalty or betrayal. This effect was heightened by the dominating personality of Verwoerd himself, who intervened to stifle debate in Die Burger on coloured political rights

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[1] Cf. Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 1, p. 72.

[2] Between 1946 and 1960, the number of Afrikaners employed in government service increased by 98.5%, while numbers of English-speaking whites declined by 25.2%, according to Dan O'Meara, Forty Lost Years (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1996), p. 62; cf. p. 76; cf. also F. van Zyl Slabbert, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, White Politics and Political Change in South Africa,' in L. Thompson and J. Butler, eds., Change in Contemporary South Africa (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975), especially pp. 4-12.

and to overturn the decisions of the Dutch Reformed Church leadership at the Cottesloe conference of 1960, to remove the leadership of SABRA in 1961, and to denounce van Wyk Louw's play Die Pluimsaad Waai Vêr in 1966, for lack of patriotism.[3] Those who could withstand such pressures of conformity were exceptional individuals, or those whose intellectual achievement and integrity had been established to an extent which made it difficult to question. Lesser figures could not easily follow their lead.

Second, within this already restricted context, natural attrition took its toll. The death of leading figures of Afrikaner dissent - some at a relatively early age - thinned its ranks: Ingrid Jonker, aged 31, in 1965; Daantjie Oosthuizen, aged 43, in 1969; N.P. van Wyk Louw, who for decades had occupied a pre-eminent position within Afrikaner intellectual life, in 1970, aged 64; B.B. Keet, one of the original Bible translators and a veteran of the Second Language Movement, in 1974, at the ripe old age of 89; in the same year, the poet Wilhelm Knobel, aged 38; André Hugo in 1975, aged 45. In any time and place, such luminaries would have been difficult to replace. In the context of an increasingly authoritarian Afrikaner political and intellectual culture, the loss of these outstanding figures was still more severely felt.

Third, although many of the figures within the dialectical tradition who had already established themselves by about 1970 continued to be critical of apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism, their own work developed in new directions. There was no natural successor to Louw as emblem of Afrikaner dissent, and key proponent of the themes of the dialectical tradition. Beyers Naudé - Louw's former dominee, with whom he had broken off relations after Naudé's removal from office in the aftermath of Cottesloe[4] - was the foremost Afrikaner critic of apartheid, and was far bolder and more forthright in this than Louw had ever been. Something of the Socratic commitment to 'following the argument where it leads', regardless of convention and consequence, can be seen in Naudé's conversion to the ideals of non-racialism. But Naudé was not primarily an intellectual. Although certain of his habits of mind may have been drawn from this distinctive tradition, he had no interest in developing or elaborating its themes.

D.J. Opperman - Louw's rival over several decades for the mantle of the greatest living Afrikaans poet, and collaborator in Standpunte, was in broad sympathy with his politics, although less philosophical in orientation. Around the time of Louw's death, and partly as a result of it, he fell into a depression, and withdrew into an alcoholic silence.[5] Martin Versfeld was later to be described by Rykie van Reenen as the Afrikaner intellectual who had assumed the role of Louw.[6] Versfeld's writings - above all, the essays collected in Klip en Klei (1968)

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[3] A.H. Luckhoff, Cottesloe (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978), pp. 116-9 ; J.F. Holleman, 'The Great Purge,' in Pierre Hugo, ed., South African Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Nic Olivier (Cape Town, Die Suid-Afrikaan, 1989), pp. 34-48; Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, pp. 1034-57.

[4] Steyn, Van Wyk Louw, vol. 2, pp. 968-71.

[5] Cf. J.C. Kannemeyer, D.J. Opperman: 'n Biografie (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1986), pp. 392-7.

[6] Rykie van Reenen, 'Tot Lafenis van 'n Honger en Verskreeude Volkie' (review of Versfeld, Tyd en Dae), Die Burger 8 July 1982; cf. W.A. de Klerk, The Puritans in Africa (London, Rex Colling, 1975), pp. 341-4.

- had considerable influence on the generation of the sestigers. He had always been the figure within this tradition most reluctant to engage directly and consistently with contemporary political issues.[7] Van Reenen's estimate of him as the successor to Louw is perhaps a sign of the extent to which the unity of the political and philosophical concerns of Afrikaner dissent had been severed in the years after Louw's death. Among younger literary figures, the novelist André P. Brink was prolific, controversial and outspoken, but his literary work and political arguments were more derivative, and never won the kind of respect which had been accorded to Louw's work.

The pre-eminent Afrikaner critic of the orthodoxies of the day after Louw's death was probably Johan Degenaar. But Degenaar's style and temperament were very different from Louw's - depending on an unusual capacity to engage with others, rather than the commanding authority of his intellect. It was only in the early 1970s that Degenaar produced his fullest account of the theme of dialectic, which was thereafter to become much less central to his work.[8] But a basic re-orientation in his thought had already taken place by then.

In the 1960s, he followed Daantjie Oosthuizen in turning to the philosophy of 'ordinary language', inspired by the work of the later Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin and others.[9] This did not entirely draw him away from larger political and historical themes, but gave his treatment of them a different basis and inflection. Degenaar's analyses came to focus more directly on the central ideological issues of the time, but did so in a way which was more modest and piecemeal. In drawing on the accepted meaning of a term, in accordance with the techniques of conceptual analysis, his work tended also towards a tame acceptance of dominant Western discourses. In the 1970s, he became apparently more critical of liberalism at the same time as drawing closer to its assumptions in his support - central to his politics after about 1974 - of pluralism as a political framework.[10]

Fourth, in this context, a younger generation of dissenting Afrikaner intellectuals, many of them directly influenced by Degenaar, never really sought to develop the central themes of the dialectical tradition. Many of them completed their studies and entered academic life in the 1960s, at a time when academic disciplines were becoming more professionalised, leaving little room for the role of 'public intellectual', concerned with the broadest political and philosophical questions. But this broadly-defined public role for the intellectual had been essential to the dialectical tradition until then.

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[7] Versfeld's decision to stay out of politics appears to have been taken as early as 1940, and is defended in correspondence with R.F. Alfred Hoernlé, who sought to recruit him for the Army Education Unit around that time (Hoernlé papers, archives of the University of the Witwatersrand). His writings from the 1960s are discussed in Chapter Nine below.

[8] Degenaar, 'Die Verhouding tussen Letterkunde en Samelewing,' in Polley, ed., Simposium oor die Sestigers, pp. 152-60; cf. 'Thought thinking against Itself,' Philosophical Papers, vol. 5 (1976), pp. 162-5.

[9] Cf. Degenaar, 'Sekularisasie en die Taalspel van die Christelike Evangelie,' in Sekularisasie, pp. 71-86.

[10] Cf. J.J. Degenaar, 'Pluralisme', Standpunte vol. 27, no. 3 (1974), pp. 6-21; 'State and Society: A Pluralist Approach,' Philosophical Papers 6 (1977), pp. 1-32; 'Pluralism and the Plural Society,' in A. de Crespigny and R. Schrire, eds., The Government and Politics of South Africa (Cape Town, Juta, 1978), pp. 223-44.

The resulting dilemmas emerge in different registers in this generation's accounts of their student days. Van Zyl Slabbert describes how he was drawn to existentialism, under the guidance of Jannie Gagiano, only to become 'bored ... with seeing myself as the centre of the universe of meaning'.[11] After this initial excitement, Slabbert became a follower of Karl Popper's philosophy of science.[12] The critique of dogmatism developed by Degenaar left its traces in Slabbert's political thought, but has taken its place as the basis for a positivist, often quite mechanistic, conception of social science, along with an unquestioning acceptance of capitalism.[13] Lina Spies describes herself as a 'grateful disciple' of Degenaar's, but remains puzzled about how he encountered the disapproval of the Dutch Reformed Church.[14] J.C. Kannemeyer describes the impact of Degenaar's teaching, without any suggestion that he saw a similar role as public intellectual for himself.[15] Vincent Brümmer - the son of Professor du Plessis's closest colleague, born in the year of du Plessis's eventual removal from the theological seminary - studied under Degenaar, and emerged as a powerful critic of Christian nationalist philosophy in the 1960s, before his departure from South Africa to take up a chair of philosophy at Utrecht in the Netherlands in 1967.[16]

The intellectual of this generation who remained closest to the perspectives of Degenaar and the dialectical tradition was his student and colleague of many years, André du Toit. Du Toit's M.A. thesis, on Kierkegaard's concept of time, dealt with a central philosophical problem in the dialectical tradition in South Africa, in the work of the modern philosopher who was perhaps most influential within that tradition.[17] Much of his subsequent work can be seen as a continuation of the distinctive kind of moral enquiry undertaken within the dialectical tradition.[18] He has also given a new dimension to the enquiry into the conditions which make particular ideas and arguments possible by relating it to the development of specific intellectual

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[11] Slabbert, The Last White Parliament, pp. 24-5; cf. Slabbert, Afrikaner Afrikaan (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1999), pp. 11-2.

[12] Slabbert, Afrikaner Afrikaan, pp. 15-6, 65-7; for his relationship with George Soros and his Open Society Foundation, inspired by Popper, cf. pp. 36-48.

[13] Slabbert, Afrikaner Afrikaan, pp.

[14] Spies, 'Sy Beiteltjie was Skerp Genoeg,', pp. 118-9.

[15] Kannemeyer, Die Rym kan ook 'n Lewe in Beslag Neem, pp. 42-4.

[16] Cf. Brummer,'Kronkels in Mijn Denkweg,', pp. 7-27; cf. bibliography of his writings in in van den Brink et al, eds., Wijsgerige Theologie in Beweging, pp. 193-5.

[17] A.B. du Toit, Die Tyd as Antropologiese Kategorie by Kierkegaard (unpublished M.A. thesis, Stellenbosch, 1962).

[18] Cf. André du Toit, Die Sondes van die Vaders (Cape Town, Rubicon, 1986), discussed in chapter ten below. A survey of du Toit's philosophical career is given in 'Filosoof tussen Politiek en Geskiedenis: André du Toit in Gesprek met Pieter Duvenage,' Fragmente 5 (2000), pp. 95-120.

disciplines in South Africa.[19] His work has also been informed by a level of historical awareness and insight unprecedented within that tradition itself.[20]

But even this exception confirms the rule. His own major political engagement in the 1970s - resulting in the political report of the project undertaken by the Christian Institute and South African Council of Churches, South Africa's Political Alternatives - was of a very different temper. It was premised on classical liberal values, drew on the mainstream of social science, and its main arguments were constitutional in focus. Its critique of the 'Westminster model' of parliamentary democracy was to have considerable influence in the political debates of the next decades. The report includes a perceptive discussion of the 'dialectical dynamics' of apartheid policies - that is, of the paradoxes and contradictions of its attempt to combine racial separation with development - as part of its account of the problems of transition in South Africa.[21] Its conception of dialectic represents a halfway house for the dialectical tradition, which could not serve as the basis for further development. It departs from the Socratic model of contradiction as source of intellectual clarification, but never seeks to locate its own values and strategies within a historical model of dialectic. It neither conforms to the more static models of political sociology, nor presents a clear alternative to them. In this sense, it by-passed the central themes of the dialectical tradition, and it was only later - in a significantly changed context - that du Toit was to return to them.

Fifth, when the uniformity imposed by Verwoerd came to an end, there was no return to the conditions in which earlier debates had taken place. Afrikaner dissent had been brought into existence by the rise to power of the NP, and then stifled by Verwoerd. It was now transformed through the emergence of the verligtes - a loose grouping of reform-minded individuals defined by their conviction that the NP was the main vehicle for reform in South Africa. New pressures - the decolonisation of Africa; the growing campaign to isolate South Africa internationally; the growth of an Afrikaner capitalist class with interests clearly separate from those of Afrikaner workers or small farmers; the growth of an African working class in the cities - made necessary a greater degree of pragmatism and flexibility within the NP.[22] The verligtes represented not so much a break with the Afrikaner establishment as a division within in. Their emergence re-legitimated dissent within the major institutions of Afrikaner political and intellectual life, but on condition it was expressed within the confines of NP

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[19] E.g., André du Toit, 'Die Filosofie in 'n Veranderende Plurale Samelewing,' Standpunte 30:3 (June 1977), pp. 18-32 (English translation in South African Journal of Philosophy 1:4 (1982), pp. 154-61); du Toit, 'The Problem of Intellectual History in (Post) Colonial Societies: The Case of South Africa,' Politikon 18:2 (June 1991), pp. 5-25.

[20] E.g., du Toit and Giliomee, eds., Afrikaner Political Thought, vol. 1; 'No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism,' American Historical Review 88:4 (October 1983), pp. 920-52; 'Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm: F.A. van Jaarsveld and the Historical Evidence for the Afrikaner's Ideas on his Calling and Mission,' South African Historical Journal 16 (1984), pp. 48-79.

[21] Peter Randall, ed., South Africa's Political Alternatives (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1973), pp. 192-201. The report is a collective document signed by thirteen members of the Commission. Du Toit was the author of the largest part of it, including this chapter.

[22] Cf. O'Meara, Forty Lost Years, pp. 150-67.

policy.[23]

In this context, the verligte movement took over many of the themes of the dialectical tradition, but in a debased form, and incorporated them into a pragmatic defence of power and privilege. A commitment to free speech as a mode of 'following the argument where it leads' no longer stood in stark contrast to the rigid and unquestioning defence of orthodoxy, as in the days of Verwoerd. Instead, the rhetoric of that commitment was appropriated in calls for 'dialogue' with leaders of independent states in Africa, better 'understanding' created by the covert operations of the Department of Information, and 'consultation' with those black leaders in South Africa who had already compromised themselves through their participation in apartheid institutions. By the mid-1980s this process would finally lead to calls for 'negotiations' with the leaders of the liberation movement itself, as a means of deflecting the demands of the majority.

The growing divisions between verlig and verkramp within Afrikaner politics in the 1970s and 80s reflected the serious threat to racial domination in South Africa - and, at least implicitly, to capitalism - posed by an increasingly militant black working class. At the same time, the traditional divisions of South African intellectual life were re-shaped by the emergence of a current of Marxist thought which - unlike the Marxism of earlier decades - gained a foothold in the universities, especially in the social sciences.[24] This development also changed the context in which the dialectical tradition had previously been sustained within Afrikaner dissent. Dissenting Afrikaners had often been able to avoid taking a definite political stance in a context in which Afrikaner nationalism and liberalism provided the main poles of orientation. Criticism of apartheid could be carefully coded in such a way as to protect the critic from the accusation of ethnic betrayal, while yet providing ammunition to liberals based in mainly English-speaking political organisations, universities or newspapers. But now that liberalism itself was subjected to a radical critique, such veterans of Afrikaner dissent as W.A. de Klerk felt it necessary to turn their attack on those striving for 'radical change' in South Africa, and then to attack the idea of non-racial democracy as overly 'radical'.[25]

If these five levels of change are taken together, they add up to a fundamental and enduring change in the character of Afrikaner political and intellectual life around 1970 - a change which threatened the basis of the dialectical tradition as it had existed for a century or more. It would be possible to argue - although this is not quite the argument which I wish to make here - that, in this way, the dialectical tradition in South Africa came to an end: its fortunes linked to Afrikaner dissent after 1948, it was first crushed by Verwoerd; then deprived of a coherent focus of critique by the pragmatism of Vorster and the verligtes; finally, its conception of social change based on rational argument within the ruling-group was rendered irrelevant by the rising tide of black militance after June 1976.

Indeed, it would be possible to locate this ending still more precisely - although again this is not quite what I wish to do - in Breyten Breytenbach's disastrous attempt in 1975 to establish an underground organisation of white militants aligned to the liberation struggle in South Africa, which ended in his arrest, conviction and imprisonment. For Breytenbach can be

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[23] Cf. du Toit, Sondes van die Vaders, pp. 14-6.

[24] Cf. Chapter Nine below.

[25] W.A. de Klerk, 'Diary of a Bolander', Cape Times, 13 June 1972; de Klerk, 'Siening van die Radikale Linkses', Deurbraak March 1974, pp. 8-9; cf. de Klerk, Puritans in Africa, pp. 332-4..

seen as representing this tradition in its radicalised form, seeking to carry its commitment to self-emancipation through conscious and critical discussion into the liberation movement, and to direct its critique of dogmatism not only against the white establishment, but equally against the Stalinism of the South African Communist Party (SACP). His activism in the politics of the liberation movement, through the formation of Okhela, can also be seen as a logical response to the central dilemma facing Afrikaner dissent: either to stand with the apartheid regime, or with the struggle of the majority. His recantation in court could be seen, then, as the moment of implosion for this distinctive attempt, sustained over a century or more, to find a basis for the good society in the conscious participation of its members in honest and open argument.

It was not simply that Breytenbach's mission failed, or that he recanted. At the moment of his recantation, although there were many to protest against his imprisonment or call for more lenient treatment, there was no-one willing to defend the underlying political and philosophical conception which had inspired his entire project. Even when Breytenbach himself emerged from prison in 1982, the note of regret and disillusionment was conspicuous in his writing, while the distinctive elements of his political thinking emerged only gradually, and in an oblique and fragmentary way.

Is this, then, how the story ends? Breytenbach's work while in prison, and since his release, provide a reason to hesitate before drawing such a conclusion. Since then, he has developed more explicitly many of the themes which animated his intervention in underground politics - above all, in a critique of the politics of South Africa's negotiated settlement. His analyses have been cast in an explicitly dialectical mould, and have put forward a conception of dialectic which - although unsystematic, incomplete and clearly contestable - is almost certainly unprecedented in the South African context in its originality and ambition, its richness and complexity.

Breytenbach, the Sestigers and the Dialectical Tradition

Breytenbach was an almost exact contemporary of the Stellenbosch students whose formation was so crucially marked by the influence of Johan Degenaar. André du Toit, van Zyl Slabbert, Jannie Gagiano, Lina Spies and J.C. Kannemeyer (to mention those whose acknowledgement of Degenaar is part of the record) were all undergraduates - as was Breytenbach - in 1959, when the legislation which imposed apartheid on the universities was enacted amidst protest and controversy. But Breytenbach's relationship to the dialectical tradition was different from theirs in two crucial respects.

First, as a student at the University of Cape Town, Breytenbach had turned his back on the Afrikaner establishment with a decisiveness that prevented him from being influenced in any particular way by the central figures of the dialectical tradition.[26] He had less sense of an alternative current within Afrikaner political and intellectual life than did Slabbert, du Toit and others. The literary figures who were crucial to his development - Jan Rabie and Uys Krige[27] - wrote in Afrikaans, but had lived in Europe for many years, and had weak links to the

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[26] On Breytenbach's student years, cf. Peter Dreyer, Martyrs and Fanatics (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1980), pp. 25-7.

[27] For Breytenbach's acknowledgement of Rabie and Krige, cf. Return to Paradise, pp. 134, 143, 170; Breytenbach, Woordwerk (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1999), pp. 72-3.

institutions of Afrikaner culture. The literary magazine, Contrast, in which they were most at home, and in which Breytenbach himself published his early writings, was predominantly English. He was taught by D.J. Opperman, but does not appear to have been much influenced by the experience.[28] Adam Small, a few years his senior at the University of Cape Town, had studied with Versfeld, and found many affinities with the thought of van Wyk Louw. There are interesting parallels between the thought of Versfeld and that of Breytenbach. But the aspects of Versfeld's thought that were of interest to Breytenbach were also those which were least representative of the dialectical tradition.[29]

Second, having quit his studies without gaining a degree, Breytenbach was not especially subject to the pressures of academic specialisation in the same way as his contemporaries who were entering academic life. After his meteoric rise to public attention in 1964-5 - with the publication of his award-winning collections of poetry and prose, and the controversy around the government's refusal of a visa for his 'non-white' wife to visit South Africa - his role as Afrikanerdom's most celebrated exile forced upon him the role of public intellectual, of interpreter and critic of all aspects of South African life, to an unusual degree. The central audience he had to address was not to be found in department and faculty structures, or professional associations and journals, but rather in UNESCO, the anti-apartheid movement and the underground structures of the liberation movement.

As a result, what I have described as the crisis of the dialectical tradition, which had become apparent by about 1970, made itself felt in very different ways in Breytenbach's work and in that of his academic contemporaries. His enduringly ambivalent relationship to the literary politics of his own generation - at once emblematic of that generation, and yet rebelling against the status it accorded him - can also be seen in this light. By the time of his arrest in 1975, he had become the most outspoken critic of Afrikaner dissent, and of the arguments and ideas from the dialectical tradition which have routinely been deployed in its defence. At the same time, however, this critique was drawn essentially from the norms which the dialectical tradition had claimed to uphold. Against the rhetoric of oop gesprek, he denied that it could truly be 'open' within the context of apartheid, and in doing so affirmed the value of the 'openness' it claimed to represent.

This pattern of simultaneous critique and appropriation is most readily apparent in Breytenbach's relationship to the sestigers. He has frequently been treated as a leading sestiger himself, representing, along with André Brink, the 'more overtly political' moment in this literary movement.[30] Breytenbach's differences with the sestigers, including Brink, turned to a considerable extent on the political meaning and significance of the virtues which had been upheld by Afrikaner dissent over generations: independence of mind, awareness of fallibility, willingness to consider all points of view.

Brink quotes a letter which Breytenbach wrote to him in 1963, protesting against the expectation of a 'change of heart' in the Afrikaner, and calling for more active involvement of Afrikaner intellectuals in the liberation struggle. By 1969, according to Brink, he and Breytenbach had 'agreed to differ' on the question of whether South African society could be

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[28] Breyten Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een) (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1987), pp. 68-9.

[29] Cf. Chapter Nine below.

[30] Michael Chapman, Southern African Literatures (London and New York, Longman, 1996), p. 250; cf. pp. 345-8.

improved without 'destroying the very foundations' of racial power.[31]

By then, Breytenbach had openly distanced himself from the sestigers. In an open letter to Chris Barnard - the Afrikaans writer who had been largely responsible for the publication of Breytenbach's first books in 1964, and an editor of the newly-established literary journal, Kol - he questioned the role of the journal, and Afrikaans literature more broadly. What was its response, he asked, to 'a situation in which so many of your differently-pigmented and/or differently-minded compatriots are in prison as a result of thinking differently, a situation in which, just north of your national borders, some of your fellow-citizens are taking up arms against you'?[32]

The function of Afrikaans literature, Barnard replied, was 'to teach my people to think for themselves'. Once 'we have learned to think independently and responsibly', books will no longer be written which it will be necessary to ban. Barnard 'does not know' of fellow-citizens who have taken up arms against apartheid. He has never met a black writer; but is quick to add that 'none of them have sought me out either'. To judge by the few banned works by black writers that he has seen, their banning was 'no loss'. He attributes the assumptions behind Breytenbach's questions to distorted press reports on South Africa, and to Breytenbach's 'discussions with friends'. Having thus dismissed the question of the political stance of the sestigers, Barnard places himself confidently on the side of oop gesprek, as opposed to the dogmatism which he attributes to Breytenbach: 'I believe in the task which we have assigned ourselves [i.e., apartheid - A.N.], and I believe in my people - even if they sometimes lose their way like sheep ... Do you ever consider the possibility - just the possibility - that not only we may lose our way, but you as well?'[33]

Etienne le Roux's contribution to the debate is similarly configured. Le Roux argues that he has been in the forefront of dissent since the 1940s. He and Breytenbach may disagree, but 'what is important is to differ with understanding', as writers 'always to have sympathy for each other', and to 'care for each other'. Le Roux will shoot Breytenbach (and Lewis Nkosi and all those abandoned in prison) 'if they threaten my safety and my family', but their link as writers would still remain. This is the precarious - even threatening - solidarity which, according to le Roux, Breytenbach violates by posing questions which imply the same lines of division as are defended by the right-wing, who 'only expect different answers from you'.[34]

Breytenbach's more overtly political writings in these years were similarly concerned with a defence of intellectual and cultural life, although conducted in very different terms from the sestigers. 'The free expression of culture,' he argued in 1967, 'should be a right never even questioned.' Because apartheid is destructive of cultural expression, 'the whole ideology underlying apartheid must be abolished before we can think in terms of culture'. The white writer is compromised by apartheid which is 'practised in his name', and this makes of his

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[31] André P. Brink, 'The Breytenbach File,' The New Review 3:25 (April 1976), pp. 5, 6.

[32] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Klad, Teiken of Skimmelvlek?,' Kol 1:1 (August 1968), p. 11.

[33] Chris Barnard, 'Brief aan Breyten,' Kol 1:1 (August 1968), pp. 14, 15, 17.

[34] Etienne le Roux, 'Daardie Brief was ook aan my Gerig,' Kol 1:2 (September-October 1968), pp. 4, 5.

writing 'an aberration of European culture'.[35]

In 1971 Breytenbach took this argument further, and applied it directly to the sestigers, claiming that 'the culture of the Whites in South Africa is at present a framework of lies and compromise' which 'leads to dishonesty, corruption, degradation, shame and decay'. The attacks of Afrikaner intellectuals on racial and sexual taboos are 'so much grist for the mill of apartheid'. For the attack is directed only against a taboo - that is, a subject excluded from discussion - not on the reality of racial domination. It is made to 'shock and excite the attention of a tribe', but not to bring about its destruction. The compromises of the sestigers ensure that they 'become part of the pressure that will be brought to bear upon fools more audacious than they permit themselves to be'.[36]

This is also the basic argument of Breytenbach's celebrated address to the University of Cape Town Summer School of 1973. The sestigers, he says, 'began to query certain tenets on which the vested interests of the Afrikaner tribe were based.' For this reason, they were perceived as a real threat to the established order: 'Touch the Afrikaner and you touch the state.' But Breytenbach turns that interpretation around, arguing that Afrikaner dissent should be seen instead as part of the process of preserving, not threatening, Afrikaner power: 'Of course, within bounds, a measure of rebellion on the part of the long-haired and/or eggheads will be tolerated; it is seen to contribute even to such suppleness as ensures a lively glow of health. And what we did was to confuse that forbearance with freedom.'[37]

Although Breytenbach's difference with the sestigers, and Afrikaner dissent in general, was never articulated in this way, it is not difficult to see it as depending on two different assessments of the scope and character of dialectical thinking. For many of the sestigers, the contradictory, unstable character of our grasp of the world required that the writer should have the freedom to explore it in every possible way, and not to be restricted by the questions of political alignment raised by Breytenbach. 'It's a difficult world in which we live,' le Roux asks Breytenbach to accept, 'and I do not always understand it ... I try in my "esoteric" way to delve below the surface to say where its mutations germinate.'[38] In this vein, Barnard asked Breytenbach to consider the possibility that he might be mistaken in his condemnation of apartheid, and prayed that he be allowed to distinguish freedom from the illusion of freedom.[39] For the sestigers, debate within the ruling culture provided a total context within which the balance between freedom and repression could intelligibly be assessed. For Breytenbach, tolerance of white dissent was compatible, within the apartheid order, with repression of black protest, and not a step in the direction of a broader freedom. White writers could not be detached from the real world, in order to explore its contradictory character, but were themselves embedded in its contradictions. When they claimed the freedom to explore and create within its context, they were refusing to recognise the total context which allowed that

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[35] Breyten Breytenbach, End Papers (London, Faber, 1986), pp. 40, 41, 43.

[36] Breytenbach, End Papers, pp. 59, 58, 61.

[37] Breyten Breytenbach, A Season in Paradise, tr. R. Vaughan (London, Jonathan Cape, 1980), pp. 154-5.

[38] Le Roux, 'Daardie Brief was ook aan my Gerig,' p. 5.

[39] Barnard, 'Brief aan Breyten', p. 17.

freedom to exist together with the crushing of black aspirations and expressions.

Seen in these terms, the difference is mainly concerned with the structural conditions of literary politics in apartheid South Africa, and not with the motives of those involved. It is questionable whether anything was gained by Breytenbach's more intemperate attacks on the sestigers as the 'many-tongued arse-lickers of the bourgeoisie', or on their 'self-aggrandisement and bloated self-importance'.[40]

But Breytenbach's difference with the sestigers was never quite what it seemed. He remained close to them in ways that belied the violence of his tone. The leading sestigers continued to claim him as one of their own: 'the sestiger with the most talent,' according to le Roux; 'the main figure of the sixties'[41], according to Brink, and 'a friend with whom I have shared more than with a brother.'[42] Even while attacking the sestigers, Breytenbach consistently included himself among the Afrikaners in whose name the policies of apartheid were carried out. He contested their claim to be the true representatives of cultural and artistic freedom. But within the liberation movement, he found himself echoing many of their arguments in a different register. He attacked the opportunism and hypocrisy of liberal reformism in South Africa, characterising it as an attempt to legitimate capitalist exploitation.[43] In time, he became equally disenchanted with revolutionaries intent on establishing their own power rather than challenging the hold of capitalism on the lives of the majority.

There is a sense in which both Breytenbach and the sestigers were the unwitting victims of the crisis of the dialectical tradition in South Africa. That crisis brought to an end, at least temporarily, the conscious development and articulation of the basic themes of the dialectical tradition. But it did not bring to an end its characteristic ideas and arguments. Paradoxically, once removed from the more demanding context of philosophical enquiry, these themes became more readily available, although often in a diffused form. Within Afrikaner dissent, these ideas became a kind of 'common sense' which could no longer be examined or developed in a conscious and creative way. To the sestigers, it seemed obvious that a gradual extension of the borders of their own literary freedom would extend the bounds of freedom for all. This was the question on which Brink and Breytenbach had agreed to differ in 1969, and in 1976, after Breytenbach's recantation from the dock, Brink assumed that the question had

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[40] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Sestiger,' in Kouevuur en Oorblyfsels (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1969), p. 117; Breytenbach, The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist (London, Faber, 1985), p. 355. It was often at the level of individual motivations that Breytenbach's contemporaries felt the need to defend themselves; cf. the discussion of responses by Lina Spies and Johan de Jager in Ampie Coetzee, Poësie en Politiek (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1976), pp. 63-5.

[41] André P. Brink, Die Poësie van Breyten Breytenbach (Pretoria, Academica, n.d.), p. 5.

[42] Le Roux, 'Daardie Brief was ook aan my Gerig,' p. 6; Brink, 'The Breytenbach File,' p. 3. Breytenbach's smuggled prison correspondence with Brink is included in Martin Welz, ed., Breyten en die Bewaarder (Johannesburg, McGraw-Hill, 1977), pp. 139-55, 179-82, 189-91. Their fiercest public clash took place after the publication of True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist; cf. polemic in Rapport, May 1984.

[43] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Humanistiese Intellektuele is die Apologete van die Blankedom,' Deurbraak 1:2 (February 1972), pp. 17-8.

been decided in his favour.[44] Within Afrikaner dissent itself, there was no apparent basis on which to challenge this gradualism.

At the same time, the challenge to racial domination in South Africa meant that new approaches to the building of discursive communities emerged in contexts such as the black consciousness and trade union movements. Central to these movements was a conception of enabling those who had been marginalised and silenced to speak in their own voice.[45] This conception implied a radical challenge to the liberal idea of free speech as an individual right, and to the idea of oop gesprek as a precondition for outstanding cultural achievement. But this challenge was articulated only in a piecemeal fashion, and the practices in which it was embodied were always under threat. Such movements of the oppressed provided a symbolic point of orientation for Breytenbach and others, but could not provide an intellectual framework within which the problems raised by the crisis of the dialectical tradition could be explored.

Confession as a Mode of Dialectic

The idea of dialectic is relatively conspicuous in Breytenbach's writings. And there are a number of dialectical themes which recur constantly in his arguments and imagery. But these themes are only loosely clustered around an idea which is not always made explicit, which takes on different meanings at different times when it is made explicit, and which is never systematically articulated. It is best to approach Breytenbach as a dialectical thinker not on the basis of his philosophical premises, but rather from the starting-point of his literary practice.

Literary practice is, moreover, where Breytenbach's dialectic first took its characteristic form. There are at least three distinct dialectical 'voices' in his work. First, there is the voice of the exiled poet, discovering, creating and exploring ever-new dilemmas, absorbing their division and dissonance into his language and imagery in surprising and inventive ways, but never developing an explicitly dialectical vocabulary for them. Second, there is the voice of the underground activist, arguing in an idiom which often comes across as deliberately monotone and conventional, as if to persuade his comrades that his poetic streak poses no threat to party-discipline. In this voice, he largely echoes the triumphalism of Soviet-style dialectical materialism.[46] Third, there is a deeper and more reflective engagement with the

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[44] Brink, 'The Breytenbach File,' pp. 6, 8.

[45] Cf. Chapter Nine below.

[46] The distinction between Soviet Marxist and Western Marxist conceptions of dialectic is important for the argument of this chapter and the next. Broadly, Soviet Marxism has upheld an idea of a 'dialectic of nature' - a set of law-like regularities which apply to both the physical world and human history alike. It has codified the main 'laws of dialectic' - most famously in Stalin's Dialectical and Historical Materialism, first published in 1938 - and seeks to interpret human history as a working-out of these laws. The laws are formulated in a way which gives them the ring of scientific precision, while in fact leaving to the leadership of the party huge and arbitrary discretion as to their interpretation. In contrast, Western Marxism has been defined by its rejection of dialectical laws applicable to nature and society alike. Its major thinkers - Lukacs, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Sartre and others - have tried to theorise a movement of contradictions within the specific sphere of human history, which typically occur when consciousness comes into conflict with social reality. It

dialectical which emerges in Breytenbach's prison writings, both in texts written while in prison and in subsequent texts which reflect more or less directly on the experience. In this voice, the dialectical is conceived as a process of unending interaction between reality, illusion and consciousness, in which human agency is always called upon to recognise its own inherent limits. It is in this third voice that Breytenbach's dialectic takes on its distinctive form, but it does so against the background of the other two.

In particular, the first of these voices remains essential to his dialectic. Throughout his work, Breytenbach the dialectical thinker is inseparable from Breytenbach the poet. This is probably both a strength and a weakness. His poetic gift enables him to capture the movement of contradiction in a sudden and telling image. But at the same time, the capacity for analysis is conveyed in a medium whose demands only a few can meet.[47] For better or worse, the beginnings of Breytenbach's dialectics lie in his relationship to language. His sudden inversions of meaning, unexpected and yet resonant juxtapositions, his capacity to give narrative unity to sequences of dreamlike incoherence - all of these might be said to make of him, in his earliest writings, a kind of spontaneous dialectician, whose sense for the dialectical is so much more versatile because it is never weighed down with the need to relate its practice to an explicit idea of dialectic.

This effect is heightened by the extent to which his relationship to language has been formed in the specific conditions of exile, in which dialectic becomes an essential means of orientation. Brecht characterises it as the necessary 'sense of humour' of the exile: 'The best school for the Dialectic is emigration. The keenest dialecticians are refugees. They are refugees because of changes, and they study nothing other than changes.'[48]

There are many ways in which this dialectical temper becomes apparent. But there is one literary mode, above all, which is essential to Breytenbach as a dialectician: that of confession. Confession in itself - broadly, acknowledgement of wrong-doing or failure or even of an intention or identity which might ordinarily be expected to be kept hidden - is very far from being a mode of thought or analysis. It has no necessary political or historical dimension. Indeed, in its focus on the individual it often has a bias against politics and history.

Confession is a literary mode which is present in Breytenbach's writing over the whole span of his career, and which is often used without apparent political or historical purpose. Its political purpose is perhaps most readily apparent in his often ironical acknowledgement, in his pre-prison writings, of his failure both to meet the expectations of Afrikaner nationalism and to escape his own Afrikaner identity. His formal confession in pleading guilty at his trial in 1975 was a deliberate means of not taking a political stand. His prison memoir, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, both relives the experience and confesses his failure as a revolutionary to those who share the ideals for which he was imprisoned. Even his

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was premised on the belief that the oppressed can learn from their own experience, and that without this process no liberation is possible. Cf. Z.A. Jordan, The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism (London, Macmillan, 1967); M. Merleau-Ponty, Adventures of the Dialectic (London, Heinemann, 1974); Norman Levine, Dialogue within the Dialectic (London, Allen & Unwin, 1984).

[47] Breytenbach describes the wisdom of the artist, Francois Krige, 'in giving only enough for the receiver to become autonomous' (Dog Heart, p. 113).

[48] Bertolt Brecht, Prosa (Frankfurt, 1965), vol. 2, p. 237, quoted in Sebastian Timpanaro, On Materialism (London, Verso, 1980), pp. 91-2.

disillusionment with the new South Africa, whose outlines begin to emerge after 1990, takes the initial form of an acknowledgement that he no longer has a clear political role.

And yet a literary mode which seems to lend itself most readily to a withdrawal from the politics of the day is used - not in each individual instance, but through its cumulative effect - to give expression to a distinctive and deeply political critique of culture and society. In this sense, we could say that this literary mode has its own dialectic. More to the point, this mode functions in such a way as to convey a dialectical movement from the isolation and dependence of the confessing subject to a call for collective commitment to human liberation.

How does a literary mode apparently so unsuited to the task achieve this dialectical effect? Five interrelated steps can be identified in this process. First, confession begins by isolating the one who confesses, emphasising his singularity, requiring him to speak for himself alone. 'I am no one's delegate but my own and that of my fleas,' Breytenbach told the UCT Summer School in 1973.[49] At his trial in 1975, he avoids a political defence as 'I was no ANC member' and 'a political defence would have been an embarrassment to people I then still considered my friends'. He values the solidarity of those who might have refused to testify against him, but holds no grudge against those who did: 'Why drown just because another madman did?' Of his comrades who 'dropped me like an embarrassingly hot potato the moment I was caught,' he comments: 'they avoid me now like the plague because I am that of course: I am the plague.' His book was written to 'purge' himself, implying that he had done things which were 'improper, which I ought to be ashamed of. It is true: I am not a hero; I am not even a revolutionary.'[50]

He took up his new role as returning exile and critic of the emerging negotiated settlement in 1990 by 'lancing the boil of unrealistic expectations - to wit, that I may ever play the role of some sort of moral magistrate or be involved in local politics', for 'an exile never returns, at least not beyond a given absence'.[51] 'At the moment, if I'm not mistaken,' he says in 1992, 'I have no recognisable politics in the accepted sense ... I find myself nowhere now. It is true that I have been back [to South Africa], but I soon found that I couldn't fit in ... I find this personal tabula rasa, this zero degree of functionality, rather exhilarating.'[52]

Second, confession conveys the dependence of the confessing subject on the one who extracts the confession; the one who confesses is made harmless by the act of confession. This is the theme with which Breytenbach launched his poetic persona as 'the lean man in the green jersey' in Die Ysterkoei Moet Sweet (1964): 'Look, he is harmless, be merciful to him.' Not only harmless, the poet is represented as dead: 'let the sly bitter geese shit on my grave'.[53] Death, impending death, fear of death, writing as resistance to death - these are constant

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[49] Breytenbach, A Season in Paradise, p. 154.

[50] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 62, 65, 81, 337.

[51] Breyten Breytenbach, Hart-lam (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1991), pp. 37-8.

[52] Breyten Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution (Cape Town, Human and Rousseau, 1996), pp. 95, 100, 104.

[53] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Die Bedreiging van die Siekes,' in Ampie Coetzee, ed., Die Hand vol Vere: 'n Bloemlesing van die Poësie van Breyten Breytenbach (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1995), p. 25.

themes in Breytenbach's poetry.[54] His own death is also prominently staged in his political writings. His account of his 1973 visit to South Africa - published under the psuedonym B.B. Lasarus, in order to give a central place to the idea of death and resurrection - opens with a repeated staging of his own death in early childhood.[55] He reverts to this metaphor in describing his treatment in the hands of the security police after his arrest in 1975: 'My hosts weren't violent in any way. Why should they be? I was dead. All they had to do was process the dead, to pick over the bones.'[56] The theme of imprisonment is also conspicuous in his poetry well before his actual experience of it.[57]

The theme of the dependence of confession is most extensively developed in a short story, 'Strafbare Onskuld' (Punishable Innocence), published in 1968. The story is at the same time a narrative account of Breytenbach's imprisonment, together with his wife and his brother and sister, at a fortified monastery which they visit as tourists during a day's outing to a small village, and an appeal to an unnamed person in authority, addressed as 'your honour', to assist in securing the release of his family, after the author himself has escaped and taken refuge in the village. But as the story unfolds, so it becomes increasingly unclear - both to the author and his readers - how the events it recounts could have taken place, and even whether they happened at all. Were they held against their will? Why did they never resist, or even communicate their frustration to each other? The mixture of prosaic detail and surreal mystery evokes a Kafka-esque world in which 'once you begin to co-operate with the enemy - supposed or real - you take much more from him than you know, or than you can control. And opposition is a means of co-operation.'[58] In the final sentence of the story, we discover that the whole appeal is addressed to the person who inflicted this nightmare on them: 'Mr Huntington'.[59]

But there is a third effect of confession, which is the reverse side of this coin. Precisely in establishing the isolation and dependence of the confessing subject, it identifies a social order which creates these conditions and compels the subject to confess. Breytenbach begins his Summer School lecture of 1973 by claiming for himself the mantle of an 'agent of a spiritual and moral contamination, operating in the dark like a plague', as described by an unnamed

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[54] This is emphasised, e.g., in Kannemeyer, Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur, vol. 2, pp. 462-87.

[55] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 1-10; cf. Dog Heart, p. 9.

[56] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 21.

[57] Weschler reports Breytenbach's comment - probably with the poem 'Breyten Bid vir Homself' in mind - that 'you have to be careful what you create. You run the risk of prefiguring your own future - you can confess things into happening' ('An Afrikaner Dante', p. 86).

[58] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Strafbare Onskuld,' in H. Aucamp, ed., Bolder (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973), p. 112.

[59] This is the first appearance of 'Mr Huntington' (sometimes 'Colonel Huntingdon'), who is to become a familiar figure in Breytenbach's writings, first as an invented name for a real member of the Security Police and then as a generic secret policeman, faceless yet threatening (cf. Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 106, 172; Woordwerk, p. 69).

'White National leader'.[60] In the opening pages of his True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, he addresses himself to 'Mr Interrogator' who 'could force me to deny whatever I say immediately after having said it'.[61] The interrogator controls and manipulates, and the process of interrogation results not only in confession, but in 'the mutual destruction of human dignity'. But this 'flowering of evil' is carried out by people convinced of their own normality, who 'know that they are tolerated and accepted by society'. Even after apartheid, Breytenbach argues, 'there is not the slightest chance that those in power politically will want to lay down guidelines to guarantee the dignity of the detainee and the interrogator and thus to sanitise public life'.[62] In disclosing the powerlessness of the confessing subject, in short, confession also reveals the true character of social power, and its separation from the human community in whose name it speaks. Confession made in isolation and dependence reveals the compulsion behind it, which is at the same time a distortion of human thought, mistakenly treated as 'normality'.

After 1990, as his critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa developed, Breytenbach was to return consistently to the deformation of social thought, not at the hands of a repressive regime but as the normal condition of contemporary capitalism. 'We think we are being exposed to a greater array of choices. But there is this weird dialectic... as the possibilities increase so the alternatives are narrowed down.'[63] 'Already in the rich part of the world people are trapped before their television screens, indulging in monologues ... This is the capitalist utopia ... From halfway through the twentieth century the question of meaning was no longer asked, neither in art nor in literature.'[64] In this context, 'reflection is replaced by the globalised inanities of a CNN cancelling out values and destroying the capacity for memory and discernment and citizen participation.'[65] 'The Great Forgetting is upon us.'[66] Dialectical confession, in this sense, identifies the source of the individual subject's powerlessness as a larger, shared condition.

Fourth, within this configuration of powerlessness and power, the confessing subject rediscovers, or perhaps discovers for the first time, a certain paradoxical freedom. The power which compels the subject to confess negates itself if the subject does not have that irreducible residue of freedom. The confessing subject must say what the interrogator wishes, but for the words to have meaning the subject must be capable of saying something else as well. The interrogator can 'force me to start all over again. I can tell you in advance that if I were to do

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[60] Breytenbach, A Season in Paradise, p. 152.

[61] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 13; on this theme, cf. David Schalkwyk, 'Confession and Solidarity in the Prison Writing of Breyten Breytenbach and Jeremy Cronin,' Research in African Literatures 25:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 23-45, especially p. 26 on the 'continuously displaced confessor' in Breytenbach's text.

[62] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 342-4; cf. pp. 56-9.

[63] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 17.

[64] Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, p. 197.

[65] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 4.

[66] Breytenbach, Woordwerk, p. 174.

that it would come out differently; it would be different; I'd no longer be there; I'd be someone else - as sincere, as keen to help, as obsessed by the necessity to confess.'[67] His poem on the journey as a prisoner from Pretoria to Cape Town through the 'untroubled' Karoo night, where 'no-one can hear the click of our shackled feet', evokes a similar response: 'we are indigestible! indivisible! free!'[68]

After his release, Breytenbach tried to explain the paradoxical nature of freedom by distinguishing seven senses of the term. For him, 'the most definite taste of freedom is when you are struggling for it ... The struggle for freedom is already the embodiment thereof.' The poem is also 'an instrument of freedom', in its capacity to convey knowledge of 'that other, unfree, twisted world of bars - which is nevertheless so totally human'.[69] The power which compels the confession also makes necessary the struggle for freedom, even if that freedom is limited, as in prison, to self-knowledge and to the sphere of words. Within this mode of confession, there is a dialectical movement from isolation and dependence to identification of the source of compulsion and to assertion of a claim to freedom against it.

Fifth and finally, this dialectical movement is completed to the extent that confession itself evokes a common ground of solidarity in the struggle for freedom. In Breytenbach's writing, the final movement in this dialectic of confession is implied, but is never clearly present. If it is there at all, it must be read mainly in his denials that the concerns of a minority have the universality that is claimed for them, and in his accounts of oppression. In this vein, Breytenbach's acknowledgement that he is an Afrikaner and cannot dissociate himself from what has been done in the name of Afrikanerdom is constantly followed by his insistence that Afrikaners are a 'bastard people with a bastard language', and the suggestion that freedom lies in honest recognition of this fact.[70] Similarly, the anomalies which are 'an existentialist agony' to the sestigers are 'a hard everyday humiliation' to five-sixth of the population under apartheid.[71]

If freedom cannot be grounded in racial purity or existential authenticity, can the dialectic of confession discover its common ground? Breytenbach's accounts of oppression most often return to the silencing of individual voices of dissent and criticism. The sestigers had been complicit in silencing a generation of black South African writers. Apartheid had produced a conformity of mind which had been inherited by the new South Africa. Breytenbach's philosophical and political concerns came into a peculiar fusion here: 'More than death I fear the living mummification of understanding and meek acceptance; the arbitrariness and petrification resulting from felicitous expression and lucid definition'.[72] In one sense, this recapitulates the central concern of the dialectical tradition in South Africa - the oop gesprek

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[67] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 14, cf. p. 26.

[68] Breytenbach, 'Transit' in Coetzee, Die Hand vol Vere, p. 195.

[69] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 93.

[70] Breytenbach, A Season in Paradise, p. 156; True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 353-4.

[71] Breytenbach, A Season in Paradise, pp. 155-6.

[72] Breyten Breytenbach, Judas Eye and Self Portrait/Death Watch (London, Faber, 1988), p. 131.

which Breytenbach treats without mercy in his early political writings.[73] But at the same time it experiences the central aspiration of this tradition - lucidity itself - as a limit to be overcome.

It may be doubted whether the mode of confession can ever complete the dialectical movement described here; whether the isolated subject of confession can never establish such common ground for collective struggle.[74] That common ground is established in the context of active struggle, and Breytenbach's entry into revolutionary politics can be seen in this light. But before the concept of dialectic actually made an appearance in his work, he had developed his own dialectical styles and strategies. In his short-lived career as a revolutionary, he was to preserve this dialectical temper, and also encounter its limitations.

From Paris to Paestum

Breytenbach became the focus of political controversy through the government's refusal of a visa for his wife to accompany him on a visit to South Africa in 1965.[75] That refusal launched his public career as an opponent of apartheid. It was only some years later that he would be drawn into a more radical political position, aligning himself with the emerging New Left in Europe, with the cause of revolution in the Third World, and with the ideas of Marxism.

In a smuggled letter to Marius Schoon, while both of them were prisoners in Pretoria, Breytenbach wrote that his political schooling - 'if any, because I feel that it is only now that I am outgrowing my child's shoes ... - was Paris', that is to say: Vietnam, May 1968, migrant workers, Tupamaros, Palestine, the revolutionary CP of Brazil.[76] Much later, he was to describe Paris in 1968: 'There were barricades in the street, daily we battled with riot police ... debate flowed freely among all parts of society ... But did we not then all believe that a new heaven and new earth were at hand?'[77]

Existing accounts of Breytenbach's radicalisation suggest a rapid transition from anti-apartheid poet to underground activist. There is a certain truth in this. But it does not take account of the ways in which his new political commitments were initially explored in his poetry. In the years after May 1968, the political character of his poetry shifted in several, related ways. Some poems take sides in the global struggles of the time, where previously he had focussed on South Africa.[78] Others go further than before in their denunciation of

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[73] Breytenbach, 'Humanistiese Intellektuele is Apologete vir die Blankedom,' Deurbraak, February 1972, p. 17; ''n Toe Gesprek,' Deurbraak, June 1973.

[74] Cf. David Simpson, 'Speaking Personally: The Culture of Autobiographical Criticism,' in H. Aram Veeser, ed., Confessions of the Critics (New York, Routledge, 1996), pp. 82-94.

[75] The fullest account of this controversy is to be found in Francis Galloway, Breyten Breytenbach as Openbare Figuur (Pretoria, HAUM, 1990), pp. 43-63.

[76] Breytenbach-Schoon, 24/7/76, in Martin Welz, ed., Breyten en die Bewaarder (Johannesburg, McGraw-Hill, 1977), pp. 117-8; cf. Breytenbach, Judas Eye, p. 127.

[77] Breytenbach, Woordwerk, pp. 30-1.

[78] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Lewe die Kommune van Mei 1968,' and 'Bid vir Hanoi,' in Kouevuur en Oorblyfsels, pp. 28-9. Kouevuur was first published in 1969. The original manuscript also included the poems which were published in 1970 as Oorblyfsels in an edition of 150 copies.

oppression in general, and capitalism in particular.[79] But among the poems written in these years, however, there is one which stands out as taking an entirely new direction - bringing together past and present, local and global, into a reflection on the dialectical patterns of human history, which is at the same time a sharply-focused comment on the struggle in South Africa: in this sense, 'Bruin Reisbrief' (Brown Travel Letter) is unique in his work.

The poem begins with a journey through the south of Italy, which takes the poet to Paestum, near Naples, the site of the largest existing Greek temple, where the poem was written. It describes the efforts of poor farmers, 'southern people, brown, the brown of coloureds' - assisted by a 'Central Authority' - to 'bring this world to its own feet'. From there the focus shifts to an imagined future in the driest, least hospitable parts of South Africa:

> ... And I saw the Karroo come into blossom
> its hills anointed with thyme and rosemary
> and villages like tendinous knots on the sinews of roads,
> I saw water-furrows,
> glistening, extended cobwebs across Namaqualand,
> with settlements caught in them like flies,
> fields of cotton in the valleys,
> how even the Kalahari regained a green fertility -
> a beautiful country open, open to all its people.[80]

From there, the poem returns to the Italian landscape, but this time to the ancient past still visible in the 'virile race' which occupies it today. That ancient past and its ideals had to be 'reduced to nothing, in order now, for the first time, to become its fruit.' What remains of it in the present? 'Nothing and everything,' Breytenbach replies, evoking the lizard and the ant among the classical ruins where peacocks once strutted.

In its fourth and final movement, the poem is addressed to the Afrikaner, the product of a similar process of historical decomposition and regeneration. For they now seek to preserve themselves through apartheid, with a logic 'like the Greeks who wanted to found a greater Greece here, and were wiped out by malaria'. The poem closes in affectionate rebuke of 'my brother, my barren, abandoned brother', and the wish that he will 'blossom in people of brown'. Afrikaners will become human in their brown descendants, gaining their humanity by abandoning their futile quest to preserve their supposed racial purity.

The poem draws on many of the existing themes of Breytenbach's work: death and decomposition as the source of life and regeneration, self-preservation as a barren death, the symbiosis of poor farmers with the land, the movement of imagination from present reality to past prefiguration, etc. But it makes use of these for a different purpose: that of constructing a dialectical philosophy of history with a political intent. The force of the poem's comment on apartheid arises not from the attitude of the poet, who speaks instead in tones of regret, even longing, but from its integral relation to the larger historical framework which informs that

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[79] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Please Don't Feed the Animals,' and 'Aandmense,' in Kouevuur en Oorblyfsels, pp. 30-1, 106.

[80] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Bruin Reisbrief,' in Coetzee, Die Hand vol Vere, pp. 107-9. The poem is dated September 1968, and originally appeared in Oorblyfsels. Page references to the poem in the following paragraphs are not given in the text.

comment.[81]

The politics of the poem sits uneasily, however, with its philosophy of history. For the account of history presented here is that of an ineluctable process, indifferent to the ambitions of Greeks and Afrikaners alike. From the point of view which it adopts, there need be no significant difference between Pericles and Dr Verwoerd. But the politics which grows out of this philosophy of history takes the form of a moral appeal to the Afrikaner 'brother' - an appeal to transform the pattern which the poem suggests is as ineluctable as death and decay itself. Within the logic of the poem itself, it is not clear that this can be done. What can be done is not to change the course of history, but to make peace with it, to discover new aspects of the self by acting in harmony with the historical process, and to prevent the needless destruction which those with ambitions of immortality - Greek and Afrikaner alike - visit on themselves and others. But if this is the argument of the poem, it might as easily be the basis for an appeal for an abandonment of politics.

In this, the politics of the poem are strongly reminiscent of the leading Afrikaner revolutionary of the previous generation, Bram Fischer. Fischer and Breytenbach are sometimes compared as dissident Afrikaners.[82] It is not always clear what is gained by a general comparison of the lives of two individuals whose background and personal make-up are so different: on the one hand, the grandson of the last president of the Orange Free State, an Oxford-educated lawyer, drawn into the Communist Party by his admiration of the Soviet defence of Stalingrad in 1942; on the other, a surrealist painter and poet, from a succession of small towns in the Boland, a student for eighteen months before departing into unintended exile, radicalised by the Paris revolt of May 1968. But Breytenbach's 'Bruin Reisbrief' makes possible a more specific and illuminating comparison with Fischer's political perspective.

Fischer's speech from the dock, at his trial only two years before Breytenbach's poem, set out a relatively determinist account of history clearly drawn from Soviet Marxism. But it gave two inflections of its own to that model of history. First, it suggested as the motive force for historical change ethical need, rather than material production: 'Political changes ... occur when the outmoded political form ceases to serve the needs of the people who live under the new circumstances brought about by the development of the new economic methods ... Once the economic changes have occurred, the political changes are bound to follow ... South Africa today is a clear example of a society in which the political forms do not serve the needs of most of the people.'[83]

Second, Fischer's Marxism lacked any conception of conflict as a necessary part of the historical process. The overthrow of capitalism can take place peacefully or violently, he held, depending on 'the circumstances at any given stage of history' (p. 13). In this context, the role of Marxism was not to clarify the lines of struggle, but to pre-empt it. For once political

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[81] Ampie Coetzee includes 'Bruin Reisbrief' among six of Breytenbach's poems as 'the most memorable documents of political protest in Afrikaans writing' (Coetzee, Letterkunde en Krisis [Johannesburg, Taurus, 1990], p. 45). But it is as much an elegy as a protest.

[82] Galloway, Breytenbach as Openbare Figuur, pp. 90-1; cf. Brink, 'The Breytenbach File,' pp. 4, 8.

[83] Bram Fischer, 'What I did was Right ...': Statement from the Dock in the Supreme Court, Pretoria, March 28, 1966 (London, Mayibuye Publications, 1966), pp. 14-5. Further page references to this work are indicated in the text.

change has become inevitable, 'the sole question is whether ... the political changes will be affected by peaceful means or by violence and this depends in essence on the balance of forces at the time when the changes come and on the degree to which people understand the need for political change' (p. 23). Marxism is presented as the source of such understanding, that which enables contending groups 'to get together and work out by discussion, and not by violence, a method whereby they can live together' (p. 16). Fischer's own sacrifice is made, then, to avoid a repetition of 'that unnecessary and futile anguish' which was suffered during the South African War.

The perspectives of Fischer and Breytenbach resemble each other in combining a philosophy of history which leaves little room for human agency with an ethical appeal to Afrikaners to conform to the course of history rather than resisting it. But Fischer's conception of the course that will be taken by history is relatively abstract. It is a linear and stagist conception in which the more advanced mode of production, and its corresponding form of state, displace the outdated mode, and the Soviet state provides a model and end-point for the process.[84]

In Breytenbach's poem, by contrast, the historical process is richly concrete, the outcome of the tenacity and passion of poor people - 'the further south you go, the poorer the farmers become' - and the imaginative feat which makes green and fertile the Kalahari desert itself. Rather than a relentless march through the stages of history, there is a dialectical sense of the tragic ambiguity of even the most single-minded projects, and a vivid sense of how coming to self-understanding is also a way of preparing for death. Fischer's account of history stands in the place of historical and philosophical enquiry, leaving him only to take his stand - and the heroism of the stand he takes cannot be doubted - for the cause which it vindicates. Breytenbach's account of history offers no pre-determined outcome. Every historical order contains the seeds of its own eventual demise, but this does not detract from the reality of its human achievements. It raises a multitude of questions about the contradictory and unexpected ways in which human purposes relate to larger historical projects and patterns.

The poem is a signpost, of startling clarity, of the road which was not to be taken by Breytenbach or by any of his contemporaries. It was his first and last sustained reflection on the historical meaning of Greek and Roman antiquity.[85] 'I came to identify more and more with the complex war of the Third World,' he wrote about the period after May 1968. 'I realised that the privileged role ascribed to the Judaeo-Greek heritage when talking about "civilisation" was nothing but the prejudiced and partisan and faulty interpretation of later manipulators; that "Western values" - the cloak of expansionism - occulted alternative sources: Chinese, Arab, African.'[86] The poem gives a radically political thrust to dialectical themes which had not previously taken that direction in Breytenbach's poetry. It surveys a range of

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[84] Cf. Stephen Clingman, Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary (Cape Town, David Philip, 1998), pp. 79-86, 210-3, 424.

[85] When he engaged again with the context of Greek antiquity, his focus was no longer historical - discussing Plato's argument with the poets, or re-animating classical myth and drama; cf. Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), pp. 12-15, 20; Breytenbach, Memory of Snow and of Dust (London, Faber, 1989), pp. 186-91; Breytenbach, Boklied (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1998); cf. Pieter Duvenage, 'Boklied en die Denke van Ons Tyd,' Fragmente 2 (1998), pp. 144-7.

[86] Breytenbach, Judas Eye, p. 128.

historical currents and cross-currents with the eye of a dialectician of considerable virtuosity, but without ever making explicit any conception of dialectic.

In a long poem, 'Kouevuur' (Cold Fire/Gangrene) written in the European winter of 1968-9, Breytenbach revisited the grave where the poem which had introduced his work four or five years before described his own burial. When the grave was opened, a flower is discovered growing from the anus of the corpse, on which is transcribed Marx's account of the ceaseless self-criticism of proletarian revolution, taken from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (the poem quotes Marx's text in English). The quotation concludes with Marx's play on Hegel's aphorism from the Philosophy of Right: 'hic Rhodus, hic salta'.[87] It is as if Breytenbach takes the work of revolutionary self-criticism to be completed. The time for his own leap has come.

Soon after that, Breytenbach entered the very different world of underground activism, after being recruited in an ANC-aligned group in 1969. Thereafter his writings put forward a conception of history much closer to that of Fischer, and to the Soviet Marxism which had been so resoundingly rejected on the streets of Paris in May 1968. There is a sense in which he made use of the Chinese, and later African, past as a cloak with which to disguise - or diminish to the scale of personal habit - his differences with the linear conception of historical progress which informed Fischer's SACP, the liberation movement in South Africa more generally, and the mainstream of Marxist thought.

The road from Paris to Paestum stopped there, at the ruins of Hera's temple. It was resumed only in Pretoria, after Breytenbach had been jailed in the same prison from which Fischer had been released in March 1975, to await his death from cancer in May of that year.

Okhela and the Contradictions of a Zen Communist

For a South African in exile, the fact that his radicalisation had taken place, or been given definitive form, in the context of the Paris revolts of 1968 had considerable consequences. These are described in Lawrence Weschler's essay on Breytenbach: 'A few months later, as Soviet-led tanks crushed the Prague Spring, the French Party was one of the world's first Communist Parties to extend its heartiest congratulations to the Old Guard in the Kremlin. The South African Communist Party, or SACP, was the first - and therein lay a huge dilemma for Breyten and many of the other young, ardent South African exiles. For the SACP had a lock on the executive organs of the African National Congress in exile during those years.'[88] This dilemma formed the essential background to Breytenbach's recruitment in 1969 into a clandestine organisation, Atlas - which was in the orbit of the ANC, rather than being part of its official structures.

Breytenbach has given several accounts of his entry into underground politics. There are

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[87] Breytenbach, 'Kouevuur: Slaap onder Lede,' in Kouevuur en Oorblyfsels, pp. 133-4. The quoted passage can be found in Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 14. It is an ironic allusion to G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, tr. T.M. Knox (London, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 11, cf. p. 303. The phrase - translated as 'here is the rose, here you must dance'- is one Breytenbach often uses. Hegel uses it to describe the tasks of philosophy; Marx to describe the political tasks imposed on a revolutionary class; Breytenbach's use of less precise, but suggests concern with the ethical demands on the individual.

[88] Lawrence Weschler, 'An Afrikaner Dante,' New Yorker, 8 November 1993, p. 84.

some points - for example, the year in which Atlas/Okhela was formed - on which these are inconsistent.[89] But in all of these accounts, a central role was played by Johnny Makatini, at that time the ANC's diplomatic representative in Algiers - 'from where he oversaw anti-apartheid activities in France'.[90] This oversight was contested by the London office of the ANC which - according to Makatini and Breytenbach - was dominated by the SACP, which in turn had a very close relationship with the French Communist Party.

Atlas had focussed mainly on exposing European collaboration with apartheid, enforcing trade sanctions and the like. But Makatini believed that it could take on a larger political role within the liberation movement, as a counterweight to the influence of the SACP. He persuaded the president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, to meet Breytenbach, and to give his sanction to the formation of Okhela. Where Atlas had been a small clandestine group engaged in anti-apartheid activities in France, Germany and the Netherlands, Okhela would be a pole of attraction for white leftists within South Africa - more specifically, for radical students, organisers in the emerging trade union movement, and dissident Afrikaner intellectuals. A major part of Breytenbach's clandestine mission to South Africa was to discuss the draft manifesto of Okhela with potential recruits.

Okhela was at cross-purposes with itself even before it came into existence. Makatini, Tambo and Breytenbach all had significantly different purposes in establishing it, and the area at which these intersected was obscure and changeable. Makatini was aligned with the 'Africanists' within the ANC, who were resentful of the opening to all races of ANC membership (but not membership of its National Executive) at the Morogoro conference in 1969, and of the influence of the SACP, which they saw as the main force behind the adoption by the ANC of the explicitly anti-capitalist 'Strategy and Tactics'. He saw Okhela as a way of reducing the role of the SACP, and limiting the role of white leftists in the liberation movement to that of 'support work in their own community'.[91] Although Tambo sought at that time to accommodate the Africanist group within the ANC, there is no evidence that he supported their cause. During the years in exile, Tambo's aim was to build as inclusive a movement as possible, and this was almost certainly his aim in initially giving his approval to the formation of Okhela.[92] Finally, Breytenbach and his comrades sought to reduce the role of the SACP for very different reasons from Makatini. 'Due to diverse leftist experiences during the sixties', he wrote (another shorthand for 'Paris 1968'), 'they felt a strong opposition to Stalinism' - that is, to the doctrinaire, bureaucratic and centralist line of the SACP. While they shared the SACP's

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[89] The account of Atlas/Okhela in the following paragraphs is based mainly on the following sources: Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 73-81; Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, pp. 122-4; Weschler, 'An Afrikaner Dante,' pp. 84-8; Luli Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity in the African National Congress,' African Sociological Review 3:1 (1999), pp. 130-51, especially pp. 134-6.

[90] Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, p. 122.

[91] Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity,' p. 134.

[92] According to Callinicos, Tambo voted against the summary expulsion from the ANC of the eight dissenting Africanists in December 1975, but then allowed the expulsion to take effect unprocedurally - e.g., without giving the eight a hearing ('Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity', p. 140.)

commitment to creating a non-racial South Africa, they also felt that the SACP was 'papering over the real problems of cultural awareness' and failing to learn the lessons of Black Consciousness.[93] Callinicos describes Atlas/Okhela as 'a white, New Left alternative to the SACP, operating within the ambit of the ANC'.[94] The characteristic critique made by New Left Marxism (or Western Marxism) of dogma and hierarchy had little in common with an Africanism concerned to promote a new dogma and new faces within the old - although racially restricted - hierarchy of the liberation movement.

Breytenbach emphasised - both in his smuggled correspondence with Marius Schoon and in his published account - that the critique of the SACP which motivated Okhela was 'coming from the left'.[95] He told Schoon that his comrades were 'Marxists and revolutionaries (and also not Trotskyists, although there were some Maoist tendencies to be detected)'. Faced with Schoon's unflinching loyalty to the SACP, he still hazarded that 'there are quite good South African communists outside the SACP'.[96] In developing its own strategies, Okhela gave priority to support for the emerging trade union movement, which was dismissed by the exiled South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and was to be subjected to sustained hostility from the SACP once it came to adopt a political direction of its own.[97]

But Breytenbach's self-definition as an anti-Stalinist 'to the left of the SACP' was largely retrospective. During his years of clandestine activism, Breytenbach's political vocabulary was very similar to that of the Soviet Marxism which he opposed. Certainly, there is no explicit critique of Stalinism to be found in the writings which Breytenbach has subsequently published, including the draft manifesto of Okhela and at least one text which was clearly written for discussion within clandestine structures. Instead, the vocabulary of Soviet Marxism is juxtaposed with relatively undeveloped suggestions of a less centralised, more flexible approach.

Breytenbach's central ambivalence is captured in a 1972 discussion paper 'contributing some elements towards a strategy for revolution in South Africa', which is in many ways a precursor to the Okhela manifesto. According to the paper, 'our ultimate objective is a Socialist South Africa' in which a 'new man' will come into being after 'a taking of power by those who genuinely represent the workers and the peasants'.[98] After setting out the complexities of the South African social order, the paper calls for a regrouping of 'progressive elements, even those outside the liberation movement, into a revolutionary avante-garde, which

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[93] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 76.

[94] Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity,' p. 135.

[95] Welz, Breyten en die Bewaarder, p. 117; Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 77.

[96] Welz, Breyten en die Bewaarder, pp. 117, 126.

[97] On SACTU, cf. Martin Plaut, 'Changing Perspectives on South African Trade Unions,' Review of African Political Economy, 30 (1984), p. 117; the SACP attack on independent trade unionism is discussed in Chapter Nine below.

[98] Breytenbach, 'Notes from a Political Discussion Paper Contributing Some Elements towards a Strategy for Revolution in South Africa,' in End Papers, p. 66. Further references to this paper are made in the body of the text.

will be closely, organically linked to the masses, work within the mass movements, learn from the people, help the mass organisations and the Liberation Movement in particular to evolve a clear strategy for revolution.' This is the central ambivalence of the politics of Okhela: on the one hand, they acknowledge a well-defined 'liberation movement' (the ANC and its allies); on the other, they assume it does not yet have a 'clear strategy for revolution'. A few paragraphs later, it recurs: 'We must redefine, if necessary, the programme of the Liberation Movement' (p. 69). But still there is no account of what its programme is, nor what problems require its redefinition, nor why this task should be assigned to Okhela. Breytenbach's own account of the nature of the South African struggle generally stays close to that of the ANC and SACP, asserting the theory of internal colonialism in more or less orthodox form, but adding that black consciousness is also a 'necessary rehabilitatory answer to cultural colonialism' (pp. 67-8).

The paper concludes: 'The Liberation Movement must head the working alliance of Black Workers, of exponents of Black Consciousness, the Church leaders and the White Radicals, and reflect the struggle at any level at which it expresses itself' (p. 70). This is to accept the leadership of a liberation movement and at the same time to dictate that it must ally itself with its rivals; to accept the idea of a 'head' for that alliance, which provides its centralised planning and direction, and at the same time to juxtapose with it the very different idea that struggle should be 'reflected at whatever level it expresses itself' - that is, without regard to the strategy of those at the 'head' of that alliance.

In a paper presented in Groningen in the same year on 'Literary Commitment and the Liberation Struggle', Breytenbach sets out the conception of history underlying this political perspective, beginning with a relatively general account of dialectic: 'The reality of who and what we are consists of ever-changing contradictions, but underlying that realisation is the concept (and principle) of the unity of opposites - and dare I say the independence of opposites'. Contradictions do not simply create a 'perpetual flux and ebb', however. Instead, 'there is a dynamic evolution which contains jumps and advances in quality according to an ever-ascending spiral. Struggles reach certain levels, contradictions are seemingly resolved and new ones created. In this universe the tension between the two opposites of a contradiction is the force that allows societies to progress'.[99] It is in the name of progress - conceived as a continuous and linear process - that struggle, conflict and resistance are made necessary, in Breytenbach's argument. The Okhela manifesto, dated June 1975, brings together this triumphalist conception of dialectic ('the profound contradictions within South African society must explode ... the Apartheid state must be destroyed'), with professions of loyalty to the ANC , and the idea of white radicals within Okhela playing a role 'within the national Liberation Front being constituted'.[100]

Breytenbach was later to comment on his activist years: 'I found political language not only sterile but sterilising', although 'at times a dour art form in itself, with its own codes and effects and flourishes of rhetoric'.[101] His later comment on Marxism (in the context of the Soviet Union) as 'the science of doublethink' might be taken as a kind of self-criticism, or at

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[99] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 251.

[100] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 385, 389.

[101] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 72.

least a reflection of a peculiarly distorting experience of Marxism.[102]

It is not only that Breytenbach articulated his opposition to Stalinism for the most part retrospectively. Even in retrospect, it is not clear what he regards as the alternative to it. At times, he alludes to other conceptions of Marxism: a 'left alternative schooled in vigorous independent thinking to counter hegemonistic practices'; or the 'enriching schools of transformative thought [that] were hounded into oblivion' by Stalinism.[103] He describes himself as an 'undogmatic leftist anarchist'.[104] At various times, he makes use of a technique of clarifying his own position by listing moral and political exemplars. In 1994, for example, the list included Gandhi, Mandela, Guevara, Brecht, Charlie Chaplin, Frida Kahlo, Malcolm X, the Zapatistas of Chiapas.[105] When he draws on the work of Marxist thinkers - Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno - he does so in passing, without serious engagement with their thought.[106]

Indeed, if there is one major influence on Breytenbach's Marxism, then it is that of Zen Buddhism. At about the same time that he entered underground activism, according to Weschler, Breytenbach began to immerse himself in Zen Buddhism. Some decades later, he recalled: 'To be a Zen Communist seems a contradiction, or at any rate peculiar - I believe I was the only clandestine activist in my dojo, I know I was the only Zen student in Okhela. But it's not such a contradiction as all that. The concreteness, shying away from abstractions, not manipulating facts or other people, forswearing personal ambition, attentiveness, awareness - all these are functional political precepts.'[107]

These precepts are surely capable of being articulated politically. But they are primarily ethical, rather than political, and better suited to providing guidance to the politically committed individual than to building a revolutionary organisation. And the task which Breytenbach set himself in the early 70s was not that of individual solidarity, but precisely the building of a new organisation. For this task, the precepts drawn from Zen Buddhism had no self-evident implications. One can forswear ambition, for example, out of loyalty to very different kinds of organisation.[108]

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[102] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 138

[103] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, pp. 29, 85.

[104] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 228.

[105] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, pp. 3-4; cf. Judas Eye, p. 123; 'Aantekeninge oor 'n Middelwêreld,' Fragmente 1 (1998), pp. 29-30.

[106] Brecht is the most significant of these influences, but as much a literary as a political model (cf. The Memory of Birds, p. 37). On Benjamin, cf. End Papers, p. 249; on Adorno, The Memory of Birds, p. 141.

[107] Lawrence Weschler, Calamities of Exile: Three Non-fiction Novellas (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 155; this passage is shortened in the version which appeared in the New Yorker (Weschler, 'Afrikaner Dante,' p. 85). In Boek (Deel Een), Breytenbach drew parallels between Maoism and Zen Buddhism (pp. 55-6). He describes taking his vows as a boddhisattva in True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 197.

[108] The indeterminate nature of Zen Buddhist activism on behalf of the poor is evident in the very different context described in Bernard Glassman and Rick Fields, Instructions to the Cook (New

In Breytenbach's writings of this period, there are recurring references to Buddha and to prominent figures within Buddhism, but these are usually juxtaposed with references to Marx or Marxism, rather than initiating any engagement between the two bodies of thought. 'Not only Marx,' he wrote in 1969, 'but already old Buddha and so many others before him in the bottomless mirror of time, have pointed out that people are bound to the results of their acts and omissions.' Describing four political prisoners being carried to the gallows in Pretoria on stretchers, with their limbs broken, Breytenbach invokes Buddha and Marx as joint witnesses here to a social logic of the absurd: 'If your warder orders you to walk to the gallows, then you walk, or else you will be punished so that you can learn once and for all the intimate meaning of authority, and will never again disregard an order'.[109] But the focus of the text soon shifts away from the social logic portrayed here to the appropriate response to it for the poet.

Marxism and Zen Buddhism are most consistently linked in Breytenbach's thought by the idea that action (whether political or spiritual) can be guided by a discipline of voluntary immersion into a larger (historical or natural) process. 'The Middle Way,' he wrote while in prison, 'is absolute identification and adherence: only in that way can objectivity and stillness be achieved.'[110] And in 1990: 'Buddha helped me to understand Marx'; the Middle Way contains 'the kernel of a dialectic encompassing continuous movement and engagement, for you can be neutral and unattached only if you are completely part of the process.'[111]

This link is also made by Erich Fromm, who holds that 'what is common' to Goethe, Hegel and Marx and to Zen Buddhism 'is the idea that man overcomes the subject-object split ... Man in relating himself to the objective world humanly, overcomes self-alienation.'[112]

This idea of immersion, non-duality, or the loss of self as the precondition of political commitment, is perhaps most recognisable in Breytenbach's subsequent recollection of the life of the underground activist as a 'clean form of political activity, divested of the more mundane horse-trading and compromise of everyday politics,' which allows a 'certain purity of thinking', and 'imposes a rigorous discipline'. In retrospect, Breytenbach argues that this loss of self often enables the underground activist to be manipulated in undemocratic and sectarian ways. The idea that 'we can make pure and honest militants' is mistaken. The 'liberating concept,' he holds, 'is exactly to give over to the people the way a fish gives itself over to the sea; and

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York, Bell Tower, 1996).

[109] Breyten Breytenbach, Katastrofes (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1980), p. 112; cf. Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 251.

[110] Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), p. 165.

[111] 'Fragments from a Growing Awareness,' in The Memory of Birds, p. 36.

[112] Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man (New York, Frederick Unger, 1961), p. 33. The parallel was defended in the South African context by Martin Versfeld; cf. Degenaar et al, Beweging Uitwaarts, pp. 71-2, and the discussion of Versfeld in chapter ten below. The theme of overcoming the distinction of subject and object is also to be found in the work of Heidegger - perhaps an older presence in Afrikaner intellectual life than Zen. On parallels between Heidegger and Zen Buddhism, cf. Michael E. Zimmerman, The Eclipse of the Self (Athens, Ohio University Press, 1981), pp. 255-76.

also, despite, or because of the watery taste of failure in the mouth, to continue struggling'.[113]

The fundamental problem with this approach is that it requires a reality uncontaminated by ideology in which the activist self can be immersed. To the extent that historical reality (as opposed to nature) is in some part constituted ideologically, it does not readily provide the medium in which the self can be recovered, with its purposes enlarged and undistorted. But the politics of Okhela required not so much immersion into the historical reality of the South African struggle, even if it might have had this in mind as an eventual aim. Instead, it required an unusually mediated and complicated relationship to that reality.

The politics of Zen Communism insisted on immediate immersion into the reality of oppression and struggle. But it could never locate the uncontaminated reality in which immersion was possible, and created ever more complex procedures for locating it. Rather than allowing the activist self to be shaped and formed by 'giving over to the people', as the fish gives over to the undifferentiated medium of the sea, it required the activist to inhabit a range of ultimately incompatible political roles. To create 'a White New Left alternative to the SACP, operating within the ambit of the ANC' required that no fewer than four distinct ideological contexts be addressed, each in a somewhat different way.

First, Okhela acknowledged the ANC as 'the political formation representing the majority of South Africans'.[114] African Nationalism is taken to be the 'sea' in which the fish of Okhela are to swim, the broad and inclusive context of the liberation struggle. At the same time, because it provides legitimacy, it is the target for those with differing agendas to pursue. A fish in this sea is vulnerable to its predators.

Second, among potential predators, Okhela had to be especially wary of the SACP. But its attitude towards the SACP appears contradictory on at least two points. Okhela was opposed to the manipulative character of the SACP's alliance with the ANC, which both deferred to African nationalism and yet reduced it to a specific role within their own mechanical conception of social change. Yet Okhela sought to compete with the SACP at their own game of bureaucratic manipulation within the ANC alliance. Within the ANC alliance also, the SACP was treated as if it was dogmatic and authoritarian, insofar as it provided a pole of opposition for Okhela's New Left Marxism, and at the same time as if it was capable of co-existing with Okhela in a tolerant and pluralistic way. Once Tambo encountered SACP opposition to Okhela, he - predictably - withdrew his support for Okhela.[115] Recently, Breytenbach has suggested that the SACP themselves may have been responsible for betraying his mission to the South African security police.[116]

Third, Okhela's relationship with its own ideological base was almost equally strained. New Left Marxism - or Western Marxism - was represented within South Africa primarily by the emerging independent trade union movement. For Okhela, support for that movement was understandably a priority. It also had support - or sympathy at least - among radical students, church organisations, and intellectuals. It had no coherent political or even ideological

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[113] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 81, 86.

[114] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 74-5.

[115] Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity,' p. 135.

[116] Max du Preez, 'Breyten Breytenbach: Geen Sensuur,' De Kat 15:9 (March 2000), p. 55; cf. Weschler, 'An Afrikaner Dante,' p. 87.

leadership in South Africa. Indeed, it was opposed to the centralised model of leadership associated with both Stalinism and Trotskyism. White intellectuals in this tradition were often keenly aware of the dangers of speaking for the oppressed majority, rather than supporting their efforts to discover their own voices. Okhela's task was to provide central leadership for this anti-centralising political current, defined by its disavowal of a leadership role. It was to provide 'invisible support' to the liberation movement.[117] In so doing, it hoped to provide an alternative to the manipulations of the SACP within the leadership of that movement.

Fourth and finally, Okhela sought to radicalise, activate and draw into the liberation struggle white intellectuals, 'particularly radical Afrikaner thinkers, artists and writers'.[118] This may have been mainly the result of Breytenbach's involvement, and he would certainly have been central to this task. It had been at the heart of his own political involvement throughout his years of exile. It was quite probably the main reason for Tambo's short-lived endorsement of Okhela. But insofar as this task was central to Okhela and Breytenbach, it was also a central source of contradiction. For it required that Okhela provide a left-wing critique and alternative to the SACP, while locating itself within a social basis historically and by virtue of their class position to the right of the SACP.

Stalinism itself is a peculiar combination of left- and right-wing elements - belonging on the left in its appeal to the working-class, its anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, and solidarity with the struggles of the Third World; but on the right in its repressiveness, dogmatism and insistence on uniformity of thought and action. New Left Marxism can be seen as 'to the left' of Stalinism, insofar as its critique of Stalinism is made in the name of a more radical emancipation. Afrikaner dissent cannot be seen in the same light. Whatever the deformations of Stalinism, in a context such as the struggle against apartheid in South Africa it remained an ideology of working-class resistance to capitalist rule, not of ruling-class dissent from the political and cultural irrationalities of the racial order.[119]

Okhela's critique of the SACP and Stalinism, then, was not 'coming from the left', as Breytenbach contended. It was coming from the left and the right at the same time. In its theoretical inspiration, it came from the left; in the social basis which it sought to mobilise, from its right.[120] It was held together only by the voluntarist conception of individual agency which was exemplified by the decision to send its best-known and most conspicuous activist on

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[117] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 389.

[118] Callinicos, 'Oliver Tambo and the Politics of Race, Class and Ethnicity,' p. 134; cf. Welz, Breyten en die Bewaarder, p. 116; Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 79-80.

[119] Breytenbach seems to notice this problem only as it relates to the class-location of the individual activist, and not the interests and vision of a larger cultural group; see his comments on children of privilege identifying themselves with a proletarian struggle in Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 132-3.

[120] There is an interesting exchange between E.P. Thompson and Perry Anderson on the ideological location of Stalinism, dating from roughly the same period. Thompson held that no wave of the working-class movement could be seen as 'further to the right' than Stalinism (The Poverty of Theory (London, Merlin, 1979), p. 326). Anderson replied that this was a 'classical cold war position', citing the Vietnamese revolution as an instance of the 'revolutionary world-historical role' of Stalinism (Arguments within English Marxism (London, Verso, 1980), pp. 122-3). Of course, world history is a difficult and changeable measure to use in such questions.

that fateful secret mission to South Africa in 1975. Breytenbach subsequently explained his acceptance of the task: 'It was not my idea to go down there but I had to submit myself to the majority decision to do so. Stupidly vain, when told there were certain things which only I could do, it touched me, and I fell for it ... I felt a moral commitment, a necessity to go. How could I pretend to lead an organisation of which some members would have to do dangerous things if I was not willing to do so myself.'[121] But the confusions which led up to his arrest and recantation had deeper roots and had begun long before that.

The Idea of Dialectic in Breytenbach's Prison Writings

At the time of his arrest and conviction, Breytenbach was a major figure in Afrikaans literature. He had long opposed the separation of Afrikaner politics and Afrikaans literary culture, but that separation was now to work peculiarly to his benefit. As a prisoner, he was allowed to continue writing - 'for the sake of Afrikaans literature' - although under severely constraining conditions.[122]

Before his imprisonment, he had spoken of working on his 'final' anthology of poetry, 'because I have had my say'.[123] But arrest, conviction, solitary confinement in prison left him no other identity but that provided by words, and provoked a controlled outpouring of them. After his release in 1982, his writings as a prisoner were published during the following five years: four volumes of Afrikaans poetry, a selection from that poetry in English, a novel, Mouroir, and a book of reflections on the process of writing a poem, Boek (Deel Een). Along with them, a number of other works appeared which were more or less directly the product of his prison years, although written after his release: his prison memoir, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, a collection of his political writings from before and after his imprisonment, End Papers, and a second novel, Memories of Snow and of Dust, published in 1989, which reflects upon the experience of underground activism and imprisonment, and brings the larger cycle of his prison writings to a close.

The event which brought this cycle to a close was the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and other organisations in February 1990, and the beginning of the negotiations which were to lead to the election of an ANC government in April 1994. It is not that Breytenbach's prison experience was made irrelevant by the end of apartheid; but unavoidably it took on a different and diminished role in his writings. Dialectical themes are developed further after 1989. But for the most part, his writings in prison and during the rest of the 1980s set the direction for this development.[124]

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[121] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 80.

[122] Cf. Galloway, Breyten Breytenbach as Openbare Figuur, pp. 191-4.

[123] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 139-40. According to Ampie Coetzee, Breytenbach stopped writing 'for a time' in order to become involved in the liberation struggle (Letterkunde en Krisis, p. 44).

[124] Works from this cycle (1975-89) also form part of other overlapping cycles within Breytenbach's writings: Return to Paradise (1993) concludes a trilogy begun with Seisoen in die Paradys; Woordwerk (1999) is the sequel to Boek (Deel Een) (cf. Breytenbach, Woordwerk, p. 125). Two texts from this period are also included in a collection of political writings, The Memory of Birds

There is no reason to suppose that at any stage of the process of thought and writing which gave rise to this body of work, Breytenbach consciously set himself the task of re-examining the conception of dialectic which had been present in his work until then. Rather, he was forced to make sense of his own situation in prison - as a failed activist still committed to liberation, as a Zen Buddhist whose inner discipline faced new tests, as a poet for whom poetry was now a means of psychic survival - and in doing so, his work constantly returned to dialectical themes. He approached them in new ways, at once more reflective and more deeply political. Cut off from the mainstream of the dialectical tradition by the circumstances of his own political and intellectual formation, there is a sense in which he had now to re-invent it, drawing on new or neglected resources in the process.

This account of dialectic was never systematically articulated, and some of its arguments and emphases varied from one context to the next. He almost never explicitly reconsidered his earlier views, but moved on to new ones instead. This re-invention was carried through to such an extent that it is possible, in retrospect, to treat it as a conscious and unified project, with its own defining contexts and aims. But it is almost certain that it did not begin life in this way.

The starting point for Breytenbach's prison dialectic was a critique of the central conceptions of his years in Okhela: the idea of discipline, which defined the underground activist and decided his success or failure; the goal of power, which justified the sacrifices which the movement demanded; and the ostensible result of all of this, historical progress. Underground work forges 'dedicated revolutionaries' conditioned into 'unquestioned loyalty, discipline', among whom 'relations are based on rock-bottom needs'. These relations are highly structured, 'with information strictly channelled, with walls separating sector from sector, with a hierarchy that cannot be questioned'. This 'makes of underground work a very undemocratic process and it constitutes a structure which can be a very manoeuvrable vehicle for whoever happens to occupy the central nerve point.' Breytenbach questions the 'romantic view of underground work' and asks: 'Has it ever been successful, apart from, in some instances, making it possible for the clandestine activist to come to power?'[125]

Discipline is justified by the needs of power. Questioning the cult of discipline therefore raises the question of whether power is itself the proper goal of the liberation struggle. For Breytenbach, it is not: 'Power is a totalitarian concept. To realise that you are marginal is of itself a way of making distance your own, of becoming as permanent as an ice-block going

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in Times of Revolution, published in 1996. Although the main focus of this section is on Breytenbach's prison writings (in the broad sense defined here), I also make use of later texts when these clarify aspects of the earlier argument.

[125] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 83, 82, 85. The concept of discipline provided the main lense through which the reviewer in the SACP's journal, African Communist, viewed Breytenbach's True Confessions. Breytenbach's politics are described as an 'infantile disorder' that 'can only lead him to individualism and adventurism', and 'the chief interest of the book is as an illustration of the individualistic preoccupations and destructive criticisms which come about when intellectuals are not able to discipline themselves and work within the structures of the mass movement' (Geus van de Suid, 'Failure of a Misguided Mission,' African Communist, no. 101 (second quarter 1985), pp. 106-7, 108.)

downstream, of disregarding coercion. It is to come upon an interstice of freedom.'[126] For a new elite to hold power does not challenge the conventions of power itself: 'Power structures are practically immutable and when broken down they're more likely than not to be replaced by others which are as exclusive and manipulative.'[127] The quest for power in the name of liberation turns into its opposite: 'All power needs interaction, relationships, intercourse ... in order to exist. It is dialectical. You are not fighting ghosts, but your brothers ... We are linked by our differences.'[128]

From the point of view of Breytenbach's view of dialectic, the main outcome of this argument is a more sceptical approach to the idea of progress. In the Okhela years, he had seen conflict and struggle as the necessary source of 'progress', and the movement of contradiction as following the trajectory of 'an ever-ascending spiral'.[129] In his prison writings, this idea of progress - and the linear conception of time underlying it - was consistently rejected. This was evident, first of all, in his re-examination of literary creation. 'There is a widely-held but mistaken idea that when you have said something ... you should not and need not say it again'. Instead, 'when you write a poem, you not only create a little basket of words', but also 'fashion a person for whom that which you have to say should and needs to be important. You are the nails in your own coffin ... For this reason, any idea of "progress" in poetry is surely misplaced.'[130]

It is a fallacy, he later argues, to postulate 'that there is a measurable progress in the quality of human intercourse.' In the life of the mind as in any other, growth and decay are inextricably linked: 'There is no composition like decomposition: not just a rearranging or falling apart, but verily rotting to the bone to bring to light the essential structure.'[131] He comes increasingly to view the linear idea of time as common ground for the apartheid regime and the liberation movement in South Africa. Marxist doctrines of historical determinism have mirrored Calvinist ideas of predestination. 'The Party does not learn from the past, it becomes the recipient, the guardian of the accumulated weight of the past ... time is an investment ... Marx will be proved right ... How is this any different from the Afrikaners' doctrine of predestination? ... Are we doomed to become imitators of the people we are combatting?'[132] Against Marxist or Calvinist ideas of redemption, he asserts the need to act in solidarity with the powerless without claiming the force of history on your side: 'I need not believe or trust in the possibility of attaining the objective in order to keep moving. That would be falling into the progressist trap.'[133]

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[126] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 309.

[127] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 32.

[128] Breytenbach, Memory of Snow and of Dust, p. 128.

[129] Breytenbach, End Papers, pp. 251-2.

[130] Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), p. 41.

[131] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, pp. 86, 151.

[132] Breytenbach, Memory of Snow and of Dust, p. 128.

[133] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 32.

What exactly is the 'progressist trap'? The belief that progress is the certain or natural outcome of existing historical forces is clearly one element of the complex of ideas which Breytenbach rejects. But he sometimes goes further, and suggests that belief in the very possibility of progress is equally a trap. If this were his view - if, in other words, all historical situations and outcomes were fundamentally equivalent, and indistinguishable from the normative point of view - then it would be hard to know the meaning of solidarity, or of Breytenbach's commitment to 'keep moving'. For all movement would be a kind of return to the same point within a normatively homogenous reality.

There is, however, a third belief which he seems to have in mind: the belief that progress is unmixed; that technological progress goes along with moral progress, and that we are justified in overlooking its human costs. When 'political language' overlooks these costs, it makes itself liable to Breytenbach's charge that 'it is never self-doubting, dark or broken'. He describes his own task, in contrast with the tasks of the political, as 'putting in motion the joyful despair of metamorphosis.'[134]

Dialectic, in this view, is no longer an 'ever-ascending spiral' which decides in advance the direction of history. But once the linear conception of historical time has been discarded, is a different conception of historical time possible or necessary? At least three alternative approaches to these questions can be found in his work. First, there are passages in which he treats the idea of time as primarily an ideological construction, upholding a Eurocentric view of historical progress. 'Africa is in the paradoxical situation of being one of the oldest civilisations continuously having to invent itself. Could it be because the criteria of recognition are Western, and that Africa is always sinking below the horizon of historical perception? ... History is a Western way of digesting time; it is a White man's burden.'[135]

Second, in one passage at least, he writes as if the linear conception has simply been left behind by modernism - put differently, as if literary modernism was the endpoint of a new linear history. 'Before, long ago, we were inventing ourselves through stories,' he says in a talk given in 1991. 'It was fondly assumed that history had a meaning.' Modernism becomes dominant when we accept that such meaning has been lost. 'Linear or progressive time, starting from the unknowable to disappear into the unknown, was destroyed.' But no stable alternative has arisen, and modernism 'also embodied the dream of progress'. Modernism becomes a new legitimation of established power, and Breytenbach ends this reflection with the despondent question: 'Can there be a modernism, at least in the creative area, which is based on non-power?'[136]

Third, there are other passages in which he seems willing simply to dissolve the concept of time into a larger cosmology: 'We speak of chance and fate because we cling with constricted buttocks to the conception of time ... We experience time as consciousness instead of as a dimension or a thing for instance .. That is how psychocentric man is.'[137] Much later, writing in a register at some remove from the political pressures of the 1980s, he argued that 'time is human consciousness of growth and decay. But it still seems that there are cycles of

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[134] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, pp. 72-3.

[135] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 67.

[136] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, pp. 137, 138, 139.

[137] Breytenbach, Mouroir: Mirror Notes of a Novel (London, Faber, 1984), p. 208.

transformation larger than can be imagined by human consciousness. To reach those areas, you work with word strings, word winds, word gatherings ... Of course, everything is true at all times; some things are just more true than others from time to time.'[138]

None of these approaches goes very far in answering the question of how a dialectical process is to be conceived, or what it means to think dialectically, once we are no longer able to rely on the linear conception of historical progress. If there is one consistent answer to this question in Breytenbach's work, it is that this absence establishes a particular ethical relationship towards the passing of time, and requires individuals to deliberate consciously on their role in respecting and validating what has gone before them, without seeking to preserve what is always part of a process of change.

More precisely, what is distinctive about Breytenbach's conception of time is the ethical relationship it establishes to the past. For the linear conception also claims to make ethical conduct possible in the present, but does so by treating the past as superseded, and emphasizing the causal relation of present conduct to the future. Once the linear conception is denied, however, there is no way of discharging your ethical responsibility by being on the side of the future rather than the past. The past and future are not necessarily in conflict. When they are, there is no easy resolution to be gained by siding with the future.

It is possible, for example, to acknowledge a background formed by racial and other forms of exclusion, and at the same time seek to develop a larger, non-racial community: 'The dialectic between the "own" and the larger togetherness, between the specific and the general, is creative and progressive and transformative. It is also never-ending, never resolved once and for all ... What do you take with you of the old as you go over to the new? ... I know only that I find myself exposed on that edge of becoming. Consciousness in movement is not a calm sea.'[139] Instead, 'you carry your history with you piece by piece, until it eventually falls to pieces.'[140] The past has not been completed and left behind; nor does it provide an eternal and unchanging standard; but the past endures, and imposes on us the dialectical task of keeping alive its purposes precisely when they are least familiar in the light of the present. There is an obligation to resist the 'Great Forgetting' of consumer culture.[141]

The linear view of historical progress implied by the 'ever-ascending spiral' of Breytenbach's dialectic during his Okhela years could claim the merit of providing a common perspective to large numbers of people engaged in a common struggle. To some extent, very different struggles are welded together by a philosophy of history capable of interpreting them as parts of a single movement of progress. Within the ethical relationship to historical time proposed in his prison writings, it is difficult to see how any such common perspective could emerge. In the work which initiates Breytenbach's re-thinking of dialectic - at once an exposition of Zen Buddhism and an enquiry into the poet's craft - he asks: 'How do you gain access, in all clarity, to the whole within which opposites continue to exist without disrupting their symbiosis? ... What Buddha proposed is no more than a method with which one can experiment; it is not a religion, or a serving of gods who can blindly be accepted once and for

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[138] Breytenbach, Woordwerk, p. 56.

[139] Breytenbach, Dog Heart, p. 186; cf. 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,' p. 28.

[140] Breytenbach, Woordwerk, p. 202.

[141] Breytenbach, Woordwerk, p. 174.

all. It must be grasped, and then constantly questioned ... The key to Buddhist thought is independence and tolerance.'[142]

The dilemma described here is one which is faced by any dialectic which seeks to avoid seeing ideas and events in isolation. On the one hand, without defining such a total context within which they are seen, events will invariably appear as if in isolation. On the other, if that total context is defined in advance of the enquiry, it may ensure that such an enquiry interprets events in such a way as to discover only what fits in with that pre-defined view. In response to this dilemma, each individual 'must find their own manner of becoming the "way"'. At the same time, because they are 'building something (a self) capable of grasping a certain thing, without yet knowing what that thing is', they are 'unavoidably dependent on exactly those traditions and old disciplines or at least on patterns which, as far as you can tell, have yielded fruit for others' (66). For that reason also, a 'master' is necessary who can be imitated to a certain degree, and serves also as 'punch-ball and obstacle' (79). For the writer, the conflict of individual inspiration and established convention is essential: 'If there was no need for technique, little would probably be written ... So it's fortunate that language is an effort ... Dichotomy and dialectic are not obstacles, but healthy signs, as they offer resistance' (106-7).

In one sense, it is the task of each individual to establish their own ethical obligation towards the past. In another, the individual can do this only by constantly taking account of collective political struggles in the present. In this ethical framework, the main obligation owed to the past - and through the past, to the present and future - is always defined politically. To keep alive the memory of those who would otherwise be forgotten; to act in solidarity with those who struggle against oppression; to cultivate the critical sense which keeps alternatives open - these are three expressions, each in a different temporal mode, of the same ethical obligation. Of his own tasks as a political writer without a stable political home, he writes: 'I must keep hold of Ariadne's inky thread, even with the tongue-taste of defeat in the mouth, because every little effort may just contribute towards destroying the old labyrinth. I must hang in there, hoping to set off some alarms somewhere, and at least to add to the quality of the reflection, to keep some options open ... Beside, continued commitment may just succeed in being perceived as a form of solidarity and support by those in their transit areas and their prisons who need to feel some human concern in order to survive.'[143]

Just as denying the linear conception of time establishes a new area of ethical responsibility, so in taking up this responsibility we locate ourselves more fully and firmly in history. 'I'm less of a threat to others when I'm at ease with my own unelucidated origins,' Breytenbach tells (a lightly fictionalised) Ampie Coetzee in a radio interview.[144] He argues: 'Ethics is important. If you "choose" who you are, there is a deepened sense of finitude, of beginnings and endings and of purpose.'[145]

This argument against the linear movement of history and for more consciously ethical responsibility towards that which is historically transient is, to some extent, a continuation of

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[142] Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), pp. 170, 173-4. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

[143] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 32.

[144] Breytenbach, Dog Heart, p. 184.

[145] Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,', p. 43.

the Zen Buddhist theme of immersion into a process as a mode of political commitment. But it is at the same time a dialectical re-working of that theme, which gives much greater emphasis to the conscious and critical detachment of the individual immersed in the process, and requires a more active historical sense. Rather than the metaphor of the fish in water - drawn perhaps from Mao's writings on people's war - that of the desert nomad, who must always move forward, is now more conspicuous.[146]

Thus, in a context in which history provides no certain direction, 'the way forward is to keep moving'.[147] When all directions seem to be obstructed, 'the point is to start anywhere. To continue then in the direction opened by that start. Whatever the way may be, wherever it may lead ... The method I've decided on is to keep moving.'[148] The Middle Way of Buddhism 'embodies the necessity of movement', not 'circumventing and obscuring irreconcilable contradictions' but recognising that 'it would be futile to sink into the static stance of waiting for the opposites to be resolved'.[149] The struggle against apartheid will not necessarily produce a better society, but at least the destruction of apartheid makes it possible for the other - 'maybe better' - to take its place. For 'there is no turning back; there is no self to turn back to.'[150]

There is no self to turn back to, in the sense of a fixed and stable identity unchanged by the projects it undertakes. This is a constant theme in Breytenbach's writings: 'The self is a hearse. Death is the past, all the mutations of the "self" which are now left to rot. You are always becoming, only a process.'[151] You can turn back to the self, then, but it will not be the same self that you were when you began with the project from which you will later wish to turn back. 'Memory is Kaggen, the trickster god. It says there is <u>one</u> certainty: nothing is what it seems. It says there is <u>one</u> finality: change.'[152]

To think dialectically, in this context, is to think reflexively; it is to interpret the world in such a way as to make sense of the struggles of those seeking to change it and express your solidarity with them, but at the same time to remain aware of how you are changed by the process. For if the self is no more than the process of change which results from conscious identification with those struggles, then reflection on the self is necessarily a mode of thinking about how that solidarity is consistently to be maintained. Understood in this way, there is no need to interpret Breytenbach's account of the task of the writer as inward-looking or apolitical: 'The writer regards the self as a vocation, and life as a reading of the self. Because the most personal is also the most subversive and paradoxically the most universal ... In these times of decay and displacement, we attach more credibility to reporting on a lived trajectory

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[146] Cf. Breytenbach, <u>Dog Heart</u>, pp. 165, 172; Coetzee, <u>Die Hand vol Vere</u>, p. 339.

[147] Breytenbach, <u>The Memory of Birds</u>, p. 158.

[148] Breytenbach, <u>Memory of Snow and of Dust</u>, p. 215.

[149] Breytenbach, <u>The Memory of Birds</u>, p. 10.

[150] Breytenbach, <u>True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist</u>, pp. 239-40.

[151] Breytenbach, <u>Boek (Deel Een)</u>, p. 88.

[152] Breytenbach, <u>Dog Heart</u>, p. 188.

than the presentation of large analyses or principles.'[153]

What is the character of 'these times of decay and displacement' which makes this personalised mode of social thought necessary? In answering this question, Breytenbach's prison dialectic reaches back to arguments which had their beginnings in the time before his activism. In an early work, he reflected on the writer's task: 'Of course, patching words together is a way of peddling illusions. My investigation is focussed on the play and relationship between reality and illusion and image. Reality is the sum total of the observations (and therefore also associations) of my senses in a particular environment at a particular time. Everything is illusion ... But I want to make my illusions worth while. Hence the beautiful apple-trees of my images in which I can hang my illusions.'[154]

In his prison writings, Breytenbach's approach to this relationship is less aestheticised, and more political: 'part of the civic poet's responsibility is to recognise the interstices, to be the thin wedge that could split the cracks, to seize the distaff elements and the moments of disequilibrium. He must be able to exploit the dynamic dialectical relationship of illusion, or appearance, with reality - knowing intimately the myriad ways in which the one becomes the other.'[155] Increasingly, he views this relationship of illusion and reality as the product of a specific moment in capitalist development: 'We are moving into exciting and frightening times where everything and its exact opposite seem to be true,' he says in 1990. 'We live ever more by the reflection of reality, its staging, rather than by reality itself. We need to be told what is happening to us and then the telling becomes more real, is indeed the true happening.'[156] With the coming of liberation, independence and legitimate government, there is also 'a television in every shack and pondok to wipe out memory'. The image of the mirror recurs throughout Breytenbach's work, often to convey this effect: 'Mirrors have a life of their own, and those who become trapped in them are doomed to continued existence.'[157]

To keep memory alive, and make of it a source of creative imagination, is also to uphold a certain conception of liberation. Liberation is not the achievement of the 'short term goal' set out in the Okhela manifesto: 'the seizing of power by the Liberation Movement representing the people of South Africa.'[158] Nor is it reduced to an attitude of mind in which 'freedom is accepting unfreedom, denying that they are opposites, reading one in the other, and going beyond.'[159]

Instead, if the conception of dialectic developed in Breytenbach's prison years and after is

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[153] Breytenbach, 'Vuur in die Vingers,' preface to F. van Zyl Slabbert, Afrikaner Afrikaan, no page numbers indicated.

[154] Breytenbach, Om te Vlieg (Cape Town, Buren, 1971), p. 91. On the origins of this text, dated 1971-1963-1966, cf. Annari van der Merwe and Adriaan van Dis, 'Om te Vlieg en Om te Vlieg,' in Ampie Coetzee, ed., Woorde teen die Wolke (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1980), pp. 56-106.

[155] Breytenbach, Judas Eye, p. 133.

[156] Breytenbach, Hart-lam, pp. 34-5.

[157] Breytenbach, Boklied, pp. 77, 131.

[158] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 385.

[159] Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), p. 87.

taken as a whole, it can be seen as an attempt to formulate a discipline of mind embodying a conception of freedom as rational self-determination. 'Power to the people,' he wrote in a reflection on his talk to the UCT Summer School of 1973, 'means that people are given the resources for self-knowledge, knowledge of the other (perhaps the same thing), and self-determination. To give the people back to themselves ... We must still learn who we are; we must still become used to ourselves.'[160] After his release from prison, he told students at Stellenbosch: 'My variant of power to the people is that everyone must think for himself, and the way I understand respect for my fellow-human is to allow each of them to think for themselves.'[161] A decade or more later, Breytenbach's tone was more sober, but the argument was not fundamentally different: 'In my experience, conscious awareness does not lead to certainty. I am not even so sure that it produces understanding. But a conscious life is all we have with which to undermine death.'[162]

Breytenbach's Dialectic: A Provisional Balance Sheet

There is much that is original and compelling in this conception of dialectic, and much also that is fragmentary, inconsistent or incomplete. Its achievements are surely matched by its limitations, and the areas in which each of them occur are briefly noted here.

First, Breytenbach's account upholds the revolutionary impulses of dialectic, and resists its assimilation into the pragmatic modes of calculation of 'another power monopoly' in the making.[163] But it does this at a cost of ignoring real problems of political organisation, and even of collective action, justified by a somewhat theatrical rejection of Leninism.[164]

Second, it re-thinks the meaning of political action outside the framework of a linear conception of historical progress, and develops a dialectical ethic of memory, solidarity and keeping open alternatives in its place. But it never attempts, or even really recognises, the task of developing a more fully dialectical conception of historical time.

Third, it integrates into dialectical thinking the particular and the contingent, seeking to capture their narrative singularity, rather than viewing them as local manifestations of a universal historical process - often modelled on a Eurocentric reading of world history. It does this by constantly exploring the interplay of reality and illusion in contemporary society - an interplay which is not reducible to the workings of contemporary capitalism, but is often grounded in it. But it only occasionally takes seriously the task of grasping how illusion is produced and sustained by the real structures of contemporary capitalism.

Fourth, it discovers dialectical capacities in the most unexpected moments of individual and collective awareness, showing concretely how these capacities precede the abstract and elaborate philosophical constructions of dialectic which often dominate debate on the left. But

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[160] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, p. 134.

[161] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Die Game is nog Lank nie Verby nie,' Die Suid-Afrikaan 6 (Autumn 1986), p. 10.

[162] Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,' p. 33.

[163] Breytenbach, Judas Eye, p. 133.

[164] Breytenbach, 'Die Partylyn,' in Coetzee, ed., Die Hand vol Vere, p. 319; Boklied, p. 21.

it gives no sustained account of where these capacities come from, and how they are to be generated. On occasion, Breytenbach gestures towards the oppressed and exploited: 'Only the poor can break the cycle of exploitation and dependence. Power makes stupid.'[165] More often, he locates the capacity for dialectic in an essentialist view of Africa, 'where people don't have either/or minds but nonetheless an effortless mastery of dialectics to make it a joyful game of trictrac'.[166] In this view, there is a mode of dialectic which is habitual in African society, which begins with imitation - 'we live in the eyes of others, not in a mirror'- and develops through respectful modification which allows a 'different edifice' to be erected on 'supposedly shared foundations'.[167] It is an interesting model of learning and argumentation in pre-capitalist society, and perhaps a way of extending the Socratic elenchus from the realm of formal argument into the conduct of life, rather than an historically useful account of African culture.

Fifth, this conception of dialectic - almost certainly without Breytenbach having intended this - gave new life and focus to the resources of the dialectical tradition in South Africa. It restated its characteristic defence of free speech and ongoing discussion, at a time when the major proponents were increasingly inclined to assimilate their thought into a liberal individualism. It gave political edge to a conception of the self as a constantly renewed process of becoming, at a time when this conception threatened to become a philosophical platitude. It enabled its characteristic critique of dogmatism to survive the decline of apartheid dogmas, without simply extending the slogans of the Cold War. It saved the idea of oop gesprek from absorption into the negotiating strategies of an emerging, deracialised political elite. It provided the basis for an important critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa which Breytenbach developed after his return to South Africa in August 1990, with a prescience and persistence perhaps unmatched on the South African Left.[168]

It could sustain that dialectical tradition because it extended its resources - developed within the context of dissent within a racially-defined ruling-class - beyond their original boundaries, and made them part of an effort to imagine and create a non-racial future in South Africa. Once again, the limit of this achievement must be recognised. For at the same time, Breytenbach's work has been influential in enabling a younger generation of Afrikaners to think about their own future in non-racial terms, rather than informing argument and debate within a context more fully defined by non-racialism. To recognise this limitation is not to suggest that one individual can be asked to overcome it. For 'writing is not possession. What you have handed out, or helped to create, you no longer control, and those who consume it make of it what they will.'[169]

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[165] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 6.

[166] Breytenbach, Judas Eye, p. 128.

[167] Breytenbach, Memory of Snow and of Dust, pp. 60, 77-8. Breytenbach later treats this mode of learning as specifically Chinese ('Aantekeninge van 'n Middelwêreld,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 32. The argument that African thought is intuitively dialectical is developed in a somewhat different way by Leopold Senghor, cf. On African Socialism (London, Pall Mall, 1964), pp. 73-7.

[168] Breytenbach's writings on the negotiated settlement discussed in Chapter Nine below.

[169] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, p. 134.

Whatever the limitations of Breytenbach's dialectic, it has few parallels in scope and ambition in South African political and intellectual life. To the extent that we take seriously the need to think dialectically about the new South Africa, we can hardly afford to overlook the resources which it offers.

CHAPTER NINE

MARXISM AND DIALECTIC IN SOUTH AFRICA

Breytenbach, Turner and Versfeld

Breytenbach's reconstruction of dialectic, begun in solitary confinement in Pretoria Central Prison, was so unusual a moment in South African political and intellectual life that it is surprising to discover its many parallels with another initiative, undertaken in the same years, and similarly unnoticed since then: the still unpublished philosophical work on dialectic of Richard Turner, who was then living in Durban under the restrictions of a banning order. Even more striking than the parallels between the two projects are those between the lives which led up to that re-thinking of dialectic, and of which those projects formed an integral part.

Breytenbach and Turner both became politically active as students at UCT in the protests against the segregation of the universities.[1] Breytenbach began his studies there in 1958, and Turner, a year or so younger, in 1959. In this context also, both were drawn away from the pursuit of conventional middle-class ambition.

The crucial context of their political formation - above all, of their Marxism - was Paris in the 1960s, at that time enjoying 'a cosmopolitan paramountcy in the general Marxist universe that recalls something of the French ascendancy in the epoch of the Enlightenment'.[2] Breytenbach left for Europe at the end of 1959, and settled in Paris in 1962. Turner completed an honours degree in Philosophy at UCT in 1963, and spent the next three years in Paris, writing a doctoral thesis on the political thought of Sartre. In 1964, Breytenbach published his first volume of stories, Katastrofes, with its title, epigraph and central theme taken from an article by Sartre, who was clearly an important early influence on his thinking.[3]

The emerging trade union movement of the 1970s provided a major point of political orientation for both Turner and Breytenbach. After returning from France, Turner held temporary teaching positions in South Africa - among others, as a colleague of Johan Degenaar and André du Toit at Stellenbosch in 1969 - before being appointed at the University of Natal in Durban in 1970. There he played a crucial role in the emergence of the independent trade union movement in the early 1970s. By then, Breytenbach was already involved in underground anti-apartheid activism in Europe. On his clandestine visit to South Africa in 1975, his main objective was to recruit two South African activists with links to the emerging unions, who would co-ordinate support for the union movement from Western Europe.

The idea of dialectic was central to the politics of both Breytenbach and Turner, and there was much that their conceptions of dialectic had in common, despite differences in idiom, discipline and context. Each saw dialectic largely as the product of the open-ended nature of consciousness, and was centrally concerned with the autonomy of the individual subject. In

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[1] Biographical information on Turner is taken mostly from Tony Morphet, 'Biographical Introduction,' in Richard Turner, The Eye of the Needle (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980).

[2] Perry Anderson, In the Tracks of Historical Materialism (London, Verso, 1983), p. 32.

[3] Cf. Breytenbach, Boek (Deel Een), pp. 17, 43; End Papers, p. 22.

his writings of the early 1970s, Turner was far more definite than Breytenbach in aligning himself with the Marxism of the New Left, and against the conception of liberation implicit in Soviet Marxism.[4]

In its initial formulations, their dialectic also shared a strong orientation towards the future. In Turner's published writings, the individual's capacity to choose their own values, and through that choice to participate in making the future, was the driving-force of human freedom. In the early 1970s, Breytenbach upheld a more determinist idea of dialectic, but one in which history followed an 'ever-ascending spiral' into the future.

Both of them began their re-thinking of dialectic in the mid-70s, and for each of them the starting-point of this process was the need to take account of the ways in which historical conditions constrained a relatively optimistic, future-orientated view of history.[5] Both of them took the problem of time as the starting-point for this re-thinking, and sought to acknowledge the extent to which historical forces constrain individual autonomy, while at the same time upholding the claims of the autonomous intellect within more modest limits. Both remained deeply critical of the politics of the vanguard party. At different times, both of them explicitly rejected the idea of politics as the 'art of the possible'.[6]

Even on the issue which set Breytenbach furthest apart from the Left - the role of Afrikaner intellectuals - their attitudes were surprisingly similar. It would not have been unusual for a white radical at an English-language university to take only the most condescending interest in Afrikaner dissent. But Turner shared Breytenbach's sense that it was important to draw Afrikaner dissidents into an active role in the liberation struggle. In his account of the forces for change in South Africa, Turner included the 'increasing restlessness among Afrikaner intellectuals with the fundamentalism of the authorised version of Afrikaner nationalism.' He commented: 'This could lead merely to their integration into the more materialistic but equally exploitative mainstream of "white civilisation", but it could also lead to a more radical critique of white society.'[7]

Turner's project was ended by the assassin's bullet in January 1978. There are several references to his assassination in Breytenbach's writings, but only one mention of him as a living person. By coincidence, Turner was testifying as an expert witness for the defence at the trial of SASO leaders in 1975, which was being held at the same time as Breytenbach was on trial for terrorism in the adjoining courtroom. 'Once, on my way in,' Breytenbach recalled,

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[4] Turner, The Eye of the Needle, p. 65; Turner, 'The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought,' in P. Randall, ed., Directions of Change in South African Politics (Johannesburg, Spro-cas, 1971), pp. 76, 78.

[5] Turner's philosophical work during the years of his banning is not discussed in any detail in this study. The only completed account of that work is Michael Nupen, 'Richard Turner on Dialectical Reason' (paper for congress of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, 1988); cf. also Nupen's Turner Memorial Lecture, 'Philosophy and the Crisis in South Africa,' Transformation 7 (1988), pp. 37-46.

[6] Turner, The Eye of the Needle, p. 96; Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 96.

[7] Turner, 'The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought,' pp. 83-4.

'I caught a glimpse of Rick Turner's red beard, sitting alone in the SASO court.'[8] He adds a footnote which describes Turner's The Eye of the Needle so inaccurately as to suggest that he had not actually read the book. Turner and Breytenbach would have known of each other by public repute and through mutual friends. But they may never have met.

How are we to interpret these parallels? In those decades, there were many intellectuals who went through a cycle of commitment to radical social change, growing confidence as they became involved in activism, then re-examination of their ideas as they searched for a more secure foundation, after their activist hopes had been thwarted by a repressive state. There were surely other South Africans of that generation whose lives followed a comparable trajectory - even if they were not introduced to politics as UCT students, never lived in Paris in the 1960s nor were much influenced by Sartre, never married in contravention of their country's racial laws, nor put their political hopes on an emerging trade union movement, never gave much thought to the philosophical problems of dialectic, nor set down their thoughts on this topic in writing. Turner and Breytenbach lived this cycle more fully, and engaged with its demands and dilemmas more intensely. They were more visible to their contemporaries, and documented their responses more fully. We might see the re-examination of the dialectic as a point further along a trajectory which many others followed in a more desultory way - as the point which individuals of their generation would reach if only they had not been held back by the compromises of more ordinary lives.

But there is another way of approaching the question which deserves to be considered here: the influence on each of them of Martin Versfeld, or more accurately, the continuities between Versfeld's thought and their own. For any explanation of these parallels which treats them as the end-point of a trajectory followed by their generation, must still say what resources would be discovered at the end of it.

Among the central figures of the dialectical tradition in the 1960s, none was more sympathetic to Marxism - in his own deeply equivocal way - than Versfeld. At the same time, none was less actively engaged in contemporary political issues. His account of Marxism - developed most fully in the three essays which he contributed to Beweging Uitwaarts - was correspondingly removed from the politics of the time.[9]

Versfeld argued that Marxism was a secularised version of a Christian philosophy of history.[10] For Versfeld, Marx had 'brought to life for the contemporary world of thought the

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[8] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 67; cf. p. 296; End Papers, pp. 112, 183.

[9] There are important continuities between Versfeld's account of Marxism in 1969, and a much later text by Johan Degenaar, Marxism-Leninism and its Implications for South Africa (Pretoria, Academica, 1982). Degenaar's arguments were developed much later, and are not considered here. I am much indebted to my colleague Tony Holiday for his recollections of Versfeld, Richard Turner and the larger context of radical politics at UCT in the 1960s.

[10] This interpretation of Marxism was much more fully developed in the work of Karl Löwith, whose From Hegel to Nietzsche was published in English translation in 1964. Perhaps closer to Versfeld's political intent was Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism: An Interpretation (London, SCM Press, 1953).

Platonic and Biblical view of the sinful person as an alienated person'[11]. He adds that the critique of alienation is 'not only Western', but a central part of 'the moral tradition of humanity', to be found in such divergent sources as Zen Buddhism and Nietzsche's rejection of conformity (71-3, 82-3). Marx's critique of alienation was an attempt to 'recover Biblical values, Biblical earthliness and the Biblical sense of community for an individualistic century' (93). His atheism 'rested on a Biblical feeling for the dynamic of time. In that sense it is a Christian heresy. Marx falls essentially within the Christian dialectic' (95).

At the same time as Marxism draws on Christianity, according to Versfeld, it also usurps its prerogative: 'For Marx, self-knowledge replaces the knowledge of God' (91). Once interpreted in this way, as an ersatz theology, Marxism can be presented as vulnerable to the critique of Christianity: 'A genuine Christian confrontation with Marxism is one which explains in good faith that it is not radical enough; that it has a vested interest in much of what it attacks ... In many respects, Marxism has not overthrown the bourgeois world, but developed it to its limits' (107).

Versfeld surely views Marxism through the prism of his own philosophical interests, and perhaps his own wish to avoid political engagement. It is not only that he overlooks major aspects of Marx's thought. He also overlooks entirely the character of capitalism as a system of economic and political domination, in which classes have an inherently unequal role to play. By viewing capitalism instead as a kind of spiritual degradation - inflicted on capitalist and worker alike; or in the context of apartheid South Africa, on white and black alike - he removes from sight the Marxist commitment to class struggle, or the need for any kind of struggle at all.

How, according to Versfeld, is alienation to be overcome? He comments elsewhere that in his youth he had been attracted to liberalism, but had come to see that liberalism and nationalism alike were forms of abstraction. He had learned that 'the choice is not between liberalism and nationalism', but between 'abstraction and reality'. This applies not only to South Africa, but to the global contest between capitalism and socialism as well: 'What the Americans and the Russians have in common is a basic puritanism which sees matter purely as a thing and an object, and which wants to make use of the earth to flee from the earth.'[12]

Versfeld claims to follow Christ, Socrates and the Buddha in his rejection of the abstract illusions of politics, and his concern with the real world. He exhorts: 'Build your house, cook your food, make your clothes, catch your fish. There is no other way of understanding God and the world.'[13] It is through this immersion in the concrete activities of everyday domestic life that the division of subject and object, which is at the source of self-alienation, is overcome. 'Whoever makes himself whole makes the world whole' (114). In contrast, whoever seeks progress in the world is held captive by the abstractions of Hegel and Marx, mistakenly treating the world as the product of human history rather than as God's creation (115). Capitalism may bring about the division of subject and object which is at the root of alienation, but this does not lead Versfeld to believe that any challenge to capitalism is required.

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[11] Degenaar et al, Beweging Uitwaarts, p. 70. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

[12] Marthinus Versfeld, Klip en Klei (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1968), pp. 107, 113.

[13] Versfeld, Klip en Klei, p. 115.

In South Africa at that time, Versfeld's distinction between the real world of domesticity, outdoor recreation and the like, on the one hand, and the abstract realm of politics, on the other, was itself thoroughly abstract. His argument never looked beyond the comfortable, though not luxurious, circumstances of the tenured professor at an established university. It took no account of the countless ways in which the politics of apartheid invaded the real lives of South Africans - separating families through the migrant labour system, removing people from their houses to create racially-defined group areas, segregating universities and every other institution, banning and imprisoning those who spoke out against its depredations.[14]

Versfeld was one of Turner's teachers at UCT in the early 60s. Versfeld and Breytenbach were friends by the time of Breytenbach's earlier, legal visit to South Africa in 1973.[15] Whatever the exact chronology of their relationships, it is quickly apparent that the points at which Turner and Breytenbach's ideas were closest to each other were also those at which they shared common ground with Versfeld.

In taking Sartre as the central figure of contemporary Marxism, both of them followed Versfeld.[16] Both of them focused on the self-alienation of the subject - for Turner, it was the result of an individual choice to conform to the values of an alienated society; for Breytenbach, a 'lack of integration with nature' is the source of alienation, loss, and 'a dialectic of belonging and transformation which must lead to death'.[17] Both had at the core of their thought a concept of freedom as self-knowledge, which Versfeld shared with the Socratic tradition more generally. For Turner, 'freedom means self-determination; it means using one's powers of reason to the full in order to understand oneself and one's world, and in order to act in terms of this understanding. An individual remains unfree if he acts in terms of unexamined principles and socially imposed norms.'[18] On this basis, both argued that apartheid created an alienated existence for white and black South African alike.[19] Turner's ease in interpreting socialism as the product of a 'Christian human model' has something in common with

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[14] Versfeld's argument replicated the strategy which the young Daantjie Oosthuizen and others had based on their reading of Kierkegaard twenty years before, in one respect at least. That generation had argued that there was a choice to be made between authentic selfhood, on the one hand, and conformity to the dominant norms of your community, on the other. But they had done this in an increasingly restrictive context - at a conservative university, tied to a narrow nationalism and a dogmatic and authoritarian church, and at a time when the major challenge to the South African political order came from the right. Unlike the generation of the 1940s, Versfeld argued that true selfhood had to exclude political commitment. Unlike them, he did so at a time and place in which moral argument - and active struggle - against racial domination and capitalist exploitation were on the increase.

[15] Cf. Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 61-70; Dog Heart, pp. 50-6.

[16] Cf. Degenaar et al, Beweging Uitwaarts, pp. 101, 105, 119. Sartre was widely-discussed in South Africa during the 1950s and 60s, and was almost certainly the best-known living Marxist intellectual of that time.

[17] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 90.

[18] Turner, 'The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought,' pp. 74-5.

[19] Turner, The Eye of the Needle, p. 10; Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 53.

Versfeld's conception of Marxism as a secular theology, while Breytenbach's assimilation of Marxism and Zen Buddhism also echoed Versfeld's arguments. The conclusion that the conventional form of Marxism - depicted as the ultimate threat by the apartheid state - was in fact 'not radical enough' was characteristic of their generation. But Versfeld provided a particular route to it.

The point at which Turner and Breytenbach differed most clearly from Versfeld was also the point at which Versfeld was most at variance with the dialectical tradition examined in this study - the need for active engagement with the public issues of the time. Versfeld shared with van Wyk Louw, Johan Degenaar, Daantjie Oosthuizen and others a commitment to Socratic enquiry, to the critical questioning of received values. But his picture of Socrates stressed the private context of his enquiry to a much greater extent. Versfeld's Socrates is defined by his distance from the Athenian Assembly; by Callicles' complaint - slightly misremembered by Versfeld - that 'he constantly speaks of food and drink and doctors and such nonsense' (Pl., Grg. 491a).[20] Socrates is a conversationalist and a drinking companion, the 'comedian of Western philosophy', the living warning against 'the attempt to divide reality into a series of problems each of which can be solved, instead of a dark night whose aromas we can enjoy'.[21] Among the ancient Athenians, Xenophon might have recognised some elements of Versfeld's picture of Socrates, but Plato and Aristotle would surely not have.

Breytenbach shared something of Versfeld's approach to language as a kind of mystery, or came to sympathise with it after the end of his underground activism: 'Meaning is mystery ... It is impossible to convey meaning because it is something that must be experienced'.[22] He came to share Versfeld's scepticism about the idea of progress. Turner took a completely different view. For him, clarity was always within reach; meaning was transparent, if only you were committed to making it so. Out of shared meaning, consciously-chosen historical change could come. Apart from their differences in temperament and training, there were equally significant differences in their political and intellectual context.

Marxism and Forms of Dialectic in South Africa

At a philosophical level at least, the distinctive elements of Turner's Marxism were surprisingly close to the dialectical tradition examined in this study. Turner shared with that tradition a commitment to reflective thought and open communication as essential political values, and not merely personal attributes. The first requirement for understanding society, he argues, is 'to shift oneself into a theoretical attitude, that is, to realise what things in one's experience cannot be taken for granted'. Without constant questioning, there is no freedom: 'It is in laying myself open to the other ... in loving communication that I become self-aware and free. The development of my reason can only occur in interaction with other people, in community ... Community is a good in itself and not a way of attaining other goods.'[23]

Colleagues and students testified to his capacity to live by these values. Raphael de Kadt

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[20] E.g., Martin Versfeld, Tyd en Dae, pp. 26-7.

[21] Versfeld, Tyd en Dae, pp. 29, 21.

[22] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, pp. 69-70; cf. Coetzee, Die Hand vol Vere, p. 338.

[23] Turner, The Eye of the Needle, pp. 5, 17, 20.

describes Turner's method of discussion as 'truly Socratic - always questioning, doubting, analysing and forcing one to think again'.[24] Turner's commitment to clarity of meaning may have brought him paradoxically closer to the philosophical conceptions of the dialectical tradition - which for decades had been sustained mainly within Afrikaner dissent - than was Breytenbach.

For all that Turner shared many of the philosophical premises of a tradition rooted mainly in Afrikaner dissent, he made them part of an entirely different political project, undertaken in a very different context - the student movement at the English-speaking universities, within radical Christian organisations, and then the emerging trade union movement. This had important implications for the conception of dialectic which he upheld, and which developed further out of the political project in which he was involved.

In recognising continuities between Socratic forms of dialectic and the historical dialectic of Marxism, we should not overlook major differences between them. Most conspicuously, the Marxist dialectic situates contradictions historically, within the mode of production in which they occur, rather than taking that mode - and capitalism, in particular - as a self-evident and unassailable reality. In tracing the movement of contradictions, Marxist dialectic seeks out openings for the oppressed majority to make their own history through collective struggle, rather than relying on an enlightened minority to guide them.

But these different forms of dialectic have to be translated into practice in concrete historical contexts. We cannot say how these forms of dialectic will be related in any such context on the basis of their theoretical structure and objectives alone. In particular, in the South African context of the 1970s and 80s, the interaction between at least two different conceptions of dialectic within Marxism - broadly associated with Soviet Marxism and Western Marxism respectively [25] - has been decisive for the relationship of dialectical thinking to Marxism. Turner played a central role in the formation of a generation defined in considerable part by their rejection of Soviet Marxism, and their assimilation - often tentative and incomplete - of the ideas of Western Marxism.[26]

Beginning with a few dozen intellectuals and activists in the 1960s, this generation came to maturity in the late 1970s, and were a powerful presence in South African political and intellectual life throughout the 1980s. Their politics were formed in the period after the police massacre of Africans protesting against pass-laws at Sharpeville in 1960, and the subsequent crushing of African political organisation. Karis and Gerhart describe the ways in which in that period 'gaps and spaces where the iron control of the security establishment had yet to penetrate' were 'found and utilised' so that the oppressed majority could once again be 'rallied to the liberation cause' . In particular, the repression of the 1960s could not prevent 'liberal and radical whites from helping to midwife the two most potent organisational innovations

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[24] South African Outlook 108:1024 (June 1978), p. 89.

[25] On the differences between the conceptions of dialectic in Soviet Marxism and Western Marxism, cf. Chapter Eight, note 46 above.

[26] A more detailed account of the developments discussed here is given in Andrew Nash, 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa,' Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 19:1 (Spring 1999), pp. 66-82.

among blacks, the black consciousness movement and the independent trade unions'.[27]

This was made possible by several strategic innovations: most importantly, a flexible approach to leadership, emphasising constant renewal rather than established hierarchies; a recognition of the need for people to organise principally in their own communities, even when upholding the ideal of non-racialism, rather than seeking a 'colour-blind' non-racialism which overlooked concrete circumstances; and a conception of grassroots organisation closely linked to the concrete needs of people's daily lives. These strategic innovations depended in turn on a larger account of the process of social transformation to which they contributed. This was provided increasingly by a radical critique of South African capitalism, which developed in constant interaction with the strategies of grassroots and factory floor organisation outlined above - a critique which treated capitalism and the racial order as inseparably linked.

The term 'racial capitalism' was probably only coined towards the end of the 1970s. But it summed up the thrust of an analysis of apartheid which was crucial for this generation. The fundamental premise of this analysis was that apartheid was not simply a survival from pre-modern times - 'a museum piece in our time, a hangover from the dark past of mankind' as Luthuli called it in his Nobel Prize speech[28] - but was integral to capitalist modernisation in South Africa. Apartheid was not simply an external defence of capitalism in South Africa; it was the distinctive form taken by capitalism in that context. There was no 'normal' self or society waiting to be freed from the abnormalities of the racial order, for that order had itself reconstituted all social norms and identities.

For the most part, this critique of capitalism was drawn from the social upheavals of the advanced capitalist countries and the Third World rather than the Soviet Union.[29] The initial assimilation of these ideas in South Africa is shown most clearly in papers presented at NUSAS conferences, and in the journal Radical, published by students at the University of Cape Town from 1965 to 1970. The sources quoted there - Marx's 1844 manuscripts, Marcuse, Sartre, Fanon, New Left Review - would have been unknown to previous generations of South African socialists, whether SACP or Trotskyist, and often incompatible with their theoretical ideas.[30] The philosophical conceptions which would have been familiar to an earlier generation - of the laws of history, the Soviet Union as model and bastion, the vanguard party and its discipline - are entirely absent from their writings.

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[27] T. Karis and G. Gerhart, eds., From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-79 (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1997), pp. 17, 85.

[28] T. Karis and G. Carter, eds., From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 volume 3: Challenge and Violence, 1953-64 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p. 708.

[29] Karis and Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 5, pp. 70, 74-5, 104.

[30] Cf. Richard Turner, 'What is Political Philosophy?', Radical (1968), pp. 1-4; 'Marcuse: The Power of Negative Thinking,' Radical (1970), pp. 29-33; R.H. Davies, 'Some Considerations for a Realistic Critique of South African Society,' Radical (October 1970), pp. 29-33. A lively picture of the assimilation of New Left ideas in the student movement in South Africa is provided in Republic of South Africa, Fourth Interim Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations (Pretoria, Government Printers, 1974). Allowance must be made, however, for the security police perspective of the report.

The most enduring intellectual work of this generation was to be in the rewriting of South African history which came to fruition in the 1970s and 80s. The Marxist historians were to be influenced by diverse theoretical sources - including some, such as Althusser, who were closer to Soviet Marxism. But there was never a return to the interpretation of South African history put forward by the Communist Party historians of a previous generation, which gave the central place to the development of African nationalism as the essential counterweight to white domination.[31]

What was most significant about this generation, however, was the way in which theory and practice intersected in their work. Within South African intellectual life, no significant current of thought has been as closely engaged with the struggles of the oppressed majority. Within the struggle of the oppressed, no political current had been as conscious of theoretical ideas. They helped to bring into being a real movement within South African political and intellectual life which had the capacity to articulate and embody the hopes and aspirations of significant numbers of the oppressed, and to interpret that movement for the Western Left, for whom the South African struggle had become 'crucial to the whole history of our time'.[32] If ever there was a moment in which there was need for the capacities for dialectical thought in South Africa, and the opportunity to develop these capacities and bring them into the movement of history, then surely this was that moment.

Five Premises of Turner's 'Eye of the Needle'

The starting-point for understanding the concrete forms of Marxist dialectic in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s is the work of Richard Turner. Turner's main political text, The Eye of the Needle, first published in 1972, transposed onto South African politics a Sartrean view of society as constituted essentially by individual choices. It argued for these choices to overcome the limits of accepted custom. 'Unless we think in utopian terms about South African society, we will not really understand how it works today'.[33] Its final chapter seeks to rebut 'realism' - that is, the argument 'that the change in consciousness that would replace competing egotists by individuals seeking loving communication with their fellows will not occur; that therefore we must place all our hopes and articulate all our strategies within the present social and political framework; that we must try to ensure simply that within a consumption-oriented capitalist society, the extremes of wealth and poverty do not grow too great' (1980:96). Five main premises of Turner's work can be identified, through which his role in the making of Marxist dialectic in this context can be traced.

First, for Turner, politics is centrally concerned with the realisation of identity. His Sartrean conception of individual choice had no theoretical limits. Human beings, he argues,

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[31] For an overview, cf. Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society,' Radical History Review 46/7 (January 1990), pp. 13-45. I have discussed the place of this historical work in South African Marxism of the time in 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa.'

[32] Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, 'Notes from the Editors,' Monthly Review 37:11 (April 1986).

[33] Turner, The Eye of the Needle, p. 5. Further page references to this work are given in the text.

'can choose about anything ... They can't always get what they choose, but that is a different question' (7-8). Above all, they can choose the 'human model' according to which they will live; the hidden telos of politics is the human model which most fully allows you to be human. For in making this choice, we discover that 'we all need to learn to live differently, to live in a way that embodies our preference for people over things. We must realise that love and truth are more important than possessions. We must do this to be human' (92). Within this larger ethical framework, the contradictions of more limited models of the self become apparent, and the dialectical movement towards the liberating model of the self takes place.

Second, within this conception of the political, identity is the product of ethical choice. For Turner, identity is not fixed by national or class origins: it is dynamic, rather than static; free, rather than determined; and it tends towards the widest range of possibilities, 'the excitement of self-discovery, the excitement of shattered certainties, the thrill of freedom' (92). Identity is realised through ethical choice. Individuals remain trapped within the confines of the capitalist human model, for as long as they accept an 'internal morality' - that is, an ethical system which 'accepts the predominant human model, and tries to rationalise it, to smooth the edges'. In contrast, a transcendent morality constantly questions accepted convention, and confronts its underlying assumptions (16-17). Only on this basis can we recognise other individuals, and indeed ourselves. In capitalism, 'I am not free to be open to the other as a person. I have to manipulate the other in such a way as to obtain things. And to manipulate the other I have to manipulate myself. This is my essential degradation, for in manipulating myself I finally lose my freedom' (21; cf. 34).

Third, Turner's emphasis on individual choice produces a limited sense of the historical context in which such choices are made. He argues as if socialist thought and - more particularly Marxism - is a ready-made object of choice; that is, as if Marxism has no history. Writing in 1972, as part of the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas), Turner argued for socialism as the consequence of what he called the Christian human model. This veiled argument was partly the product of conditions of extreme repression, but was also related to the ahistorical bias in his own thought. For him, each individual is faced with the choice between adherence to a capitalist or a Christian human model, and the choice must be made afresh on each occasion. There is no sense of a cumulative development of a tradition, or of the capacity for rival traditions to absorb and give their own meaning to each other's terms. Nor is there any real recognition of the ways in which socialist ideas have been integrated into regimes of repression. Significantly, his contrast between a caring (Christian) and an acquisitive (capitalist) human model casts no light on phenomena such as nationalism, in which that choice is obscured by being tied to complex contexts of belonging, which can seldom be the subject of individual choice.

Fourth, in Turner's political vision, organisation is reduced to the role of catalyst. The moment of Western Marxism in South Africa began with the recognition among white radical students that they were not part of the social force which would bring about revolutionary change. Fundamental social change could not result from radical white students organising themselves, nor could they claim to speak for the oppressed majority. The idea of organisation as a catalyst in the process of transforming class consciousness was shaped by their need to define a political role in that context. Turner drew what was most coherent from this experience in his account of the 'intimate relationship between change in consciousness and organisation'. Organisation, he argued, enabled people to see the world in a new way by involving them in action to change it, and prefiguring the future they sought to achieve (85, 93-4).

Fifth, in Turner's work and throughout the initial assimilation of Western Marxism in South Africa, a specific point of view of analysis is maintained. The removal of white radicals from the mainstream of struggle resulted also in a conception of theory and practice which would not have been openly defended, but was implicit in the arguments and strategies of the time. This was a conception of political analysis as the product of an independent or external point of view, requiring ethical constancy, but making possible the greatest degree of strategic mobility. This conception reproduces the Sartrean focus on the authenticity of the individual's perspective. It follows from the idea of historical options being available for individual choice, as objects external to the one who is choosing. It is perhaps most evident in Turner's postscript to The Eye of the Needle, in which he assesses the viability of many different strategic options for change in South Africa - from building trade unions to cultivating homeland leaders. The only form of agency which these options have in common is that of the 'free-floating' intellectual.

From 'The Eye of the Needle' to the Politics of FOSATU

In various ways, Turner's five premises informed the politics of the independent trade union movement which was given impetus by the strikes in Durban, and consolidated in 1979 by the establishment of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). The development of each of them in that context is traced briefly here.

First, the movement of consciousness towards identity, which Turner had treated primarily from the point of view of the individual, remains at the heart of FOSATU's political project, even though consciousness is understood there in more collective terms. In an article published under the name of his wife, while Turner himself was prevented from publishing by a banning order, a similar path is outlined for the movement of class consciousness - beginning with a common set of beliefs shared with other members of a class, and culminating in a 'clear concept of an alternative society to be reached through struggle with one's opponent'.[34] This dialectical movement of class consciousness is central to Joe Foster's address to the FOSATU Congress of 1982 - the major statement of the politics of the independent trade unions, and the focus of controversy for many years to come. There the tasks of FOSATU are defined by a working class whose 'power is only a potential power since it has no definite social identity of itself as working class'.[35] In order to 'ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters', FOSATU must 'create an identity, confidence and political presence for worker organisation' (77, 78; cf. 82). FOSATU is 'built up from the factory floor' where its worker leadership 'do battle every day' (79). Without an independent organisational base, 'we will be destroyed since workers will be entirely swamped by the powerful tradition of popular politics' (82). Far from avoiding politics, this concern with clarifying class identities is, according to Foster, 'the very essence of politics' (83). This conception is crucial to Foster's much-contested argument that there had never been a working-class movement in South African politics, and that

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[34] Foszia Fisher, 'Class Consciousness among Colonised Workers in South Africa,' in L. Schlemmer and E. Webster, eds., Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1978), p. 222.

[35] Joe Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle - Where does FOSATU Stand?,' South African Labour Bulletin 7:8 (July 1982), p. 70. Further references to this work are given in the text.

FOSATU must work towards the establishment of such a movement.

The same idea of clear working-class identity as the precondition for socialist politics recurs in the response of independent unions to pressures on them to affiliate to the newly-formed United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. Thus, the General Workers Union describes the accusation of economism made against the unions as 'a very narrow, formalistic notion of what politics is'. The 'key aspect of union's political work' is to give workers 'an awareness of their own power'.[36]

Alec Erwin's paper on unity in the struggle - which takes up Foster's argument where it left off - follows the same logic in seeking to show that a liberation movement is likely to 'defer or suppress' class interests and avoid a 'clear-cut' programme.[37] Perhaps this conception of politics as the realisation of identity survived longest in the field of education. As FOSATU Education Officer, Erwin described his task in these terms: 'In FOSATU's eyes, education is class-based: it is designed to reinforce a sense of working class identity, to reinforce working class confidence and counter the kind of anti-worker propaganda that prevails in general education and the media.'[38]

Second, Turner's treatment of identity as the product of ethical choice was continued. It was explicitly transposed to the context of the trade union movement in a powerful critique of the idea of economic growth developed by Erwin, or at least published under his name: 'Economic growth measured in monetary terms says remarkably little about society's evaluation of the goods produced'; instead, it 'reflects the wants of a particular social structure, a structure within which the rich are relatively powerful and the poor weak'. The choice between affirming that social structure through the pursuit of economic growth as an end in itself, or contesting it through the building of an independent identity for the working class, is cast in essentially ethical terms here.[39]

The trade union movement's interpretation of democracy as a process in which the real choices, values and experiences of workers must be heard is of a piece with this. One of the basic policy resolutions adopted at the formation of FOSATU in 1979 expresses this concern by warning: 'Structures can be a dangerous thing [sic]. They can be powerful and be used in such a way as to confuse workers and hide things from them. Officials and committee members can hide behind a constitution and say things are unconstitutional or that some committee has to decide on things ... It is very important that structures are built up which do not entrench the position of people either as committee members or officials.'[40]

Indeed, so grave were the dangers of structures that some of the leading independent

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[36] General Workers Union, 'On the UDF,' South African Labour Bulletin 9:2 (November 1983), pp. 50, 53.

[37] Alec Erwin, 'The Question of Unity in the Struggle,' South African Labour Bulletin 11:1 (September 1985), p. 58, cf. 60, 69.

[38] Alec Erwin, 'The FOSATU Education Workshop and Worker Education,' South African Labour Bulletin 9:8 (July 1984), p. 117.

[39] Alec Erwin, 'Is Economic Growth Beneficial to Workers?,' South African Labour Bulletin 1:2 (May 1974), pp. 7-9. The argument resembles Turner's work rather than Erwin's in its clarity of presentation, and its capacity for reflective thought.

[40] Karis and Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge, vol. 5, p. 625.

unions of the time - most notably, the Food and Canning Workers Union and General Workers Union - chose to stay out of FOSATU. But they shared with FOSATU the idea of worker identity as that which results from the real choices of workers, when unconstrained by tradition or structure. This concern with organisational structures as obstacles to the expression of a worker identity was also central, again, to debates on whether trade unions should affiliate to the UDF.[41]

Third, an ahistorical view of Marxism lived on, even though FOSATU had no alternative but to take account of the existing currents of political thought among African workers, in a way which Turner never did. But in doing this, FOSATU seldom went further than examining the limits of African nationalism. In the global context, FOSATU never identified its commitment to socialism with support for the Soviet Union. 'The fact that a country is said to be socialist does not guarantee that workers control their own destiny'.[42] It took a sympathetic interest in the struggles of Solidarity in Poland and in the Brazilian Workers' Party at a time when the Soviet Union and the SACP were clearly hostile to them.[43] FOSATU's international policy statement warns against 'being caught in the web of international politics rather than building effective worker solidarity'.[44] Erwin describes the need for liberation movements to seek international legitimacy as a source of programmatic confusion.[45] In general, FOSATU followed the pattern of Western Marxism in distancing itself from Soviet Marxism, while never developing a clear critique of it.

Instead of tracing their own theoretical roots historically, the intellectuals of this generation treated Marxism as if it had sprung ready-made from the texts of the theorist who was favoured at that moment. This meant that there could be discussion about the way in which Marxist ideas could be disseminated, or implemented. But there could never be a coherent way of posing the question of how a Marxist tradition or any tradition of dialectical thought - that is, a developing body of thought, argument and practice - was to be built in the South African context.

Fourth, a conception of organisation very similar to Turner's took root in the trade union movement soon after the strikes of 1973. By 1974, the argument which prevailed was that 'union membership should be reluctantly extended' and 'training, discussion and organising should precede membership'.[46] In a sense, this is the other side of the coin of pointing out the 'danger of structures': structures will come to dominate members, unless all the members of a structure know exactly why they belong to it. This conception of organisation took on a

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[41] Cf. GWU, 'On the UDF'.

[42] Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle,' p. 70.

[43] Cf. Ruth Nhere, 'The Dangers of "Legal Marxism" in South Africa,' African Communist 99 (fourth quarter 1984), p. 78.

[44] FOSATU, 'International Policy Statement,' in D. MacShane, M. Plaut and D. Ward, eds., Power! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1984), p. 188.

[45] Erwin, 'The Question of Unity in the Struggle,' pp. 57-8.

[46] Stephen Friedman, Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-84 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p. 93.

crucial role in defining FOSATU's relationship to nationalist politics in the early 1980s. Thus, Foster describes FOSATU's political role, not in relation to its own members only, but to the working class 'more widely'. The 'danger that the unions become preoccupied with their members and ignore workers generally' must be avoided by 'establishing a clear political direction'. Its main task is the 'building of a larger working class movement in South Africa', but it is not itself that movement.[47] Instead, the unions are to serve as a catalyst: by defining more clearly the identity of the working class, they make this identity available within a movement which is still to come into being. But this conception produced no criteria which could tell when the moment of the 'larger' movement would come.

Fifth, the point of view of analysis of Turner's writings remained relatively unchanged. On the face of it, the FOSATU tradition, with its emphasis on the agency of the working class, seems poles apart from the hothouse atmosphere of radical student politics. But the mechanisms of mandate and accountability which were intended to ensure that workers remained active participants in the making of their own struggles prevented any deeper reflection on the way in which their agency was defined. In particular, these procedures precluded any questioning of the terms in which debates were formulated, mandates were given, etc. Insistence that worker organisation be consolidated on the factory floor was, however, not only a way of keeping intellectuals from taking decisions for them, but also a way of ensuring that those intellectuals and activists who defined the debates were not subject to any kind of intellectual scrutiny. Wide participation in open debate is, of course, an essential precondition for critical reflection on the terms of such debate. But the two are by no means identical. Maree shows, for example, how disputes about union control over education 'boiled down to whether intellectuals outside the unions or organically linked with the unions' should exercise that control.[48] In this sense, through its overstatement of the meaning of the procedures of mandate and report-back, the FOSATU tradition continued the historical unreflectiveness which was an essential feature of Turner's utopianism.

These five continuities between Turner and FOSATU were at least as important in the assimilation of Western Marxism in South Africa as were the differences that emerged - primarily in the Institute for Industrial Education - before Turner's death.[49] They defined the meaning of dialectical thinking for the South African Left until some time in the 1980s - among those who consciously built on his perspectives, and often those who opposed them as well.

Cronin's Dialectic and the Re-invention of the SACP's Marxism

Ideologically, the growing influence of Western Marxism in South Africa was bound to bring it into conflict with African nationalism, and consequently with Soviet Marxism, which gave the central place in the liberation struggle to collaboration with nationalism. Turner's contrast between Christian and capitalist human models in South Africa simply avoided the question of

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[47] Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle,' pp. 69, 82.

[48] Johan Maree, 'The Institute of Industrial Education and Worker Education,' South African Labour Bulletin 9:8 (July 1984), p. 77; cf. Maree, 'Harnessing Intellectuals: Tensions between Democracy and Leadership in the Independent Trade Unions in the 1970s,' South African Sociological Review 1:2 (April 1989), pp. 58-73.

[49] Cf. Maree, 'The Institute of Industrial Education,' pp. 80-6.

nationalism. FOSATU activists developed a critique of African nationalism, which was implicitly supported by the radical historians' denial of any kind of nationalist teleology in their accounts of South African history. But the Western Marxist critique of nationalism was fundamentally ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be made from the left, focussing on the petty bourgeois leadership of African nationalism, the absence of a clear-cut commitment to the working class, and its need to conform to the requirements of international diplomacy. On the other hand, the same critique could easily be made from the right, suggesting that African nationalism sacrificed the cause of African workers by drawing them into struggle for the overthrow of the apartheid state, in such a way as to prevent them building their capacity to win incremental reforms within the context of racial capitalism. Most often, the critique of African nationalism remained politically ambiguous: pointing to its limitations while suggesting at the same time that a nationalist movement with precisely those ideological limitations was essential for the broader struggle against apartheid.[50] The ambiguity of this critique of nationalism was to be exploited to the full in the SACP attack on the Western Marxists.

The SACP - together with SACTU, the exiled trade-union wing of the ANC alliance - had strong reservations about the growth of independent trade unions in South Africa in the 1970s. If unions were not driven underground, according to their reasoning, this proved that they had been co-opted. Accordingly, SACTU attacked direct links between these unions and their British counterparts as an attempt to 'by pass the people's revolutionary organisations'.[51] But it was only after Joe Foster's paper had been adopted as FOSATU policy at its second congress that the SACP launched a frontal attack.

Between 1983 and 1985, African Communist published at least six articles attacking FOSATU and the union movement, the influence of white intellectuals, legal Marxism at the South African universities and Western Marxism in general. According to their contributors, this new Marxism was sowing 'confusion and division in the ranks of the working-class' by ignoring the role of the SACP.[52] It misunderstood the role of trade unions which 'as Lenin showed clearly ... can function properly only under the leadership and guidance of the party'.[53] This Marxism was not the 'real Marxism' of the Communist Parties, but depended instead on '"Marxist" literature published in the West'.[54] Finally, white Marxist intellectuals active in the trade unions and universities rejected 'the rigours and discipline required of a vanguard

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[50] These three alternatives are perhaps best represented by Joe Foster, 'The Workers' Struggle' (the left critique), Steven Friedman, Building Tomorrow Today (the right critique), and Alec Erwin, 'The Question of Unity' (simultaneously left and right).

[51] Martin Plaut, 'Changing Perspectives on South African Trade Unions,' Review of African Political Economy 30 (1984), pp. 117, 121.

[52] Toussaint, 'A Trade Union is Not a Political Party: A Critique of the Speech "Where FOSATU Stands",' African Communist 93 (second quarter 1983), pp. 45-6.

[53] Vuk'ayimbambe, 'Revolutionary Trade Unionism and the Tasks of the Party,' African Communist 103 (fourth quarter 1985), p. 97.

[54] Ruth Nhere, 'The Dangers of "Legal Marxism" in South Africa,' African Communist 99 (fourth quarter 1984), p. 79; Nyawuza, 'New "Marxist" Tendencies and the Battle of Ideas in South Africa,' African Communist 103 (fourth quarter 1985), p. 50.

revolutionary movement'.[55] In each case, rather than arguing against the perspectives it opposed, the SACP critique assumed the correctness of its own perspectives, in order to prove the ideological errors of its critics. The authority of dogma was asserted against the claims of dialectic.

Some intellectuals close to the SACP made a more measured critique, deploring what they treated as the sectarian assumption that 'it is only in FOSATU that a "working class political perspective" is being developed'.[56] But within the SACP, a number of activists had moved away from the theoretical framework of Soviet Marxism as early as the 1970s. Wolpe had called into question the coherence of the SACP's analysis of South African society as colonialism of a special type.[57] Ruth First had called openly for the rejection of the two-stage theory of revolution.[58] They paid a price for this, and were increasingly marginalised within the SACP, in spite of their exemplary records of struggle and sacrifice.[59] For the most part, the SACP responded to the assimilation of Western Marxism in South Africa by drawing a line between its own, Soviet-inspired Marxism and the whole body of Western Marxism. Having drawn such a line, contributors to African Communist developed ever more dramatic labels for this 'ideological enemy', until eventually satisfying themselves that their ultra-left petty bourgeois opportunism played into the hands of the ultra-right.[60]

Sometime in the mid-1980s, however, a different approach emerged. The SACP's dividing line between the 'real Marxism' of the Soviet Union and the 'armchair' theorising of Western Marxism was breached, initially perhaps by the winds of glasnost blowing in from the Soviet Union, and then by political events within South Africa. The upsurge in mass struggles after September 1984, the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985, the collapse of Botha's reform initiatives and the withdrawal of support for the apartheid regime by the world's major banks - all of these developments gave priority to struggles within South Africa, rather than the positions taken by SACP leaders in exile.

Although the UDF and COSATU were closely aligned with the ANC and SACP, their formation also represented something of a transformation of the Congress tradition. The

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[55] Comrades in Africa, 'The Intelligentsia must be Won Over to Our Side,' African Communist 101 (second quarter 1985), p. 110.

[56] Robert Davies and Dan O'Meara, 'The Workers' Struggle in South Africa: A Comment,' Review of African Political Economy 30 (1984), p. 116; cf. O'Meara, 'Democratic Trade Unions and the Struggle against Apartheid,' Labour, Capital and Society 18:2 (November 1985), pp. 412-21.

[57] Harold Wolpe, 'The Theory of Internal Colonialism: The South African Case,' in I. Oxhaal et al, Beyond the Sociology of Development (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

[58] Ruth First, 'After Soweto: A Response,' Review of African Political Economy 11 (January-April 1978), pp. 97-8.

[59] Dan O'Meara, 'The Engaged Intellectual and the Struggle for a Democratic South Africa: The Life and Work of Harold Wolpe,' unpublished conference paper, 1997.

[60] Comrades in Africa, 'The Intelligentsia must be Won Over,', p. 108; cf. T. Zuma, 'How the Ultra-Left Play into the Hands of the Ultra-Right,' African Communist 109 (second quarter 1987), pp. 84-92.

organisational form of the UDF, in particular, was designed to preserve the autonomy of its affiliates. At the same time, its politics were orientated towards issues of everyday concern for working people, on the basis of which it sought to create greater political awareness. In its struggle for 'people's power' it was as much concerned with showing the oppressed that they themselves could exercise power as in transferring that power to a new regime.[61] In smaller and larger ways, their struggles shifted the framework of the ANC and SACP itself. By 1988, Toussaint, who had led the charge against FOSATU, was disowning 'the dogmatic "two stage theory"', calling for unity among socialists, and 'for the debate between "workerist" and "populist" to be resolved and transformed from words into combined action'.[62]

The main initiative in recasting the Marxism of the SACP apparently came from within South Africa. The major part in this process was played by Jeremy Cronin - who, like Turner, had been taught by Versfeld at UCT, before continuing his studies in Paris.[63] Cronin became active in the UDF after his release from prison in 1983, served as its education officer in the Western Cape, and edited its short-lived theoretical journal, Isizwe. Under his own name, he published at least three responses to left critiques of ANC and SACP strategies and their theoretical underpinnings - by Erwin, Peter Hudson and Colin Bundy.[64]

Cronin's line of argument is also clearly discernible in Isizwe's discussions of 'workerism', and in a two part treatment of SACP analysis and strategy in African Communist in 1988, under the name of Ben Molapo. In these interventions, the characteristic resources and claims of Western Marxism are mobilised in support of analyses and strategies drawn from the opposing tradition of Soviet Marxism. Cronin's Marxism - that is, the innovations in SACP argument in which he played a central part - had three main characteristics.[65]

First, it developed a conception of the relationship of theory and practice which did not rely on appeals to the dogmatic authority of Marxism-Leninism. It presented itself as open to debate; indeed, as positively welcoming critical engagement. At the same time, however, it relied on a specific - though never clearly articulated - conception of the practical needs of the present as the basis for debate, as setting the limits for debate that was practically useful rather than mere theoretical indulgence.

In that present, the main practical necessity was always to unify the oppressed under the most readily-accepted banners in the struggle against apartheid. To do this, it was necessary

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[61] Jeremy Seekings, The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991 (Cape Town, David Philip, 2000), pp. 18, 40, 55, 90 et passim.

[62] Toussaint, 'On Workerism, Socialism and the Communist Party: A Contribution to the Debate on Stages of the Revolution,' African Communist 114 (third quarter 1988), pp. 32, 35.

[63] The major French philosophical influence on Cronin was not Sartre, but Althusser. Although Althusser was much closer to the politics of Leninism and the philosophy of dialectical materialism, he shared with Western Marxism a strong focus on cultural and ideological hegemony.

[64] Cronin also wrote a brief response to Breytenbach's True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist which contained its own critique of ANC and SACP politics, focused more on their political culture than their strategy, cf. 'Towards a National Culture: Oedipus, an Albino and Others,' Stet 3:2 (June 1985), pp. 16-7.

[65] This does not imply that Cronin was necessarily the author (or sole author) of articles published under the name of the Isizwe Collective or Ben Molapo.

also to draw on the past - on its symbols, sacrifices, heroes.[66] For 'the struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting'.[67] But it is a struggle only for the recovery of the past, never for its critical interrogation; it seeks inspiration, and never self-knowledge; conformity with popular consciousness rather than clarity of meaning. The argument for drawing on the symbolism of the past excludes any historical and theoretical examination of how the needs of struggle have been conceptualised. These are 'scholastic preoccupations' or questions which are 'simply academic'.[68] In a similar way, South African history is located in world-historical context when recognising the prestige of the Soviet Union and the historical significance of state socialist regimes.[69] But examining the meaning of political concepts in this context is dismissed as an unnecessary 'genealogical trip eastward'.[70] The practical needs of 'the present' always turned out to be defined by the strategic theory of the SACP, but were never defended in that guise.

Second, Cronin's Marxism develops a polemical defence of the SACP analysis of South Africa as a colonial society of a special type (CST) which collapses the distinction between CST and racial capitalism. The contributors to African Communist of the early 1980s had seen this as a crucial dividing line: the attack on CST was an attack on 'the two stage theory of our revolution' and an attempt to 'change the orientation of our movement and all that we stand for'.[71] In contrast, Cronin writes as if the argument for a two-stage revolution had never been made.[72] Instead, 'national oppression and capitalist exploitation are inextricably interlinked.'[73] In Molapo's account, CST is presented as a form of class domination. Its 'contradictory essence' lies in a 'constant dialectic of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion' of the black working class. In contrast to the traditional arguments of the SACP, Molapo asserts: 'This is a contradiction within the workings of South African capitalism itself, between the social forces of production and the mode of domination whereby private ownership and appropriation is secured. It is not a contradiction between "modern" capitalism and a

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[66] Jeremy Cronin, 'The Question of Unity: A Reply,' South African Labour Bulletin 11:3 (January 1986), p. 31; Cronin, 'National Democratic Struggle and the Question of Transformation,' Transformation 2 (1986), p. 73; Cronin, 'Inside Which Circle? A Reply to Colin Bundy,' Transformation 10 (1989), p. 71.

[67] Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 4-5.

[68] Cronin, 'National Democratic Struggle,' pp. 77, 73; cf. Isizwe Collective, 'Errors of Workerism,' South African Labour Bulletin 12:3 (March-April 1987), p. 52.

[69] Isizwe Collective, 'Workerism and the Way Forward - A Rejoinder,' South African Labour Bulletin 12:5 (July 1987), pp. 73-4.

[70] Cronin, 'National Democratic Struggle,' p. 75.

[71] Nyawuza, 'New "Marxist" Tendencies and the Battle of Ideas in South Africa,', p. 51; cf. Zuma, 'How the Ultra-Left Plays into the Hands of the Ultra-Right,' pp. 85-6.

[72] E.g., Cronin, 'The Question of Unity,' p. 33.

[73] Suttner and Cronin, Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter, p. 129.

backward feudal ideology (racism).'[74] Until then, the main purpose of the CST thesis had been to demonstrate that colonial domination must be overthrown before the workings of capitalism could be challenged.

Cronin thus inverted the terms of the controversy as it had been conducted until then. FOSATU had distinguished vigorously between nationalism and socialism, in order to warn against the dangers of nationalism for the working class. The SACP made the same distinction, in order to warn against a struggle for socialism which by-passed the essential stage of national liberation. Cronin consistently supports the SACP argument that working class struggles should be subordinated to the goal of national liberation. But in contrast to both FOSATU and earlier SACP positions, he plays down the distinction between nationalism and socialism, describing it as abstract, mechanical and undialectical.

This is the third and crucial characteristic of Cronin's Marxism: the defence of a dialectical, concrete and historical Marxism, which is opposed to that which is abstract, one-sided and mechanical. According to Cronin, Erwin's distinction between liberation politics and transformation politics is mechanical because it creates an opposition 'in theory where none need exist in practice'.[75] Hudson's analysis of the theory of national democratic revolution is 'scholastic' because it examines the logic of the arguments for that theory while 'in the real world a great many things are not guaranteed'.[76] Bundy's argument that ANC and SACP strategies have diverged from those entailed by its analysis of South Africa as a colonial society of a special type is mistaken 'because one cannot read [strategy] off abstractly from the concept [of CST]', but must 'grasp both the colonial and special type features in their dialectical interconnection'.[77] Here and elsewhere, according to Cronin, a dialectical Marxism allows conceptual distinctions only when their objects can never overlap or articulate in practice.[78]

The conception of dialectic which animates these arguments is very different from that which was to be found within Soviet Marxism or the SACP until then. It has nothing in common with the 'laws of dialectic' expounded in the SACP's philosophical primer - a crude rehash of Stalin's Dialectical and Historical Materialism, making use of South African examples with a suitably nationalist twist.[79] Rather, it drew on the more open-ended and historical usages of the concept in Western Marxism. But it served an entirely different function from that of the concept of dialectic in Western Marxism.

The concept of dialectic plays a distinctive role within Western Marxism, from Lukacs and Gramsci to the Frankfurt School and Sartre. Put simply, the concept is essential to a

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[74] Ben Molapo, 'Marxism, South Africa and the Colonial Question,' African Communist 113 (second quarter 1988), p. 69.

[75] Cronin, 'The Question of Unity,' p. 33; cf. pp. 29, 37.

[76] Cronin, 'National Democratic Struggle,' p. 77; cf. pp. 73, 74, 78.

[77] Cronin, 'Inside Which Circle?', p. 71.

[78] Isizwe Collective, 'Errors of Workerism,' p. 51; Isizwe Collective, 'Workerism and the Way Forward,' p. 75.

[79] Dialego, Philosophy and Class Struggle: The Basic Principles of Marxism seen in the Context of the South African Liberation Struggle (London, Inkululeko Publications, c. 1977).

materialist account of how consciousness can be transformed in capitalist society. For if Western Marxism had not been able to develop a distinctive account of the contradictions of consciousness in capitalist society, and the potential for movement of such contradictions, and a distinctive mode of analysis of that dialectical movement, its entire project could not have distinguished itself from Soviet Marxism as it did. The concept of dialectic provides a tool for analysing the movement of the contradictions of consciousness, as these are embedded in the contradictions of the society itself. The Western Marxist concept of dialectic, in other words, has the task of calling into question - indeed, of making redundant - the Soviet Marxist approach of aligning social forces on the basis that their ideological commitments are fixed by class interest, tradition and the like. In the context of Soviet Marxism, the dialectic legitimates the strategic approach of the party to these differing social forces, and does not entail any real movement within them.[80]

While Cronin's use of the term constantly suggests a historical open-endedness, it comes into play only in considering strategical questions, and always takes as its point of departure the popular legitimacy of the ANC/SACP alliance. Within his conception of dialectic, a ceaseless unrest and instability take the place of any intelligible dialectical movement. Indeed, the space between the real and the conceptual, from which any such dialectical movement originates, has been closed down.[81] This has been done by a critique of abstraction, which turns out to be a critique - or rather, a rejection - of all conceptual categories except those of SACP orthodoxy, which alone are legitimated by their circular inclusion in the realm of practical necessity. Popular support for the ANC is removed from the sphere of historical understanding and change, and comes to be treated as an eternal fact of nature.

Cronin's Marxism filled the gap which was left by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of its Marxism. It did away with the crude dogmatism of Soviet Marxism, but preserved its instrumentalism. His critique of abstraction was elaborated at a philosophical level - albeit clumsily - by the author of the SACP primer of a decade before.[82] Cronin himself was elected to the Central Committee of the SACP in 1989, and became editor of African Communist on its re-location to South Africa in 1990.

Paradoxically, perhaps more than any of the left critics of the SACP in the 1980s, Cronin articulated the basic conception underlying the complex tradition of Western Marxism: of a Marxism which 'is not a monolithic and closed dogma simply awaiting application' but a body

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[80] According to Adam Westoby, Soviet Marxism 'provided millions of activists with dialectical arguments and reasons why the zig-zags, and apparently hypocritical revaluations of allies and enemies, of communist political strategy are in fact its most fundamental strength ... In putting incompatible policies successively into action the activist can understand himself as the instrument of a reason - pure and practical combined - which is coextensive with the universe' (The Evolution of Communism (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989), p. 195).

[81] 'The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy' (T.W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics (London, Routledge, 1990), p. 5).

[82] Dialego, 'Working Class must Lead Our National Liberation Struggle,' African Communist 111 (fourth quarter 1987), p. 64.

of theory which 'constantly needs to be tried out in practice, developed and revised'.[83] But he articulated it only to preserve the essential content of Soviet Marxism, and its essentially manipulative relationship to politics and society.

As a theorist, Cronin was more sure-footed than Joe Slovo, whose denunciation of Stalinism was more widely-acclaimed. To some extent, Slovo represented the face which the SACP wished to show to the Western Left - and indeed to liberals in the West - after the collapse of the SACP's backers in the Soviet bloc. Slovo's most vigorous denunciation of Soviet Marxism - describing the SACP's 'so-called Leninism' as 'repackaged Stalinism .. in search of legitimation' - was made in New York.[84] Cronin and other SACP leaders sensed that Soviet Marxism, and the record of the Soviet Union, had not been discredited among militant youth and workers within South Africa. His theoretical reconstruction enabled the SACP to deny anything more than 'mild Stalinism', and hold on to the banner of Marxism-Leninism.[85]

But at the same time, the legacy of Soviet Marxism was itself deprived of its theoretical content. Slovo's initial acknowledgement of the failings of the Soviet model, in 1990, began the process with a defence of Lenin which at the same time denied the dialectical elements of his thought.[86] The SACP's popular exposition of dialectic effectively reduced it to a kind of folk wisdom, to be found in all cultural contexts in which paradox and reversal of fortune is recognised.[87] It should be said in defence of the SACP that this abandonment of theory was at the same time an attempt to move away from sectarianism and towards a kind of glastnost within the camp of South African socialism. And prominent Western Marxists such as Ronald Aronson were also urging the South African Left to abandon the struggle for socialism, as a prelude to their own abandonment of Marxism.[88]

By 1998, when the SACP put forward an extensive account of 'Our Marxism' in preparation for its 10th congress, it asserted the need to 'take theory seriously', and advanced a

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[83] Jeremy Cronin, 'Is the SACP Travelling in the Right Direction? A Response to Kitson and Habib,' Work in Progress 74 (May 1991), p. 26.

[84] Joe Slovo, 'Socialist Aspirations and Socialist Realities,' African Communist 124 (first quarter 1991), pp. 7-13. This article was originally presented to a conference organised by the independent socialist magazine, Monthly Review. Mike Morris commented on the 'surprising adulation' with which Slovo's contribution was received (Morris, 'The Future of Socialism,' Transformation 14 (1991), p. 45).

[85] Jeremy Cronin, 'Rediscovering Our Socialist History,' South African Labour Bulletin 15:3 (September 1990), p. 100.

[86] Joe Slovo, Has Socialism Failed? (London, Inkululeko Publications, 1990). This argument is set out more fully in Andrew Nash, 'Leninism and Democracy,' Theoria 76 (October 1990), pp. 19-32.

[87] SACP, 'A Thorn can Eat up an Elephant: A Basic Introduction to Marxist Dialectics,' African Communist 126 (third quarter 1991), pp. 39-42.

[88] Ronald Aronson, 'Is Socialism on the Agenda? A Letter to the South African Left,' Transformation 14 (1991), pp. 1-23; Aronson, After Marxism (New York, Guilford Press, 1995); cf. Andrew Nash, 'The Idea of a "Fully Contemporary" Radicalism: Ronald Aronson's "After Marxism",' Theoria 87 (June 1996), pp. 108-23.

conception of Marxism which 'breaks with dogma' and is 'dynamic, living and engaged with collective practice'.[89] But it is a Marxism in which not a single theoretical problem or question can actually be identified.

The absence of any dialectical perspective was most readily apparent, however, within the politics of the SACP after the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and other organisations in February 1990. Once it became clear that major forces both within South Africa and globally were intent on achieving a negotiated settlement on a capitalist basis, the only conceivable alternatives for the SACP were those of a futile utopianism, on the one hand, and pragmatic realism, creating a readiness to compromise or capitulate on any principle, on the other. There was no possibility of imagining a radically different future, while at the same time seeking the basis for it in the contradictions of the present. 'There is a necessity to keep the red flag flying during this period,' Cronin explained, 'but at the same time not to make it seem like the major present confrontation is between the red flag and the flag of free enterprise.'[90]

The success of this reconstruction of the SACP's Marxism was not so much due to its philosophical cogency - indeed, it never rested on explicit theoretical argument - but rather on the collapse of the Western Marxist critics of the SACP. FOSATU had become a major component of COSATU in 1985, which was closer to the ANC. But the tradition of working-class independence remained strong in certain COSATU unions, most notably the Metal and Allied Workers Union, later the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). But when the SACP relaunched itself as a legal political party in South Africa in July 1990, its internal leadership group included such former stalwarts of the independent wing of the trade union movement as Moses Mayekiso and John Gomomo of NUMSA, and Chris Dlamini of FAWU.[91] Alec Erwin, the leading intellectual within the independent trade unions, joined the SACP and was later elected to its Central Committee. The relaunch of 1990 was followed by what Morris described as 'the rapid movement into the SACP of a large group of leftists who traditionally were its strongest left-wing critics.'[92] After 1994, many of the radical intellectuals who had been aligned with the independent trade unions played a prominent role in devising a neo-liberal economic policy for the ANC government.[93]

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[89] SACP, 'Draft Programme Discussion Documents,' African Communist 149 (second quarter 1998), pp. 76-7.

[90] Jeremy Cronin, 'Building the Mass Legal Party,' South African Labour Bulletin 15:3 (September 1990), p. 11.

[91] Cf. Devan Pillay, 'The Communist Party and the Trade Unions,' South African Labour Bulletin 15:3 (September 1990), pp. 19-27. NUMSA had been the stronghold of 'workerism' as it was known in the 1980s. It adopted the Freedom Charter in 1987, at the same time unsuccessfully launching a campaign for a Workers' Charter. Dlamini was elected president of FOSATU at the same congress at which Foster's controversial paper was adopted as FOSATU policy.

[92] Mike Morris, 'Dangerous Liaisons: Socialists and the SACP,' New Era 6:1 (Autumn 1991), p. 16.

[93] Cf. Ashwin Desai and Heinrich Böhmke, 'The Death of the Intellectual, the Birth of the Salesman: The South African Intellectual during the Democratic Transition,' Debate 3 (1997), pp. 10-34; Vishnu Padayachee, 'Progressive Academic Economists and the Challenge of Development in South Africa's Decade of Liberation,' Review of African Political Economy 77 (1998), pp. 431-50.

The sudden ending of the moment of Western Marxism in South Africa can only be explained by relating it to the larger national and especially global political context.[94] But one part of that explanation lies at the level of the philosophical ideas which helped to form and define that moment. For the challenge of Western Marxism depended on its capacity to create a mode of dialectical thought which respected the autonomy of the oppressed majority, and expressed their demands and aspirations.

Once the radical intellectuals influenced by Western Marxism lost their dominance in the trade union movement, they had nothing to fall back on. Turner had provided them with a conception of dialectic as a movement of consciousness towards a liberating model of the self, and that conception had been transposed to the movement of collective consciousness within the trade union movement. The radical intellectuals of that generation quickly reverted to an individualised conception of political agency - in which the self was now 'liberated' for career advancement in the new South Africa.

Change and Continuity in the New South Africa: Breytenbach's Critique of the Negotiated Settlement

The projects of reconstructing dialectic undertaken by Breytenbach and Turner - in ignorance of each other, and in relative isolation from the politics of the time - were as necessary as they were doomed to be ignored, stifled and misunderstood. After his assassination, Turner's philosophical writings were rapidly typed by relatives and trusted friends, and stored in the German Consulate in Durban, where they were thought to be safe from confiscation by the security police.[95] His philosophical writings have never been published, and have effectively been suppressed by his family. The political concerns underlying his project have been lost from view, or actively covered up.

In contrast, Breytenbach's work has been prolific and widely-recognised. The central themes of his dialectic have been embodied in a critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa after 1990, which focused on the contradictory modes of continuity between the apartheid order and its non-racial sequel. And yet the distinctively dialectical character of his thought has been lost from view, even while he has continued to stress the need to think dialectically.

For some years after his release in 1982, Breytenbach played no real role in the disputes within the South African Left. After the publication of True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, his politics were attacked by the SACP as an attempt to undermine the ANC, motivated by ultra-leftism, lack of discipline and individualism.[96] In 1986 Breytenbach

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[94] Cf. Nash, 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa', pp. 78-80.

[95] Turner's banning order prohibited him from preparing any material for publication, so that these writings were technically illegal. While under the banning order, he continued to publish on contemporary political issues, but did so under the names of friends and colleagues.

[96] Geus van de Suid, 'Failure of a Misguided Mission,' pp. 106, 107, 108. The book was treated very differently by Jakes Gerwel, who praised it for showing how the whole experience of prison gave expression to the political system, for its honest self-appraisal, and clear and insightful 'exposition of a political theory and vision for South Africa' ('Dié Teks eerstens Polities en nie Literêr nie,' Die Vaderland, 2 July 1984).

returned to South Africa to receive the newly-established Rapport prize for literature. During the visit, he fell out with the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC) - both ANC-aligned groups based in the white English-speaking Left - which invited him to read his poetry at a fund-raising event, and then withdrew their invitation in protest against his acceptance of the literary prize. He also spoke at the University of the Western Cape, where he felt himself 'at home among my people'.[97] Soon after, he became active in initiatives to bring about meetings between leading Afrikaner intellectuals and ANC leaders, most notably in Dakar in 1987. The Dakar meeting, according to Weschler, 'represented an edgy, tentative reconciliation between Breyten and the ANC leaders, some of whom may well have been partly responsible for his seven and a half years of incarceration.'[98]

Even while working towards a negotiated settlement between the apartheid regime and the ANC, Breytenbach expressed his reservations about it. As early as 1984, he had written of the struggle within the liberation movement as 'the real one', and 'a process that will continue way beyond liberation'. He speculates about Mandela's possible release from prison, and the involvement of the ANC in negotiations which may 'reinforce the power of those now ruling South Africa'.[99] The ANC 'will eventually rule the country', but to judge from its practices in exile, 'it is conceivable that the present totalitarian state will be replaced by one which is totalitarian in a different way, and intolerant of alternative revolutionary schools of thought, more hegemonic but minus the racism ... And yet there is no other way. How can we advance unless we destroy racism?'[100]

After the release of Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations, Breytenbach returned to South Africa in August 1990, warning against the consequences of a victory over apartheid too easily won. In a series of interventions over the following years, he attacked the 'false sense of consensus - actively connived at by the negotiators - namely that we know who we are and where we're heading'. This false consensus stands in the place of free and open debate about the direction which South African society is to take, and mobilization around different perspectives; instead, 'one sees the participants in the various minutes and talks-about-talks-about-talks congregating in a kind of bureaucratic conspiracy of mediocre Boere-Stalinism'. The outcome of their negotiations, he warns, will reflect 'the interests of two symbiotically dependent South African political formations which do not, cannot and are not mandated to represent the majority of us hoi-polloi'.[101]

The threat of the negotiated settlement, according to Breytenbach's analysis, is threefold: conformity of mind; stagnation of identity; continued inequality. 'South Africa's dominant

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[97] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Die Toespraak Debat: Breyten Antwoord by sy Vertrek,' Rapport 27 April 1986; cf. Hein Willemse, 'Vrek-eerlik en Opreg,' Ekstra-Rapport, 20 April 1986.

[98] Weschler, 'An Afrikaner Dante,' p. 99.

[99] Breytenbach, End Papers, pp. 178, 180.

[100] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 359; cf. End Papers, p. 33; Judas Eye, p. 133.

[101] Breytenbach, Hart-lam, pp. 35, 40, 41.

culture is one of co-optation. There are still too many zones of silence, of accessory muteness, of reciprocal moral blackmailing living on hereditary guilt and the need to be humiliated,' he told a Stellenbosch audience in 1990.[102] South Africa is 'caught between the plague and the cholera - between, on the one hand, Apartheid with its patriarchal and colonial tenets of Christian National Education, accompanying repression and the censoring of dissidence and deviation ... and, on the other hand, a potential Stalinism, with its cultural commissars enforcing "people's culture" as populist idolatory through the appropriate "structures" ... and where we shall again experience the marginalization of dissidents' (149). In this context, 'you need to be bewildered, again and again, until such time as you're obliged to think for yourself. If you have to be stupid, at least be so with your own authentic foolishness' (26).

It is not only the habits of mental conformity that will persist; often, it is conformity to the same ideological models as before. Breytenbach rejects the idea of reconciliation if all that it involves is a way of bringing together existing identities, which are left unchanged by the process. If talk of a 'National Compromise' is 'about the ANC and the National Party sharing power - then I'd say: Let's fight on' (32). Instead, 'reconciliation is hybridization. To the Afrikaner the implications of South Africanization will be a given loss of domination and control, to thus become an active component of a larger development; the acceptance of change, also that of self' (35). 'Defeat will save us,' Breytenbach said of Afrikaners in the new South Africa, warning that the negotiated settlement might stand in the way of such salvation (32). Put differently, the loss of power brought about by the end of apartheid might enable Afrikaners to re-make their identities within the cultural differences of a post-apartheid South Africa, and give new meaning to old cultural commitments, which could now be freed of their ideological meaning. Conflicting identities - including the Afrikaner identity which was the ideological creation of apartheid - are preserved and consolidated by this specific process of ending apartheid.

This preservation of existing identities also ensures the continuation of inequality, and of the suffering inflicted upon the majority. 'South Africa's legacy of injustice and inequality can be tackled only by a combination of socialist solutions - and yet, all alternative socialist solutions have been squashed by the objective alliance of the NP government and the South African Communist Party. The Government simply put all leftists in the same "red" bag of exile or prison; the Communists, intent upon preserving their ideological hegemony ... made sure that enriching schools of transformative thought were hounded into oblivion' (85).

In this context, reconciliation becomes 'the reconciliation of two power machines - to broaden the base of pork barrel politics'.[103] The inequalities of the past would be deracialized, but would continue and prompt new racial conflicts: 'the Mandelas and the Mbekis and the Meyers ... already live hand-in-pocket with the Oppenheimers and the Motlanas,' while 'the rough, white and black, unpoliticized lumpen proletariat' will 'take each other on' (145). The 'political caste' will be guaranteed 'untrammelled access to the state's feeding troughs - while outside the slaughter continues' (147).

Breytenbach seeks to disrupt the emerging consensus, but does not always make clear what is supposed to take its place. There are times when he speaks as if there is a core of 'immutable premises' - most obviously, non-racialism - which 'make a tolerant co-existence

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[102] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 26; cf. pp. 81, 157. Further page references to this collection of speeches and essays are given in the text.

[103] Breytenbach, Hart-lam, p. 48.

compelling' (144). But his most consistent theme is not the need for a national consensus with a different content, but rather for active exploration of differences, which does not necessarily have consensus as its aim: 'I'd like to put in my plea for doubt and questioning, diversity, the maintenance of our "Ho-Chi-Min trail" of underground tunnels of memory and resistance' (149).

Sometimes this argument for ongoing debate and discussion is made in terms which correspond quite closely to van Wyk Louw's idea of lojale verset, although the object of Breytenbach's loyalty is not conceived in ethnic terms as was Louw's. 'My dissent,' he writes to Mandela, 'is always meant as a manifestation of critical loyalty' (79); 'my collaboration will be conditional and critical' (82); his loyalty (and that of 'others of my ilk') takes the form of 'vigilant opposition' predicated on 'principled criticism' (86). At times, he locates himself specifically within a tradition of Afrikaner dissent, suggesting that Afrikaners may have 'a special contribution to make ... in taking to the knacker's yard the monstrous remnants of the rule of oppression' (32). But he also appeals, less specifically, to 'an alternative tradition of subversion, you could say of cultural guerilla action' in which 'we too, black and white, rubbed the dog the wrong way', and calls for this tradition 'to be deepened and strengthened' (149-50).

On at least one occasion, Breytenbach inventories an elaborate distinction between 'left' and 'right' in the contemporary world, locating himself on the left, 'fighting for revolution and against politics' (105). For him, 'revolution negates the cynicism of "the art of the possible" whereas politics is the arcane craft of disempowering the population'. The distinction is drawn in a way which represents both sides as engaged in conscious processes of social change. But the distinction does not make clear a real difference in the changes they seek to bring about, but rather in the means by which they pursue them: 'To the left, associations forming civil society; to the right, cabals, expert committees, vigilantes, brotherhoods, the Vanguard Party, the State and its nomenklatura. To the left, understanding or confusion; to the right, "correct" understanding or indifference. To the left, the Way; to the right, the Truth' (96). The distinction draws a clear line between the politically powerful and the intellectually independent, or between intellectuals who defer to power and those who do not. But it gives us little sense of how to distinguish left and right among larger social forces. It assumes the existence of a separate layer of intellectuals, rather than examining the ways in which capacities for intellectual independence emerge and develop.

The least developed of Breytenbach's accounts of the continuities of the transition in South Africa concerns the capitalist basis of the negotiated settlement. 'Only the racist half of the Apartheid beast is dead,' he writes to Mandela in 1994; 'the other half, economic exploitation, is alive and kicking' (84). He re-affirms his past commitments in a similar vein: 'If I had to do it all over again, I know which side I'm on, and if I could undermine the rich and the powerful - the bankers, the rulers, the secret police, the tax collectors, the television journalists, the popes and the arms merchants and the Swiss and the Americans - I'd do so in all the possible ways' (72).

But all too often capitalism is reduced to an ideological preference, or even a personal style. There is little sense of the ways in which the actual mechanisms of capitalist accumulation enforce a meaningless conformity in the workplace, in consumption and in cultural life. He affirms his continued support for socialism (29, 72, 145). But he can relate this only loosely to his critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa, and his arguments for renewal within the Left.

This equivocation in Breytenbach's account of the contradictions of the new South Africa

reveals the strength and weakness of his conception of dialectic. He follows the movement of contradictions without seeking to locate them within a pre-determined and self-fulfilling pattern - within either the 'ever-ascending spiral' of historical progress, or the rigid logic of class betrayal. But in the process, he begins to describe the new South Africa as if the only historical patterns discernible in it are those imposed by powerful individuals. He ridicules the political leaders, old and new, and at the same time attributes to them a larger role in the making of the new South Africa than is consistent with their petty stature. Too often, his critique focuses on the way in which apartheid's legacy of conformity, obedience and hypocrisy would be perpetuated - in non-racial form - in the new South Africa. It can too easily be interpreted as if intellectuals, writers and artists are the victims of the transition, rather than the majority of working people. His writings of the time produced perceptive insights and fine-grained portrayals, but could not locate these within a larger analysis of capitalism.

Because Breytenbach's critique of the negotiated settlement never engages with the continuity of capitalism in South Africa in more than the most passing way, it offers little sense of the negotiations as part of a larger, more deeply-rooted historical process. It avoids the static class-reductionism of interpreting the negotiations as the product of an imperialist conspiracy. But by the same token, it also does not build on accounts of the ways in which aspects of a defeated social order reproduce themselves in the context of the new order, such as Isaac Deutscher's analysis of the 'revenge of the past' in the Soviet Union under Stalin.[104]

For all the power and eloquence of Breytenbach's interventions in these years, then, they remain strangely disconnected from the real conflicts of the time. There are many aspects of the transition to democracy which he foresaw more accurately than any of his contemporaries. But he could not make of that foresight the basis for any kind of resistance or opposition, nor has it been incorporated into any line of analysis - apart from that which has confined itself, self-defeatingly, to the issue of Afrikaans. In effect, Breytenbach's dialectical analyses could never really contribute to a dialectical politics. For the central contradictions of the new South Africa lie not in the moral failings of bourgeois politicians, but in the bourgeois order itself. It is not that those who bring it into being wish to preserve and imitate the pretensions and habits of mind of the apartheid regime. They have no real alternative but to do so, for as long as the new South Africa derives its legitimacy from the democratic support of the oppressed majority, while carrying out the economic programme which serves the interests of the privileged minority.

In some measure, this failure can be seen as the product of Breytenbach's own lack of connection with the South African Left. After his release from prison, he quickly became an international celebrity, a prized item in the consumer culture against which he railed. For some years, he travelled widely in Europe and the United States.[105] After 1990, he took on the same status in South Africa, moving 'from airport to dinner table to lecture room'.[106]

But this failure should not be attributed to Breytenbach alone. It is clearly mistaken to

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[104] Isaac Deutscher, Stalin: A Political Biography (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), pp. 356-60; Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-9 (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 461-8.

[105] Cf. Breytenbach, End Papers, pp. 24-6.

[106] Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, p. 217.

attribute to any one individual the failure of a project which could only have been brought to any kind of completion within a vigorous and coherent culture of the Left. By the early 1990s, there was no larger process of analysing the political economy of the transition on the South African Left.[107] The political practice which Turner had done so much to establish on the basOis of a similar rejection of politics as the 'art of the possible' had not survived. Not surprisingly, Turner's political legacy has been re-interpreted in such a way as to fit the needs of the negotiated settlement in South Africa, as the apostle of 'gradualism, flexibility and compromise' in the trade union movement.[108] His first wife, now a British New Labour MP, has invented a new past for him as a 'key ANC leader'.[109]

In a Turner Memorial Lecture delivered in September 1990, Tony Morphet described how Turner's break with an unreflective liberalism had attempted to 'place South Africa as part of a long world historical struggle', and how this perspective had been displaced in the 1980s by the idea that 'the end of apartheid would be freedom, the triumph of reason, and the fulfilment of history'. In this context, 'what has gone is dialectical thought ... Any form of dialectic is suppressed. The theoretical attitude is exiled ... Thought is put under a state of emergency.'[110]

Albie Sachs captured the dominant response to Breytenbach's critique of a South African Left which had by then forgotten the possibility of dialectic: 'But aren't you ever happy? Now that we've won, can't you rejoice?'[111] In a similar vein, Michael Chapman dismisses Breytenbach's political writings: 'Having spoken out strongly in support of black liberation ... he now expects authoritarianism as a matter of course from a future black government'.[112] Thought trapped within these polarities - winning and losing, rejoicing and mourning, supporting and opposing black liberation - has quit the terrain of the dialectical.

Although Breytenbach's arguments and analyses had little impact on the course of the negotiated settlement, they have in many ways been justified by events since then, and elements of that critique have come to inform political thinking in the new South Africa in a wide range of contexts. Breytenbach himself has been active in recent years in the emergence of a defence of Afrikaans language and culture in the new South Africa. If there is one single context in which the legacy of the dialectical tradition is most clearly being tested, and in which its future development will most immediately be decided, then it is that of this newly-emergent politics of Afrikaans.

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[107] The most important exception to this statement is the work of Neville Alexander, cf. Some are More Equal than Others: Essays on the Transition in South Africa (Cape Town, Buchu Books, 1993).

[108] Eddie Webster, 'Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction: Richard Turner and Radical Reform,' Theoria 81/2 (October 1993), p. 7

[109] Gavin Evans, 'Champagne Socialist Pulls the Cork on Tory Whip's Safe Seat', Sunday Independent 4 May 1997.

[110] Tony Morphet, '"Brushing History against the Grain": Oppositional Discourse in South Africa,' Theoria 76 (October 1990), pp. 95, 96, 97-8.

[111] Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, p. 160.

[112] Chapman, Southern African Literatures, p. 346.

CHAPTER TEN

THE NEW POLITICS OF AFRIKAANS

'Wat Verby is, is Verby': Afrikaners and Reconciliation

One of the main themes of Nelson Mandela's presidency was that of reconciliation. In his inaugural address as President of South Africa in May 1994, he chose to convey this in Afrikaans: 'wat verby is, is verby' (what is past, is done with). In the years that followed, he came to embody this spirit, visiting the widow of Dr Verwoerd in the whites-only settlement of Orania, wearing the Springbok jersey to support South Africa during the rugby world cup, and the like.[1]

Mandela's prison experience played a crucial role in shaping his perceptions of Afrikaner history and politics and the Afrikaans language. He urged his fellow-prisoners - often against their instincts - to study Afrikaans and the history of the Afrikaners, and he himself enjoyed the poetry of Opperman and the novels of Langenhoven.[2] In his political writings in prison, he urged the liberation movement to 'speak directly to the Afrikaner and fully explain our position,' as 'honest men are to be found on both sides of the colour line'. He warned against 'the well known hostility and contempt of the Englishman' towards Afrikaners, and the dangers of 'black Englishmen' being too readily influenced by the English 'who have their own reasons for despising the Afrikaner'.[3]

The negotiated settlement of the 1990s was made possible in part by a rapprochement, specifically conceived as being between the exiled ANC and Afrikaners. Thabo Mbeki played a central role in this process. According to Waldmeir, 'only the subtlest of ANC minds could recognise this truth: that petting, coddling and cajoling the Afrikaner could pay enormous dividends. And apart from Mandela himself, there was none subtler than Thabo Mbeki.'[4] Waldmeir describes how Mbeki won the trust of Pieter de Lange, then chairman of the Broederbond, in New York in 1986; the fifty dissident Afrikaners who met a delegation from the ANC in Dakar in 1987; and Willie Esterhuyse, the Stellenbosch philosophy professor sent as P.W. Botha's clandestine emissary to meet the ANC in London in 1988. In each case, a major part of Mbeki's strategy was to demonstrate his sympathy with Afrikaner concerns, the cause of Afrikaner culture and the Afrikaans language, and even to identify himself with that cause: 'My name is Thabo Mbeki,' he told the visitors to Dakar; 'I am an Afrikaner.' Esterhuyse felt he could 'entrust his life' to someone who 'understood the Afrikaners'

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[1] Cf. Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, pp. 267-71; Anthony Sampson, Mandela: The Authorised Biography (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1999), pp. 520-33.

[2] Sampson, Mandela, pp. 229, 286.

[3] Sampson, Mandela, pp. 298, 268. The quotations are from Mandela's unpublished prison writings (a 1976 paper on national liberation and a 1978 paper on black consciousness), to which Sampson had access.

[4] Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, p. 67.

predicament' as did Mbeki.[5]

Mbeki was also the first within the ANC to propose a coalition government with the National Party.[6] This proposal was based, according to his subsequent account, on 'the understanding that the National Party would be the political representative of the army, the white police, white business, the white civil service, that it would have a hold on very important levers of power. When we came into government, we would come with the numbers, they would come in with the power, and we would need to work together for a certain period instead of saying to those power centers, you are the opposition.'[7] On the basis of similar reasoning, the ANC kept alive the unrealistic prospect of an Afrikaner volkstaat, in order to keep the Afrikaner right wing - and the Afrikaner leader they came to rely on, Constand Viljoen - within the bounds of the negotiation process.[8]

After the adoption of a new constitution and the demise of the government of national unity in 1996, and then the retirement from politics of former president F.W. de Klerk, this reasoning became increasingly redundant. In 1997 Mbeki, as Deputy President, and Mangosothu Buthelezi, as Minister of Home Affairs, began extensive discussions with a wide range of Afrikaner leaders and opinion-makers on their concerns as Afrikaners in the new South Africa. These discussions culminated in a special parliamentary debate, held in March 1999, at which Mbeki reported his findings. Mbeki's speech and the debate which followed were something of an anti-climax: he made use of the opportunity to include Afrikaners within the fold of the new South Africa, and to indicate that the government was concerned with their interests. Constand Viljoen objected that Mbeki had acted 'undemocratically' in consulting directly with Afrikaner organisations and individuals, rather than through his own Freedom Front, which claimed to represent Afrikaners in parliament.[9] Viljoen was surely right in surmising that the event signalled that the days of a representative mouthpiece for Afrikaners at a national level were over.

But the main result of Mbeki's consultation and debate on the Afrikaners was more or less the opposite of what he had intended. Instead of drawing Afrikaners more closely into a national consensus, it was the starting-point for a new politics of Afrikaans, increasingly conceived as a challenge to the emerging national consensus. Instead of re-legitimating the Afrikaner establishment - discredited by its support for apartheid, and now to be assigned to a new and subordinate role - it provided an occasion for Afrikaner dissidents to re-group, and for former critics of apartheid to take on a new role as critics of the ANC government.

Mbeki's initial strategy was to neutralise and win over the Afrikaner establishment by acknowledging its power and sympathising with the 'predicament' created by its reliance on racial domination. In the new South Africa, this strategy could only be continued by re-consolidating that establishment. But this had the effect of fixing Afrikaner identity in the patterns of the past, and marginalising once again the dissident Afrikaners who had never

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[5] Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, pp. 68-9, 74-5, 77-80; quotations from pp. 74, 78.

[6] Sampson, Mandela, p. 467; cf. Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, p. 214.

[7] Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, p. 272.

[8] Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, pp. 238-40.

[9] Beeld, 25 March 1999.

defended apartheid power, nor shared the predicaments of its apologists. 'Defeat will save us,' Breytenbach had said of Afrikaners facing the end of apartheid.[10] Mbeki now sought to block this salvation, by making the defeat of apartheid acceptable to the establishment which had grown up to defend it. In the process, this re-consolidation of the Afrikaner establishment threatened to end the challenge of those Afrikaners who had struggled to free Afrikaner culture and the Afrikaans language from the matrix of apartheid.

Some days before the parliamentary debate itself took place, a letter signed by Breytenbach, André Brink, Ampie Coetzee and van Zyl Slabbert - four central figures in Afrikaner dissent - was published in Die Burger, objecting to the entire process. It developed one of the central themes of Breytenbach's critique of the negotiated settlement, warning against the capacity of the ANC to find common ground with the apartheid establishment: 'Apparently it suits the future president to legitimate and stabilise the previous orthodoxy ... In our country, power always prefers to choose its own interlocutors and partners in dialogue. This was how the previous dispensation appointed the Hendrickses and Matanzimas and Mangopes as spokesmen for their respective nations.' But the organisations with which Mbeki had consulted - the official face of Afrikaner culture, the product and bastion of Afrikaner supremacy in the apartheid years - had not been 'mandated or delegated by us, nor by any other Afrikaners for whom we have respect'. A debate which takes these consultations as its starting-point is 'unacceptable and perhaps even mischievous'.[11] More than anything that had gone before it, this letter sparked public debate and controversy on the place of Afrikaans in the new South Africa.

For the most part, the debate has focused specifically on state policies regarding language in the new South Africa. The significance of defending the Afrikaans language - rather than Afrikaans culture, or language and culture, as was the most frequent usage before the mid-1990s - is seldom made explicit. The previous, more inclusive usage suggested that Afrikaans-speakers had to hold certain religious or political beliefs in order to be 'true' Afrikaners, but seldom specified what these were.[12] In the context of the new South Africa, the defence of Afrikaans language is less ethnically-laden and hence more feasible politically, but does not necessarily exclude literary and cultural products of the language.

The development of policy in relation to language is also clearer than in the ill-defined sphere of culture. In 1992, the ANC adopted a policy of giving official status to eleven languages - preserving the status of English and Afrikaans, and adding nine African languages - until such time as a lingua franca developed 'spontaneously'.[13] This policy became part of the constitution of South Africa, adopted in 1996. It has never been the intention of this policy that all functions of state would be carried out in all eleven languages, nor could this be done. In the 1970s, the apartheid government abandoned mother-tongue primary education in African languages, and this policy has been maintained by the ANC government since 1994.

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[10] Breytenbach, The Memory of Birds, p. 32; cf. Chapter Nine above.

[11] Breyten Breytenbach et al, 'Watse, Wie se Afrikaners,' Die Burger, 20 March 1999. The prose style is that of Breytenbach rather than any of the other signatories.

[12] Cf. du Toit and Giliomee, Afrikaner Political Thought, pp. xxvii-xxix.

[13] Sybelle Albrecht, 'Wegwysers na 'n Tuiste in Eie Taal,' Die Suid-Afrikaan, August-September 1992, p. 33.

African languages are given greater recognition mainly at a symbolic level. In practice, this policy has mostly had the result of putting English in the place of Afrikaans, in schools and universities, in radio and TV, in the public service and the legal system.

In this context, the defence of Afrikaans has gained increasing momentum. A month or two after Breytenbach's letter appeared in Die Burger, a proposal to establish a private Afrikaans university was launched at a meeting held over several days in Oudtshoorn - a proposal which is still under discussion.[14] Some months later, in November 1999, 24 Afrikaans writers and academics - including Breytenbach, Degenaar, Hermann Giliomee and Jaap Steyn - signed an open letter to President Thabo Mbeki, appealing to him to give greater recognition to minority rights, and those of Afrikaners in particular.[15] Also in November 1999, controversy was fuelled by the call made by an Afrikaans writer of a younger generation, Dan Roodt, for a protest march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and then by Roodt's establishment of the Pro-Afrikaanse Aksiegroep (PRAAG) which sought to guide a new 'language struggle' for the recognition of Afrikaans.[16]

PRAAG itself soon became something of a personal fiefdom for Roodt, dominated by his relentless debating style and the long-postponed march to the Union Buildings. In May 2000, Roodt's initiative was in some part superseded by the formation of a 'Group of 63', concerned to defend Afrikaans language rights, with Breytenbach, Degenaar, Slabbert and Steyn as its patrons, and a number of editors and associates of the journal Fragmente in its secretariat. Roodt was part of the Group of 63 at its formation, but withdrew from it a few days later, together with Chris Louw, an Afrikaans radio journalist who, at about the same time, aroused heated controversy in the Afrikaans press with an angry open letter to Willem de Klerk, the former editor of Rapport and leading proponent of verligtheid within the NP.[17]

Whatever new developments will follow, enough has happened already to give the lie to the idea - in this context at least - that 'what is past, is done with'. Reconciliation on that basis required that Afrikaner history be seen as all of one piece. It required not only that the book be closed on the assassins and torturers of the apartheid regime and their political masters, but also on the ideals and aspirations of those Afrikaners who sought to develop their language, literature and culture in ways which would serve larger, more humane causes.

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[14] Fragmente 5 (2000) includes writings on this theme by Breytenbach, Dan Roodt and seven others.

[15] Chris Barnard et al, 'Pres Mbeki, Luister Asb na Ons,' Insig, November 1999, pp. 24-5.

[16] Roodt was a student activist at Wits in the 1980s, and editor of a short-lived and frequently-banned Afrikaans literary magazine. Like Breytenbach, Turner and Cronin, he spent formative years in Paris - in his case, avoiding conscription into the apartheid military. His work is not easy to place on the ideological spectrum, but he cannot be reckoned as a critic of capitalism. Roodt writes a column, Grasperk, for the website www.mweb.co.za/litnet, and on the website of the Pro-Afrikaanse Aksiegroep www.praag.org. His essays are due to be published under the title Opstandige Opstelle.

[17] Chris Louw, 'Boetman is die Bliksem in,' Die Burger 8 May 2000. A longer version has now been published as Ope Brief aan Willem de Klerk (Johannesburg, PRAAG, 2000). De Klerk's own contribution to the debate - Afrikaners: Kroes, Kras, Kordaat (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 2000) - calls for Afrikaners to adopt a low profile in South African politics for a decade or two, in order to allay fears that they seek to preserve the privileges of apartheid.

In what sense does this defence of Afrikaans represent a new political departure? First, it is located firmly in the context of the new South Africa, and takes non-racial democracy as its explicit starting point. It is explicitly concerned with the interests of Afrikaans-speakers without regard to their ethnic background. Second, unlike the initial proposals of the National Party in the constitutional negotiations, it is not concerned with formal means for securing political power for ethnic and other minorities.[18] Indeed, this new politics could probably only take on its own character after the defeat of such strategies. Third, the version of Afrikaner culture it defends is far less conformist than that defended in the apartheid era. It assumes cultural diversity among Afrikaners, and is easily compatible with elements of Afrikaner life - explicit sexuality, rock music, Eastern religion - which Afrikaner cultural authorities previously sought to suppress or exclude.[19] Fourth, it depends on a new political style - drawn largely from the youth culture and new social movements of the West - which opposes hierarchy and dogma, and encourages diversity of opinion and spontaneity of expression. This political style is manifested in poetry slams and philosophy evenings, web-sites and phone-in radio programmes, rather than parliamentary politics, prayer meetings, or grim-faced men in dark suits. Its philosophical ideas and idiom are drawn from the postmodernism of Derrida rather than the neo-Calvinism of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd.

The novelty of this configuration is easily apparent when contrasted with the traditional Afrikaner nationalist view - taken for granted even by dissenting figures like van Wyk Louw - that political power was essential for the preservation and promotion of Afrikaans language and culture. But it has important continuities with arguments developed by Afrikaner critics of apartheid to the effect that Afrikaner nationalism represented a peculiar distortion of the achievements of Afrikaans language and culture, and that Afrikaner political power was itself the main threat to the survival of Afrikaans language and culture.

The seminal expression of this argument was Breytenbach's lecture to the UCT Summer School in 1973. However, this was not itself the main argument of Breytenbach's lecture, and it was not altogether clear to what extent the lecture was concerned to defend Afrikaans against the threat posed by Afrikaner power. As an Afrikaner, Breytenbach asserted, he could 'not distance himself from this mess' and had to 'work for the transformation of my own community'. But this transformation, he argued, should not be an end in itself, but a contribution to a larger project of liberation. For 'I can only be free to the extent that my fellow human being is free'. He called on his fellow writers to 'make more spacious our humanity and our language' and thus escape the 'traps of Apartaans' in order to 'speak Afrikaans: one of the many languages of Africa.'[20]

It was an essential part of Breytenbach's argument that Afrikaners had to earn the right to

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[18] The NP's negotiating proposals included a permanent coalition government, cabinet decisions based on consensus, a rotating presidency, veto rights for minorities and the like; cf. Waldmeir, Anatomy of a Miracle, pp. 149-51.

[19] O'Meara describes the 'alternative' Afrikaans culture which emerged mainly at Afrikaans universities in the 1980s as a 'direct and deliberate desecration of the Afrikaner civil religion' (Forty Lost Years, p. 369).

[20] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, pp. 121, 122, 123, 128.

defend their language: 'I myself will only acquire respect for the Afrikaner (for myself),' he wrote to Brink in 1963, 'when I learn that "Jan Smit" has been placed under house arrest or has vomited all over himself with electrodes attached to his fingers.'[21] For Afrikaans to live on, Afrikaners must be prepared to 'become compost, decomposing in order to compose other forms'.[22] The 'middle ground' of South African politics could have been established, he wrote in 1985, deliberately using the past tense, 'only were there to be, by now, say two to three thousand white political prisoners'. A 'cultural middle ground' could only have come into existence 'had the White writers the foresight to break with their own tribal authorities ... along lines of absolute solidarity with their Black colleagues'.[23]

Indeed, until the mid-1990s Breytenbach never explicitly concerned himself with the survival of Afrikaans. In the early 1970s, Breytenbach later recalled, he had 'dreamed that Africa may be united around two or three major languages, Swahili and Hausa and what then?'[24] After his release from prison in 1982, he was vigorous in disowning any concern with the preservation of Afrikaner culture and identity. 'To be an Afrikaner ... is a blight and a provocation to humanity,' he held. 'To me it is of little importance whether the language dies of shame or is preserved and strengthened by its potentially revolutionary impact.' Above all, he denounced the idea of struggling for 'the survival or imposition of Afrikaans', holding that those who do so are 'objectively strengthening the ideology of the White rulers'.[25]

The argument that Afrikaner nationalism was a threat to the survival of Afrikaans became increasingly central to Afrikaans literary politics after the establishment of the Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde (Afrikaans Writers' Guild) in 1975. Its founding constitution recognised Afrikaans as 'the language of all who speak and write it - bound to no party, dogma or colour', and committed the Guild to 'building up Afrikaans as a multinational language'.[26] But Afrikaans literary politics remained largely confined to questions directly relevant to writers: censorship, prescribed books, coverage of literary matters on radio and TV, even the conditions of eminent writers in prison. This self-imposed restriction is evident in Jan Rabie's round-about call at the Guild's founding conference for 'colour discrimination to be removed immediately from our language', rather than for its removal from society.[27] Jakes Gerwel addressed the political issues around the survival of Afrikaans more directly, developing a perspective for Afrikaans as a minority language in a future South Africa, relying on its own vitality rather than its political connections for survival and growth. But Gerwel deliberately

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[21] Brink, 'The Breytenbach File,' p. 5.

[22] Breytenbach, Seisoen in die Paradys, p. 123.

[23] Breytenbach, End Papers, p. 204.

[24] Breytenbach, Return to Paradise, p. 67.

[25] Breytenbach, True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, p. 354-5; cf. 'Taalstryd,' in Coetzee, Die Hand vol Vere, pp. 273-4.

[26] Bartho Smit, 'Tien Jaar Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde,' in Charles Malan and Bartho Smit, eds., Skrywer en Gemeenskap: Tien Jaar Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde (Pretoria, HAUM, c. 1985), p. 8.

[27] Jan Rabie, 'Is Dit Ons Erns - in Afrika?,' in Malan and Smit, Skrywer en Gemeenskap, p. 39.

spoke in the role of the outsider, whose own 'personal efforts at responsibility for the language are negligible next to the collective responsibility of the Afrikaner', and explored the common ground available to Afrikaans speakers only within the literary terrain.[28]

The same argument came increasingly to be integrated into a larger, more political perspective in Johan Degenaar's writings of the early 1980s. During an extensive polemic about the lessons of Elsa Joubert's Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena, conducted in the letter columns of Die Burger in 1978-9, he rejected Sampie Terreblanche's demand that he identify himself either with the Afrikaner establishment of the NP and Broederbond or with the English establishment of Anglo-American Corporation and the PFP. 'It is important that Afrikaners can also stand in solidarity with those who have been wronged, and against the holders of power, whoever they may be.' Later, reflecting on the polemic, Degenaar held that if Afrikaners could not recognise through the Afrikaans of Poppie Nongena 'a complete person and a full citizen of the country', then it would be justly deserved if 'one day, in the process of renewal, they are shifted into the background with their language and all'.[29]

This argument is the central focus of a subsequent short collection of essays, which critically examined the political ideas of the leading verligte intellectual, Gerrit Viljoen. Here Degenaar set out an agenda for the 'morally critical Afrikaner', who seeks to base his Afrikaner identity 'on language and culture, rather than race and blood'. This included openly rejecting 'the identification of Afrikaner culture and Afrikaner power', rejecting the nationalist conception of Afrikaner identity, and seeking to establish shared values with non-Afrikaners 'which can serve as the basis for a common future'. The argument emphasises the active role which Afrikaners have to take upon themselves in order to overcome the legacy of apartheid: 'There is no necessity and guarantee that [the Afrikaner] will continue to exist. Like all other peoples and population groups, he [sic] will have to find out what role there is for him in the future, for example in helping to build a new nation and in becoming a meaningful part of an over-arching South African nationalism. His continued existence will depend on the manner in which he strives for a just social, political and economic dispensation. Afrikaner survival is only possible as a creative and shared survival in justice.'[30]

In the mid-1980s, Degenaar called for Afrikaans to be transformed from a language of oppression to a language of liberation through Afrikaner engagement with 'the politics of negotiation', aimed at creating 'a more just South Africa in which Afrikaans culture and language will have a better chance of survival'. For 'the liberation of Afrikaans is inextricably

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[28] G.J. Gerwel, 'Afrikaner, Afrikaans, Afrika,' in Malan and Smit, Skrywer en Gemeenskap, pp. 43, 41, 51; cf. Gerwel, 'Afrikaans - 'n Toekomsperspektief,' in Malan and Smit, Skrywer en Gemeenskap, pp. 189-94.

[29] J.J. Degenaar, Voortbestaan in Geregtigheid: Opstelle oor die Politieke Rol van die Afrikaner (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980), pp. 72, 30. Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena documents the experiences of a black, Afrikaans-speaking woman, whose family life and livelihood are disrupted as she is forcefully relocated according to apartheid's racial map. Its author, Elsa Joubert, is a celebrated Afrikaans novelist.

[30] J.J. Degenaar, Keuse vir die Afrikaner (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1982), pp. 22, 26-7, 28.

tied up with the political liberation of the brown and black people.'[31]

In all of these contexts, Degenaar's argument is conducted strictly at a normative level. That is, it proposes a single norm for 'the Afrikaner', regardless of whether that norm should be adopted by all Afrikaners, or none, or some number in between. The argument never reflects on the likelihood that Afrikaners will differ with each other on apartheid, or on the need to preserve political power. It does not consider the differing ways in which Afrikaners (or others) could align themselves with the aspirations of the oppressed majority, nor how the meaning of their political choices may change over time. It takes no account of how Afrikaans culture and language have been formed by the context of racial domination, nor of how this legacy would be contested in a post-apartheid context. Within this perspective, the burden of the past could be shaken off through a simple normative choice. The 'sins of the fathers' would not be visited upon the generations to come.

In his essay, Die Sondes van die Vaders, André du Toit shares with Degenaar and with Breytenbach - before his release from prison in 1982, at least - a commitment to speaking 'as an Afrikaner' even while contesting the Afrikaner nationalist conception of Afrikaner identity. Each of them accepts that, for as long as they remain Afrikaners, there is a sense in which they share a common destiny with those who speak their language, regardless of their political differences. Du Toit's essay is consciously informed by this spirit of dissident solidarity: 'Whether he wants to or not,' he comments, 'the Afrikaner intellectual forms part of organised Afrikanerdom, and thus of the apartheid order itself.'[32] But it differs from anything that has gone before, in that it is at the same time a critical and historical reflection on that solidarity, and an exploration of its limits and consequences.

Die Sondes van die Vaders takes as its starting-point the failure of the verligte project of reforming apartheid 'from within'. The failure of P.W. Botha's reform initiative means that the 'credibility and integrity' of the verligte intellectual is itself at stake (18). From this starting-point, the essay reaches back historically to N.P. van Wyk Louw - 'the archetypal Afrikaner intellectual' (19). Du Toit rejects the verligte interpretation of Louw - exemplified in the work of Jaap Steyn - which distorts his arguments in such a way as to call for ethnic solidarity, rather than critique, as the main task of the dissenting intellectual (26, 48). He locates Louw's literary nationalist project in context, in order to demonstrate how by the 1950s he had come to 'anticipate the dilemma of a new generation of Afrikaans intellectuals whose basic duty could require them to attack the established Nationalist leadership as a serious threat to the survival of Afrikaans culture' (59). Going back still further in Afrikaner history, he uses the example of General Koos de la Rey to show that the ethos of Afrikaner solidarity had itself been partly formed by acts of dissent (64-8).

Against this historical background, the essay also looks forward, by examining the situation of the emerging generation of Afrikaner intellectuals, whose outlook and prospects are shaped by the likelihood of black majority rule in South Africa during their working lives. No longer able to commit themselves to Afrikaner nationalism, nor to turn to 'alternative cultural and political frameworks', they also find themselves in a society too deeply politicised to allow for any retreat into 'an apolitical concern with purely cultural and personal values'

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[31] J.J. Degenaar, 'Afrikaans, die Taal van Bevryding,' in Hans du Plessis and Theo du Plessis, eds., Afrikaans en Taalpolitiek (Pretoria, HAUM, 1987), p. 208.

[32] André du Toit, Die Sondes van die Vaders (Cape Town, Rubicon Press, 1983), p. 7; cf. pp. 51-3. Further page references to this work are indicated in the text.

(45-6). Unlike the generation before them, they cannot avoid the fact that Afrikaner culture and the Afrikaans language - through their association with Afrikaner power within the apartheid order - have become the 'legitimate target of black rage' (54). They have no choice but to take on 'the accumulated burdens of the past'; but in doing so, 'they forfeit the opportunity to create their own future' (51).

Nor is there is an easy way out of this dilemma. There is 'no possible guarantee' of Afrikaner survival - that is, survival of Afrikaners as a distinct cultural group - after the end of Afrikaner power, 'except insofar as Afrikaners themselves have the moral and political courage to act in such a way that they convince themselves and others that such survival indeed has legitimate value' (63). To do this, they would have to act in solidarity with oppressed people - above all, with the victims of Afrikaner oppression - in the cause of justice, freedom and the common good (59, 62). Both 'the burdens of history and the risks of the future' must be grasped in ways 'which can be justified to ourselves and to others' (68).

This perspective is similar to Degenaar's in its emphasis of the need for Afrikaners actively to earn the respect of their fellow South Africans, rather than treating such respect as a right to which they are automatically entitled. But it differs from Degenaar's in two crucial respects. First, it recognises that the verdict of history will be far more crude than that of a 'heavenly observer, able to weigh up all the nuances of the historical record' (54). Second, it emphasises that in establishing this historical record, the task of convincing others of the values you stand for is inseparable from that of convincing yourself (60, 62, 68).

The kind of abstract appeal to the rights of a culture and language to survive with which verligtes had deceived themselves, presupposed that Afrikaners themselves could decide the historical meaning of their politics. Against this, du Toit argued that the self is formed through its dialectical interaction with others. No self-conception will endure if it conflicts with the concrete experience of your contemporaries. And the norms by which your contemporaries will judge will themselves be transformed in the process of struggle. This theme had also been developed in du Toit's earlier interpretation of Black Consciousness in South Africa: 'The awakening of social and political self-consciousness is a process with its own internal dynamics and emancipatory imperatives, with the primary consequence that social relations which earlier had proved to be in one way or the other tolerable now become utterly intolerable.'[33]

Moreover, the self which is formed in that dialectical interaction has a history which cannot unilaterally be brought to a close. Du Toit was to make this point some years later in response to Sampie Terreblanche's confession of complicity with apartheid and apology to Degenaar and others for his vilification of them during his days as an NP apologist. 'For a confession of guilt to have meaning, it must not be easy. It must be earned. It must have consequences. What we confess and acknowledge has implications for the past as well as the future'.[34]

In this respect, Die Sondes van die Vaders was closer to the ideas and assumptions of the

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[33] André du Toit, 'Philosophy in a Changing Plural Society,' South African Journal of Philosophy, 1:4 (1982), p. 160. This is a translation of a paper first presented in Afrikaans in January 1977, and published in Standpunte 129 (June 1977), pp. 18-32..

[34] André du Toit, 'Was Alles dus maar 'n Ligte Mistykie?,' Die Suid-Afrikaan, April-May 1991, p. 47; cf. du Toit, 'Oor Politieke Pyn, of die Hede as Geskiedenis,' in du Toit, In Gesprek, pp. 22-31.

mass struggles of oppressed communities in the 1970s and 1980s than to the liberal constitutionalism which informed the negotiated settlement of the 1990s. The negotiated settlement proceeded on the basis of the formal equality of each and every individual citizen, including rights related to language and culture. The new politics of Afrikaans could trace its roots back to the arguments of Afrikaner critics of apartheid such as Breytenbach, Degenaar and du Toit. But it was much closer to the spirit of the new South Africa in its assumption that the rights of a language or culture could be defended on formal grounds alone. In adopting that assumption, it was already altering the self-conception which it sought to defend; and coming to defend the self-conception provided by liberal constitutionalism and the capitalist market.

Post-Apartheid Postmodernism: From Degenaar to 'Fragmente'

The new politics of Afrikaans is characterised by a peculiarly selective continuity with the thought of Afrikaner critics of apartheid such as Breytenbach, Degenaar and du Toit. It continues their argument that Afrikaans language and culture must be defended on a basis of opposition to Afrikaner nationalism and white privilege. It derives its legitimacy partly from the record of Afrikaner critics of apartheid and its association with them. At the same time, it brushes aside a theme which was essential to their critique of apartheid: that of the need for Afrikaners to demonstrate their solidarity with the majority of oppressed South Africans by upholding common principles and values.

Put differently, the new politics of Afrikaans seeks to continue a tradition of dissident solidarity which never treated the individual as responsible for their own acts alone, but always sought to recognise their co-responsibility for the processes which formed them. But it relies on that tradition only insofar as it applies to the apartheid past. In the context of the new South Africa, the defence of Afrikaans more often rests on denying the possibility of collective responsibility for the past, or on the view that 'what is past is done with'. Those defending Afrikaans have not done so by seeking, as Afrikaners, to develop a common project with other South Africans, nor do they seem set to do so.

This discontinuity has complex sources. One of them is a changed philosophical conception of the historical process within which political and moral responsibility occur. More accurately, we might speak of a changed conception of the possibility of making history intelligible in such a way that any account of it can serve as a real basis for moral and political argument. Postmodernism has played a crucial role in this process. Any account of the new politics of Afrikaans, and its selective continuity with the historical past it invokes, needs to recognise the impact of this philosophical current.

In its initial context, postmodernism occupied a place in the political and intellectual life of the capitalist West which was not replicated in South Africa. First, it served as a critique of modernity in a context in which the project of the modern had been carried through in exemplary form - that is, in the societies in which modernity had been invented and by whose experience it was defined. Second, it served as the sequel to Marxism for many intellectuals of the Left who - in the decade of Reagan and Thatcher - came to see the revolutionary hopes of 1968 as so many illusions. Put differently, postmodernism emerged as a distinctive philosophical current in societies which represented the highest achievements of modernity, and in which there was little apparent prospect of fundamental social change.

The South African context in the 1980s was vastly different. Its experience of modernity had been peculiarly deformed by racial domination, and fundamental social change seemed

certain and imminent. Postmodernists in South Africa - or those who adopted its idiom or self-concept - were not always strongly orientated towards the local political and intellectual context. Linear narratives of triumph and disaster had a powerful hold on the South African imagination in the charged years of revolt and repression. Postmodernism might have offered a kind of corrective to these, but could as easily be a means of evading the fundamental conflict at the core of South African society and culture.[35]

In the 1990s, postmodernism has probably been most influential in South Africa in the context of Afrikaner literary and intellectual life. In that context, it has played two main roles: first, it provided a world-historical framework within which arguments for pluralist politics could be developed and extended; second, it provided a challenge to conservative ideologies - particularly within the sphere of culture - which were either resistant to modernity, or at best ambiguous about it. The continuity between older themes in Afrikaner dissent and the post-apartheid assimilation of postmodernism is particularly visible in the writings of Johan Degenaar. Degenaar was not the first South African interpreter of postmodernism, but he played a crucial role during the 1980s in preparing the assimilation of postmodernism into the new politics of Afrikaans.[36]

Degenaar's political thought of the 1960s - like that of van Wyk Louw in earlier decades - gave a prominent role to the idea of a lewenshouding or 'attitude to life'.[37] For him, unlike Louw, an attitude to life premised on 'the acceptance of otherness' was an essential attribute of freedom. Within this perspective, freedom is conceived as a consciously and actively-acquired attribute of the whole person. It could not be achieved piecemeal, nor conferred on you by another. The process through which freedom was achieved involved gaining self-knowledge, ridding the self of possessiveness in relation to its presuppositions, and engaging with the world. The culmination of this complex process is described as mondigwording ('coming of age').

The call for Afrikaners to 'come of age' was central to Degenaar's writings in theology and politics alike. Kant had defined Enlightenment as 'man's emergence from his self-incurred

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[35] The most explicitly political manifestation of postmodernism in the mid-1980s and early 90s was the attempt - by Peter Hudson and others, based mostly at Wits University - to put forward a 'discourse-theoretical' perspective, drawn from the work of Laclau and Mouffe, within the South African Left. As far as I know, no attempt has yet been made to give an account of the assimilation of postmodernism in South Africa. Daniel Herwitz has attempted a general account of the requirements for an engagement of postmodernism with the real conditions of contemporary South Africa - or the Third World more generally - in his 'Postmodernists of the South: An Essay in Philosophical Journalism,' South African Journal of Philosophy 18:1 (February 1999), pp. 18-40.

[36] Degenaar encountered postmodernism at a summer school on literary theory in Chicago 'during the 1980s' ('Om die Wêreld te Ontdek: 'n Onderhoud met Pieter Duvenage,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 22). He refers to deconstruction sympathetically in an article published in 1984 ('Die Betekenis van N.P. van Wyk Louw vir My Eie Denke,' p. 52). His earliest account of its main concepts was a series of summer school lectures delivered in 1986 on Art and the Meaning of Life (Cape Town, UCT Dept of Extra-mural Studies, 1986). By then, postmodernism had acquired considerable currency in literary studies in South Africa, with the bilingual Journal of Literary Studies being established in 1985 largely to accommodate this interest.

[37] Cf. Chapter Seven above.

immaturity'.[38] Degenaar built on this conception in his appeal to Afrikaners: 'Coming of age means that people may think for themselves in all circumstances. And allow them to be at ease in expressing their thoughts ... The immature laager mentality is not the cramped characteristic of one group or one people alone, but as an Afrikaner I call upon Afrikaners to be on their guard against it.'[39]

In the 1960s, Degenaar identified this coming of age with the adoption of liberal values. Indeed, he defined liberalism as the 'attitude to life in which the freedom of individuals, groups and peoples is central'.[40] By 1980, coming of age was identified with a commitment to pluralism, which 'leaves room for the individual to come of age as an Afrikaner in a way which does not necessarily presuppose a nationalist identity'.[41] Whether described as liberalism or pluralism, however, coming of age is characterised by tolerance of diversity, respect for differing opinions, willingness to reflect critically on one's own assumptions, and openness to change.

These are also the characteristics which are most conspicuous in Degenaar's accounts of postmodernism. Postmodernism demonstrates that we 'lack a metaphysical form which guarantees finality with regard to meaning', and that 'self-understanding can never become self-transparency and self-possession'. It 'protects man from the death of dogmatism and premature totalisation', and preserves Socratic knowledge of our ignorance.[42] In this perspective, 'postmodernism assumes that there is a plurality of ways of understanding and that a more tolerant approach to differences is called for.'[43]

In a certain sense, then, Degenaar's postmodernism can be seen as a continuation of his earlier call for mondigwording, now transposed into a new idiom. But the meaning of that call was at the same time transformed by locating it within a new conception of history. The call for Afrikaners to engage openly with their developing situation, and to reflect critically on their conceptions in the light of new developments, had always raised the questions of the historical direction of those developments, and the conceptual framework within which they should be interpreted and assessed. To the extent that Degenaar left these question unanswered, his argument left room for dominant conceptions of them to fill the vacuum. But his writings also suggest a specific approach to them, which treated modernity as a value to be endorsed.

In his theological (or anti-theological) writings of the 1950s, Degenaar explicitly appealed

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[38] Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in Hans Reiss, ed., Kant's Political Writings (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 54.

[39] Degenaar, Moraliteit en Politiek, p. 5. In the original Afrikaans, passages like this are a delicate parody of the rhetoric of the official guardians of Afrikaner culture in state and church.

[40] Degenaar, Moraliteit en Politiek, pp. 6-7.

[41] Degenaar, Voortbestaan in Geregtigheid, p. 5.

[42] J.J. Degenaar, 'Deconstruction - The Celebration of Language,' in Bernard Lategan, ed., The Reader and Beyond (Pretoria, HSRC, 1992), pp. 207-8. This article was first published as the fourth of a series of lectures on Art and the Meaning of Life in 1986.

[43] J.J. Degenaar, 'The Concept of Politics in Postmodernism,' Politikon 23:2 (December 1996), p. 55.

to the standards of 'modern thought'.[44] The 'coming of age' metaphor - which was central to his thought in the 1960s and 70s - implied a linear progression in the growth of individuals and cultures alike. His critique of nationalism, sustained over several decades, always emphasised the need to move away from the unquestioned loyalties and divisions of the past. In some of his writings, he was more specific, calling, for example, for the 'rural attitude to politics' to make way for the 'urban way of life in which different cultures meet and influence each other', for the elimination of global hunger and war, and the creation of a world federation of states.[45]

This picture of human progress is perhaps more reminiscent of Kant than of any 20th century thinker.[46] But Kant's reliance on humankind's 'unsocial sociability' was less easily available to Degenaar, who was conscious of the world having been brought together by the fear of nuclear annihilation.[47] In his book on the evolutionary theory of Teilhard de Chardin, Degenaar sought to establish a basis for this sense that the movement of human life was in the direction of freedom. He argues that evolution is a 'process of progress' which produces human consciousness, self-consciousness and freedom, and that 'all people should meet each other in conscious participation in the evolution of humanity'.[48] But this way of solving the problem of history through an optimistic metaphysics of nature was unconvincing, and perhaps alien to Degenaar's own dominant mode of thought. Later, in writing about Marxism, he indicates his reservations about a predominantly economic conception of progress, pointing out how it provides ideological justification for domination and exploitation, but offers no alternative framework for thinking about economic issues.[49]

In this context, postmodernism serves not to provide a basis for grasping the movement of history, but rather for dissolving the need for any such basis. Degenaar's writings on politics and culture had previously implied a progressive movement from pre-modern to modern, but could provide no clear warrant for his belief that the modern would more adequately embody values of freedom, solidarity and reason than the pre-modern. Postmodernism, however, makes such a warrant superfluous, by virtue of 'an ironic relationship to all claims of finality whether produced by myth or by reason'. It is 'extremely critical of totalising ideologies in politics since they are incapable of accommodating a plurality of practices and lifestyles and viewpoints and inevitably impose a unity on diversity'. This plurality is accommodated, according to Degenaar, when - instead of a pre-modern 'collision of differences' or a modern 'levelling of differences' - we choose a postmodern 'negotiation of differences'.[50] Moreover,

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[44] E.g., Degenaar, Die Sterflikheid van die Siel, p. 19; Sekularisasie, p. 41.

[45] Degenaar, Op Weg na 'n Nuwe Politieke Lewenshouding, pp. 47, 57-8; cf. Die Sterflikheid van die Siel, p. 78.

[46] 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,' in Reiss, Kant's Political Writings, pp. 41-53.

[47] Degenaar, Op Weg na 'n Nuwe Politieke Lewenshouding, pp. 48, 57, 58.

[48] J.J. Degenaar, Evolusie en Christendom: 'n Opstel oor Teilhard de Chardin (Cape Town, Simondium, 1965), p. 42, cf. pp. 23-4, 71-4.

[49] Degenaar, Marxism-Leninism and its Implications for South Africa, p. 30; cf. p. 33.

[50] Degenaar, 'The Concept of Politics in Postmodernism,' pp. 55, 61, 64.

this is the only choice which corresponds to a correct (that is, postmodernist) view of language. For in language, 'there is only the open play of differences which remain an unending adventure'.[51]

The need for an account of the historical basis of human progress is removed in this way, by effectively reducing human history to the history of discourse - itself very broadly sketched. That history is then provided with an endpoint - postmodernist discourse - from which all others are accessible. In this way, Degenaar is able to integrate concerns drawn from politics, ethics, culture and aesthetics into an attractive and open-ended philosophical vision, in which the self is always dialectically related to the other, and their interaction retains an element of uniqueness. It enables him to retain the political edge of philosophical critique in a context in which political debate is often reduced to legal or economic technicalities. But he does this by evading the question of the decisive historical forces of our time, rather than engaging with it. The result is that his work is always critical of domination, but never enquires consistently into its systemic sources. It is at its best in examining the ideological bases of largely unquestioned assumptions in contemporary politics - for example, in his influential critique of conceptions of 'nation-building' in the new South Africa.[52]

For a younger generation of Afrikaner intellectuals - whose political and intellectual formation took place largely after apartheid had entered its terminal crisis, or after negotiations with the unbanned ANC had begun - the issues at stake have been very different. Too young to have a consistent and publicly-acknowledged record of opposition to apartheid during its darkest days, but associated with its atrocities through the accident of their language, this generation has to establish a 'moral place to stand' in the new South Africa.[53] Renouncing apartheid has no cost any longer, and no principle is served by disowning Afrikaans - except perhaps that of self-advancement. Among Afrikaners of this generation, a collective intellectual project has taken shape, drawing much of its inspiration from postmodernism, which is perhaps the most lively, focused and sustained to have emerged in the new South Africa. Its main forum is the journal Fragmente.

Fragmente is based in Gauteng, with strong links with Belgium and the Netherlands.[54] Since its first issue appeared in 1998, its contents have reflected a distinctive range of historical, philosophical and contemporary concerns. Historically, it has re-examined the work of crucial figures in the history of Afrikaner dissent - carrying long interviews with Johan

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[51] Degenaar, 'Deconstruction - The Celebration of Language,' p. 190.

[52] E.g. Johan Degenaar, 'The Myth of a South African Nation' (Cape Town, IDASA Occasional Paper no. 40, 1990); 'Beware of Nation-Building Discourse,' in Nic Rhoodie and Ian Liebenberg, eds., Democratic Nation-Building in South Africa (Pretoria, HSRC, 1994), pp. 23-30.

[53] The phrase is that of Pieter Duvenage, 'Inleidende Opmerkings: Apartheid en Skuld?,' Fragmente 3 (1999), p. 110.

[54] The seven editors listed in the most recent issue, Fragmente 5, are all based in Gauteng (or Turfloop, in the nearby Northern Province). Of thirty editorial associates, fifteen are based in Gauteng (or the Northern Province), eight overseas, and the remaining seven spread relatively evenly across the rest of South Africa. Historically, Dutch and Afrikaans periodical literature in South Africa, of the kind which is committed to critical analysis of conventional ideas and structures - from the establishment of De Onderzoeker in 1860 to the closing of Die Suid-Afrikaan in 1995 - has been based mainly in the Western Cape.

Degenaar and André du Toit, a series of articles on van Wyk Louw, and a sympathetic account of the work of Martin Versfeld.[55] Philosophically, it has developed what can broadly be described as a postmodernist perspective. It has carried a long interview with Jacques Derrida, conducted during his visit to South Africa in 1998, translations of the writings of a number of contemporary Dutch, French and German philosophers sympathetic to postmodernism, and original contributions by Afrikaans writers. It has dealt with a range of contemporary issues concerning religion, cyberculture, and the media in society. In the South African context, it has paid particular attention to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Afrikaans language and culture, and has devoted the bulk of its most recent issue to discussion of the project aimed at establishing an Afrikaans university in Oudtshoorn.

In many respects, the postmodernism of Fragmente can be seen as a further continuation of Degenaar's concerns. Although it is critical of the political culture of individualism, and often of the 'centred' self, it seeks to integrate political, ethical, cultural and religious concerns into a philosophical unity very similar to that of Louw and Degenaar's conception of a lewenshouding. At the same time as taking as its premise the need for the unity and authenticity of the individual's conception of the world, it is also committed to pluralism in politics, culture and religion. Its pluralism - like Degenaar's - reflects a defence of local forms of autonomy which is never developed into a larger programme of social change, nor engages in any sustained way with actual historical struggles.

At the same time, there are at least three significant differences between Degenaar's political thought and the project of Fragmente. First, the project of Fragmente is informed by a far more thorough-going account of the contemporary global order, and a strong sense of the present - in South Africa after the end of apartheid; and globally in the age of the internet - as a moment of beginning and renewal. In this sense, Fragmente's thought is more consciously historical than Degenaar's. Second, the historical context to which Fragmente is most responsive is not so much that of racial domination as global capitalism, and its logic of cultural homogenisation. For this generation, it is no longer necessary - as it was for Degenaar - to defend diversity against the now discredited racial dogmas of Afrikaner nationalism. Third, and perhaps as a consequence, Degenaar's critique of domination is overshadowed, in the pages of Fragmente, by a critique of instrumental reason. That is, Fragmente presents a picture of a social order in which human purposes are not so much thwarted or crushed by coercive force, as misdirected or corrupted by ideas.[56]

Fragmente's philosophical and political perspective is set out most explicitly in its opening editorial. According to this perspective, 'old lines of division have been pushed aside' by such developments as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of apartheid, the digital revolution and the process of globalisation. The new lines of division are conceived as being 'between the forces which stand for the economisation of lived reality and those who value its multi-faceted

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[55] There is also an extremely guarded interview with P.S. Dreyer, who was for many years professor of philosophy at the University of Pretoria and a staunch defender of apartheid ('Filosofie, Teologie en die Geskiedenis: 'n Onderhoud met Pieter Duvenage,' Fragmente 2 (1998), pp. 102-19). The interview is introduced as part of a larger project concerned with 'Afrikaans philosophy'.

[56] This critique of instrumental reason draws - directly or indirectly - on the work of the Frankfurt School. The idea of 'fragmentary thought' is also reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's strategy for analysing life under capitalism in its 'estranged form' (Minima Moralia (London, New Left Books, 1974), p. 15).

character; between those who would subject everything to the demands of a technical rationality, and those who stand for a differentiated conception of rationality; between those who give unqualified support to the globalisation process, and those who, in the midst of the process, lend a voice to the unique and exceptional; between those who subject aesthetic experience to the interests of the culture-industry, and those who hope for the creative disruption it can bring; between those who support liberal democracy with its reduction of political life to "lobbying" and manipulated "dialogues" on TV, and those who want to create an openness for radical forms of democracy; between those who accept the nihilism which is the basis of modernism and those who want to create an openness for the coming of a post-nihilist culture.' In each of these oppositions, Fragmente sides with the second alternative against the first.[57]

This account includes some elements of a radical critique of global capitalism - or at least of certain aspects of its contemporary politics and culture. These recur in various contributions to the journal and in later editorial statements, in which Fragmente aligns itself with local forms of community against 'the power apparatus of late capitalist agents of globalisation', or describes the dialectics of globalisation creating 'unequalled economic instability in emerging markets, unprecedented ecological damage and new forms of political marginalisation'.[58]

But the nature of this critique is not all that easily apparent. The main difficulty in interpreting it lies in its relation to the new 'lines of division' which supposedly characterise the contemporary world: on the one hand, the unbridled onslaught of capitalist power; on the other, not the majority of humankind caught up in the headlong rush to reduce the world to so many opportunities for corporate profit, but rather a cultivated minority, defined by its cultural values, philosophical premises and aesthetic sensibilities. These lines of division are drawn neither at the material nor the philosophical level, but somehow at both levels at once. Capitalism - its beneficiaries and victims alike - is placed in opposition to a philosophical outlook which does not seek openly to challenge its logic.

It is not even clear whether the opposing sides are engaged in a genuine conflict. Fragmente does not identify itself with any larger project to transform the narrow and disabling culture it criticises, or to seek its overthrow. It rejects what it calls 'the modern fundamentalisms (fascism, communism, liberal capitalism and apartheid)', and their 'totalitarian patterns of thought'. Fragmentary thought, in contrast, makes it possible to 'keep open the space for a borderline existence in the in between'.[59] The metaphor of the 'in between' suggests not so much an alignment in a conflict between the powerful and the powerless, but rather an attempt to live on the borders of capitalist power without quite conforming to its terms. The logic of this argument requires that the main lines of division in the contemporary world be drawn along a different axis from that which is developed in Fragmente's opening editorial.

The lines of division which define the role of Fragmente are not those between the minority which benefits - economically, culturally or otherwise - from global capitalism, and the majority whose indigenous cultures are destroyed or subverted by it, and who are

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[57] 'Redaksioneel,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 3.

[58] 'Redaksioneel,' Fragmente 2 (1998), p. 5; Fragmente 5 (2000), p. 4.

[59] 'Redaksioneel,' Fragmente 1(1998), pp. 4-5.

condemned to poverty, hunger and disease, and a working life of mindless routine. Rather, these lines of division run within the culturally and economically empowered minority itself. What is primarily at issue is the scope of the logic of commodification - whether it need be imposed with uniform rigour throughout the cultural sphere. The defence of 'marginal' and 'fragmentary' cultural values does not itself require opposition to the exclusion of the majority of the world's population from effective participation in the making of contemporary culture.[60]

Of course, the cultural values defended by Fragmente do not necessarily require the exclusion of the majority from contemporary global culture. Whether it contributes to that end or not, depends mainly on the way in which that defence of cultural values articulates with its specific political and material context. But it depends also on the intellectual basis of that defence, and in this regard, postmodernism has a vital role to play in defining the orientation of Fragmente.

Among the editors and regular contributors to Fragmente, Danie Goosen has most clearly set himself the task of locating the larger, collective project within the philosophical framework of postmodernism, and his contributions are worth examining for that reason. His account of deconstruction defends it against accusations that it maintains an ironic or aesthetic attitude to events. Instead, it has a 'special relationship with the future, and thus an affirmative structure'; it is 'a style of thought which lives from a messianic expectation that that which is strange and other can always come from the future to surprise us again'.[61] In this respect, he contrasts deconstruction with dialectic. The defining characteristic of dialectic, for Goosen, is its aim of assimilating eventuality into its own circularity, thus depriving events of their singularity, restoring 'normality', making events 'at home', and identifying them with the 'status quo'. Whereas deconstruction 'presupposes an affirmative attitude to life', dialectic seeks to 'protect itself against intrusion'.[62]

There is a certain limited truth to Goosen's charge against dialectic. Dialectical analysis can indeed be circular; there are many instances in which dialectical categories are used in such a way as to prove the validity of the categories themselves, rather than to grasp the course of events. Whether this is their only use is another question. There is a long history of dialectical writing - from Hegel and Marx to Breytenbach's critique of the negotiated settlement in South Africa - which suggests that it is not. But even against the circular uses of dialectic, Goosen's defence of the messianic capacity of deconstruction is centrally concerned

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[60] Patterns of cultural empowerment do not follow economic patterns in all cases. Some individuals and communities are able to develop their own cultural forms in conditions of extreme poverty. Some who have adequate income, housing, medical care, school education and the like, are in practice limited to passive consumption of the current offerings of the culture industry. Despite these exceptions, it seems plausible to argue that a global system which enriches a minority and impoverishes the majority according to all available indices will also do so in the cultural sphere, on roughly the same scale. Extrapolating from the statistics provided by the United Nations Human Development Report, the Worldwatch Institute, Food First and other bodies charting global poverty, hunger, literacy, preventable disease and mortality, it seems likely that about 20% of the world's population benefit from global capitalism and 80% do not.

[61] Danie Goosen, 'Verlies, Rou en Affirmasie: Dekonstruksie en die Gebeure,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 55.

[62] Goosen, 'Verlies, Rou en Affirmasie,' pp. 60, 61, 63.

with its refusal to seek any pattern within historical processes. It is messianic in the sense that it anticipates a future which comes from beyond a horizon of human expectation or action.

Goosen's treatment of the economy of guilt, in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has a similar structure. Here he addresses a liberal capitalist 'philosophy of the hawker', in which everything is reduced to its economic value.[63] In this perspective, guilt is conceived as 'compensation' for wrong-doing, and its acknowledgement as a way of settling the debt. Tragedy is no longer recognisable in an era in which wrong-doing and guilt have become negotiable. In this context, guilt must be re-interpreted, by replacing a rationalist or causal conception of guilt with a realisation that 'we are and remain always already guilty, and therefore at the same time always already addressed from an outside against which we are always already guilty'. By embracing this conception of guilt, we establish the basis for a 'community beyond nihilism'.[64]

As before, Goosen's argument exposes - with some skill and insight - a limited and disabling understanding of social processes. But it does so not in order to replace it with a better, more historically conscious understanding. Rather, it takes the critique of an ideological view of history as the basis for a rejection of any kind of historical analysis, and its replacement with an ontology of 'openness'. As before, this ontology leads in effect to acceptance of a history we cannot ourselves transform. A rhetoric of radicalism is combined with a programme of acquiescence.[65]

In Goosen's most recent writings, a more explicitly political agenda is attached to the project of postmodernism. He attributes the current crisis of the university to its subservience to the needs of the global economy, obeying the 'most important law of the process of globalisation' which is 'the law of the market'. In this context, it is the task of the postmodern university - including a future Afrikaans university - to 'break through the monotonous logic of the prevailing economic order'. It does this by 'creating local spaces in which people are enabled to live the good life in a radically democratic way beyond that which is merely economically feasible'.[66] But this radical democracy, or republicanism, is not intended to challenge 'the late modern urge to reduce everything to representable and ultimately consumable object'. Instead, it 'shelters' or 'takes into protection' its 'own world'.[67]

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[63] Danie Goosen, 'Skuld en Kompensasie: Opmerkings rondom die Ekonomie van Skuld,' Fragmente 3 (1999), p. 127.

[64] Goosen, 'Skuld en Kompensasie,' pp. 133, 135-6.

[65] This discrepancy between rhetoric and programme is also very evident in Jacques Derrida's responses in an interview with Fragmente. A radical critique of capitalist democracy in the new South Africa is suggested by arguments that Mandela's strategy 'mirrored the assumptions of those who kept him in prison' or that he 'speaks in the name of an extremely specific and limited form of democracy'. But Derrida's concrete proposals go no further than protecting the secret ballot and the right to non-participation - staples of the 'limited' democracy he criticises (Derrida, 'Die Tragiese, die Onmoontlike en die Demokrasie: 'n Onderhoud met Danie Goosen, Johan van der Walt en die Redaksie,' Fragmente 3 (1999), pp. 54, 55, 52-3).

[66] Danie Goosen, 'Die Postmoderne Universiteit: Enkele Spekulatiewe Notas,' Fragmente 5 (2000), pp. 24, 25, 26.

[67] Goosen, 'Die Postmoderne Universiteit,' p. 27.

Goosen's treatment of the logic of capitalism as the logic of the economy itself, means that there is no alternative to acquiescence. If capitalism is one historically specific mode of economic life, then it might still be transformed. If it represents the logic of economic life itself, we can at most withdraw some part of our energies from its cultural effects. In this manner, the postmodern university can 'serve the professions as well as possible' but not make them its 'highest goal'.[68]

Goosen develops the idea of a postmodern republicanism, or radical democracy, in an essay which is currently available only on the internet.[69] Postmodern republicanism is introduced here as the political mode in which Afrikaners might attempt a 'creative re-interpretation of the symbols and myths of our shared world', in order to preserve their participation in history as a 'unique historical community'.[70] Once again, he addresses the threat of a 'neo-liberal order' intent on 'the commodification of everything'. In the primacy it gives to production and consumption, it resembles its 'great counterpart', Marxism. Unlike liberalism and Marxism, the republican tradition - from Machiavelli to Arendt - values active participation in the collective life of the community, and seeks to defend concrete communities against the power of abstractions. This is the direction, he suggests, which is evident in the open letter to Thabo Mbeki of November 1999, calling for the defence of Afrikaner minority rights.

Once again, the radical rhetoric conceals actual acquiescence with the logic of capitalism. Goosen explains that the 'tension between North and South' - or rich and poor - is a consequence of the more basic tension between neo-liberalism and this form of radical democracy. Having presented Marxism as a regime of production, rather than a critique of domination, he then presents this defence of Afrikaner minority rights as the radical alternative to capitalism. But there is no suggestion that the achievement of such rights would limit capitalism in any way except that of creating an ethic which did not favour conspicuous (or 'unlimited') consumption. Far from being a radical or democratic alternative to capitalism, this is only intelligible as any kind of alternative insofar as it is limited to a minority - whether in South Africa or globally - which is able to compete successfully within capitalism.

At the same time, the local and particularistic character of this alternative leaves little room for acting together with other South Africans on the basis of shared principles and analyses. It is as if this possibility has ended with apartheid. In this context, the postmodernist project abandons the arguments made by Breytenbach, Degenaar, du Toit and others, that Afrikaners would have to earn the respect of their fellow South Africans by standing with them, as Afrikaners, in defence of common values. Indeed, postmodernism has not so much abandoned the arguments of the Afrikaner critics of apartheid as made them unintelligible. For those critics assumed that there was a collective alternative to the ideology of the ruling party, within which Afrikaans language and culture could be renewed and

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[68] Goosen, 'Die Postmoderne Universiteit,' p. 30.

[69] Danie Goosen, '"Wat Staan Ons te Dinke": Enkele Notas rondom die Republikeinse Gedagte,' http://www.praag.org/opstelle3.htm. The essay is due to appear in Fragmente 6 (forthcoming, September 2000). No page references are yet available.

[70] Goosen refers both to Afrikaners and to 'the Afrikaans world'. The context suggests that he often has in mind Afrikaans-speakers regardless of race. If this is so, he seems - quite unrealistically - to expect them all to draw on the 'symbols and myths' of white Afrikaner history.

developed. In contrast, postmodernism has equated the project of constructing such an alternative with totalitarianism. Ironically, it has come to strengthen the assumption that the inequitable social order required by global capitalism in South Africa is the only way in which South Africans can collectively transform their society.

In some ways, post-apartheid postmodernism can be seen as a re-working of the sestiger project of extending their own freedom of creative expression, on the assumption that this would lead to the extension of freedom for all. The politics of the sestigers required a historical blindness to racial power and privilege, which made them vulnerable to Breytenbach's charge that their literary attacks were 'so much grist to the mill of apartheid', made to 'shock and excite the attention of a tribe', not to overthrow its rule.[71] Postmodernism has helped to sustain a similar blindness to class domination and inequality in the context of the new South Africa. The difference, however, is that postmodernists have consciously chosen their cultural and political limits, and chosen to make a virtue of them.

Breytenbach's Ambivalent Defence of Afrikaans

The new politics of Afrikaans has not been dominated by any single individual. But Breyten Breytenbach has been its most celebrated figure, and among the most prominent in defining its shifting terrain. His own position has shifted in the process, from that of hostility or indifference to the defence of Afrikaans under apartheid, to a vigorous defence of Afrikaans today. In 1993, before the issue was widely discussed, he called on Afrikaners 'not to be ashamed of fighting for Afrikaans'.[72] In a 1997 interview, he spoke of his 'renewed passion for the Afrikaans language', adding that its 'official position' was under pressure: 'I think the present government would like nothing more than for the people with the obnoxious tongue to disappear'.[73] Since the parliamentary debate of March 1999, he has been central to the growing momentum of this project.

Breytenbach's positions have shifted in the 1990s, but not towards postmodernism. Among regular contributors to Fragmente, Breytenbach is the only one who has been openly sceptical - even scornful - about the postmodernist project. 'We live in futile times,' he writes of a visit to the new South Africa, 'where the Romantic impulse in gaudy theoretical garb (and a moralist stance), now ever more smothered in the garbage of "postmodernism" and "deconstruction", reigns supreme over Nomansland ... The fashionable discourse of mind-numbing, nit-picking academics sully the clear waters of saying and singing and painting'.[74] His most recent collection of poems includes a scornful 'Selfportret van 'n Poes-modernis' who 'tried to do his bit against Apart-hate' but acknowledges that it 'was surely not enough'.[75]

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[71] Breytenbach, End Papers, pp. 58-9; cf. Chapter Eight above.

[72] Die Burger (second editorial), 23 July 1993.

[73] Sunday Independent, 27 April 1997.

[74] Breytenbach, Dog Heart, p. 117.

[75] Breytenbach, Papierblom, p. 76. Elsewhere he is more ambiguous: attempting a postmodernist 'translation' of a Chinese fable, with some sympathy (Woordwerk, pp. 176-7); or making a passing reference to the characteristics of 'our postmodernist environment' in which 'shadows

Breytenbach is not unique in his distance from postmodernism. Insofar as his current role is defined by his philosophical convictions, it is made unique by his having come to the defence of Afrikaans not from a background of pluralist reformism, but from a background of revolutionary politics.

It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Breytenbach occupies two distinct roles in this context that are ambiguous, and even contradictory. In his most conspicuously public role, Breytenbach has identified himself with arguments which quite uncritically assume the framework of global capitalism and liberal constitutionalism, and turn a blind eye to the inequalities created by apartheid and now perpetuated by a non-racial capitalist order. The open letter to Mbeki - signed by him and 23 others - is the most extreme example of this. Its authors announce their commitment to making South Africa 'a player to reckon with in the global economy of the new century'. They call for minority groups to be given 'a right to have a fair share of the tax which they pay allocated to their own institutions' - as if the wealth on which Afrikaners are taxed was a badge of merit rather than the product of massive inequality, sustained by brutal coercion. Their claim that 'the Afrikaner will simply bleed to death' without the recognition of minority rights could hardly be more mistaken in its assessment of who the real victims of the negotiated settlement have been.[76]

On the basis of such a text, it might seem as if Breytenbach has simply turned his back on his earlier positions. This is surely the interpretation given to his current politics by those who describe him as part of a 'new right'.[77] But at the same time, Breytenbach has also taken on a second, somewhat different role within the politics of Afrikaans: not so much publicising issues and causes, but reflecting on their philosophical bases. While his public activities rest on a fairly conventional - even conservative - model of capitalist development, his more reflective writings are sharply critical of this conventional wisdom, and develop a very different conception of human freedom.

Thus, where the open letter to Mbeki treats development in narrowly economic terms - insisting on the signatories' commitment to 'prosperity' - Breytenbach argues elsewhere, in direct conflict with the open letter's perspective, that 'humankind strives for more than the satisfaction of urges and desires ... They want justice.'[78] Where the open letter treats globalisation as a benign force to which the South African polity and economy must conform - or even as a kind of trump card, which can be used to force the ANC to concede to Afrikaner demands in order to ensure that their 'skills and capital' are not lost through emigration - elsewhere Breytenbach describes globalisation as 'no more than a code name for American imperialism'.[79] Where the open letter equates freedom with the 'winning recipes' of the 'winning countries' within the contest of global capitalism, elsewhere Breytenbach develops an

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are replaced by phantoms and the deep stain of not-being by the fleeting imagery of a continuum' ('Andersheid en Andersmaak,' p. 33).

[76] Barnard et al, 'Pres Mbeki, Luister Asb na Ons,' pp. 24-5.

[77] E.g., 'Taalstryders op KKNK Erg Gekritiseer,' Die Burger, 1 April 2000.

[78] Breytenbach, 'Aantekeninge van 'n Middelwêreld,' Fragmente 1 (1998), p. 28.

[79] Breyten Breytenbach, 'Brief oor die Kannaland-Projek,' Fragmente 5 (2000), p. 9.

account of the Pax Americana centralising global power under the guise of freedom.[80]

In these more reflective writings, Breytenbach's defence of Afrikaans draws on and develops themes which had long been present in his thought, and in the dialectical tradition in South Africa. The premise of these writings is not the liberal defence of individual rights, but a conception of human autonomy as the outcome of a social process in which the self develops and changes through exchange and argument with others. It is only within this dialectical conception of human autonomy that Breytenbach's account of language and his critique of the assumptions of language policy in the new South Africa can be justified. At the same time, Breytenbach's conception of dialectic is re-worked through a particular - and selective - account of the place of language in human experience.

This account of language is first developed in a discussion of his own political goals: 'the only abstraction I'm interested in struggling for is a community of understanding'. The basis of this kind of community is a shared language, for 'language is not just a tool, it is perhaps the closest we can come to a communal "soul"'. The defence of Afrikaans, in this context, is not the basis for exclusion and nationalism, he argues, but for 'the dialectic between the "own" and the larger togetherness'; 'a process of becoming other which is illuminated, step by step, by an awareness of differences'.[81]

In a remarkable imagining of a 'middle world' occupied by the 'uncitizens' of the contemporary global village, he returns to this theme. A defining feature of that middle world, he holds, is a specific relationship to language: a resistance to the centralising powers' attempt 'to calcify language, to make it "official", to put it in the place of memory, to make it an exclusive means of "communication and record" - that is to say, order and authority - and to suppress questioning and the creativity of uncertainty.'[82]

In a later article, Breytenbach argues that the mother-tongue provides the 'conceptual forming through which we experience life, and thus ourselves', and for that reason 'any impairment or obstruction of the full use of your mother-tongue is a violation of that human right which ensures that you may be a full and useful citizen, even and especially in a multi-lingual society'. The effect of government language policy is to 'narrow the functions of language' to those of communication and manipulation. In this process, language loses its capacities for questioning and creating, remembering and imagining. Above all, for the Afrikaner, 'language is the thread of self-knowledge'.[83] In this argument, language is essential to a freedom which extends beyond the formal rights of liberal capitalism.

In short, Breytenbach's defence of Afrikaans is made in two voices. In his role as publicist, his call for minority rights is premised on the existing capitalist order, and disparages attempts to mitigate its inequalities.[84] In his role as thinker, he treats contemporary capitalism

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[80] Breytenbach, 'Aantekeninge van 'n Middelwêreld,' p. 27.

[81] Breytenbach, Dog Heart, pp. 183, 186.

[82] Breytenbach, 'Aantekeninge van 'n Middelwêreld,' p. 28.

[83] Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak, oftewel die Afrikaner as Afrikaan,' Fragmente 4 (1999), p. 28, 31, 30.

[84] E.g., 'There is more and better legislation to protect the rights of trade union members than the rights of minorities' (Barnard et al, 'Pres Mbeki, Luister Asb na Ons,' p. 24). Breytenbach's most

as a fundamental constraint on human culture, and seeks to encourage the subversive force of language as a source of self-knowledge. For these two voices to be reconciled, it is necessary for the place of language to be narrowly - even if richly - conceived.

Breytenbach's account of language consistently focuses on its role in self-knowledge, on its activation of the 'soul' of the community. It is an account of language which requires no firm distinction between speaking to yourself or to others. In this respect, it may resemble the poet's experience of language. But it blurs that distinction, rather than overcoming it by uniting its poles in an account of the dialectical interaction of self and other. For that interaction takes place in historical contexts of inequality, in which unequal access to wealth and power decide whose words will be made to count. Of all areas of culture, the spoken word is perhaps least vulnerable to material inequality. It costs nothing to speak Afrikaans, and all who speak the language are equally able to do so. But that equality conceals many other inequalities; that unity hides deep divisions.

Breytenbach's writings on South Africa under an ANC government since 1994 have a similar ambivalence, balancing elements of critique from the left and from the right: on the one hand, increasing inequality, the entrenchment of a new elite, the spread of a culture of consumerism; on the other, rising crime, declining standards, affirmative action.[85] In this respect, Breytenbach's role within the contemporary politics of Afrikaans is reminiscent of his role in the liberation movement in the days of Okhela. Just as his political opponents in the liberation movement welcomed a prominent Afrikaner poet willing to condemn apartheid, so his Afrikaner political opponents welcome a former political prisoner willing to condemn the ANC. It is a small consolation to know that this time his comrades cannot betray him to the security police. The price he pays for this consolation is that he cannot separate himself from their politics.

Race, Class and Language in the New South Africa

The new politics of Afrikaans shares the basic assumption of the politics of the new South Africa: that the legacy of apartheid can be overcome on the basis of capitalism. Both sides of the controversy among Afrikaners on whether it is necessary to campaign actively in defence of Afrikaans share this assumption. In the context of their exchanges it is seldom, if ever, critically examined. Instead, the two sides often appear to compete to see who can embody this assumption more fully.

Afrikaners opposed to actively campaigning for Afrikaans have argued that Afrikaans received special privileges under apartheid, and under white governments before apartheid. Public funds were used to develop Afrikaans schools and universities, provide a market for

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explicit disavowal of revolutionary politics is made in the context of discussing the role of Afrikaners in the new South Africa. In his foreword to Slabbert's Afrikaner Afrikaan, he concedes that 'from the course of events during the previous ten years ... it is clear that van Zyl's pragmatic approach was better equipped to interpret the situation than my own heights of utopia and depths of pessimism'. On this account, such pragmatism appealed to the 'better instincts' of those in authority, prevented 'chaos and collapse' and provided the required guarantees to 'the economic sector' - by which is meant, presumably, the small minority who own the country's wealth - as 'stabilisers of everyday life' (pp. viii-ix).

[85] E.g., Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,' pp. 36-7.

prescribed books, and ensure that the major academic disciplines developed a modern technical vocabulary in Afrikaans. Afrikaans was used as an official language in courts, the public service and the like while other indigenous languages were not. In this context, to defend the existing status of Afrikaans is to defend its continued preference over the indigenous languages spoken by the majority of black South Africans. It is to preserve the legacy of apartheid and racial domination while disowning that legacy at the same time. Those who are opposed to the domination of English, without wishing to campaign for Afrikaans, have argued that the issue of language rights must either be taken up on behalf of all ten South African languages, apart from English, or not be taken up at all. They hold that Afrikaans can flourish as a literary language, and as a means of everyday communication, for as long as individuals express themselves in it, and for as long as the state does not actively prevent them from doing so.

Those arguing for an active defence of Afrikaans have replied that, by campaigning for Afrikaans and against the domination of English, Afrikaners are defending the rights of the majority of South Africans, whose mother-tongue is not English, to speak their own language, be educated in it, and develop its capacities. They have argued also that, if Afrikaners were to refuse to stand up for their own rights, they would in effect be weakening a democratic culture in the new South Africa, in which all South Africans should be enabled to stand up for rights previously denied. Even a figure such as Z.B. du Toit - former editor of the Conservative Party newspaper, now deputy-editor of Rapport, and the author of a book-length plea for a new Afrikaner politics - treats the end of apartheid as a step forward for the Afrikaner, who is now 'rid of the albatross of an illegitimate white minority regime', and argues for a nationalism which he describes variously as 'post-modern' and 'anti-conservative', and compares to other causes which are 'centre-left' or 'further left'.[86]

Those defending Afrikaans are almost certainly right to argue that its downgrading, and the elevation of English to the de facto language of power, do not benefit the majority of South Africans. This policy does not reverse the legacy of apartheid, and in certain respects perpetuates it. Nor is it in keeping with the tradition of the liberation movement.[87] But this policy does, however, make possible more rapid and effective change in the racial composition of the privileged minority within the inequalities of South Africa after apartheid. For the downgrading of Afrikaans makes it easier for members of the new black elite to gain access to positions in economy and society from which they were previously barred on grounds of race. It creates openings - in public life, state media, education and elsewhere - which would not otherwise be available for members of this elite, who are far more likely to be fluent in English both for historical reasons and for reasons of their location in the global economy.[88]

Put differently, if a substantial number of black people are to be included within the privileged minority, this will take place by strengthening the globalising and homogenising tendencies of capitalism in South Africa and weakening its local particularities, its roots in pre-

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[86] Z.B. du Toit, Die Nuwe Toekoms: 'n Perspektief op die Afrikaner by die Eeuwisseling (Pretoria, J.P. van der Walt, 1999), pp. 356, 332-3.

[87] The Freedom Charter adopted by the ANC in 1955 held that 'all people shall have equal rights to use their own language'(Suttner and Cronin, Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter, p. 263).

[88] A crucial economic strength of the new black elite is their attractiveness as local partners for foreign investment, especially in areas dependent on state licensing (e.g., cellphones), privatisation of state assets (tourism, mining) and politically sensitive areas such as the media.

capitalist affiliations of kinship, culture and language. If national unity is to be achieved on a capitalist basis, then at an ideological level, English is the language of unity, the language in which a new national elite can come together. At a material level also, English - or more specifically, the English of CNN, Microsoft and Walt Disney - is the language of economic globalisation and a concomitant cultural homogenisation. The strength of Afrikaans - as Breytenbach and others have reminded us - lies precisely in its retention of its pre-capitalist roots, its resistance to modernisation.[89]

The majority of South Africans do not benefit directly from the elevation of English into de facto sole official language. But this does not mean that they have common cause with the new politics of Afrikaans. For they experience their marginalisation and exclusion in the new South Africa in a very different way from Afrikaners. They are excluded and marginalised not as cultural minorities, but as propertyless people, and people without access to the networks of influence, patronage and state power which would enable them to share in the privileges of the propertied. For as long as the issue of language in the new South Africa is centrally concerned with the racial composition of the privileged minority, within a social order which consigns the majority to poverty and powerlessness, there is no conceivable reason why that majority would opt to support a language policy which favours their former apartheid masters. And the defence of Afrikaans is currently conducted in such a way as to emphasise these differences, and ensure that common ground will not be found with the propertyless majority.[90]

Sometimes this is the result of a particular bias towards questions of consciousness - rather than the material conditions in which consciousness is formed - which characterises the dialectical tradition in South Africa as a whole. When Breytenbach argues, for example, that 'a conscious life is all we have at our disposal to undermine death', there is no need to dispute his sense that conscious thought and enquiry are essential conditions for a fully human life.[91] But only a moment's reflection is needed in order to see that conscious thought and enquiry are not the only conditions for human life. But often, rather than being blind to the material context of their own arguments, Afrikaners are willing to invoke their own relatively privileged place within South African capitalism as the basis for recognition of their cultural rights - most clearly in the open letter to Thabo Mbeki of November 1999, discussed in the previous section.

The dependence of this argument on the capitalist model of development can very easily be turned against its conclusion that the state should give greater recognition to the rights of Afrikaans. Gerwel has argued, for example, that the relative strength of the Afrikaner capitalist class is a reason to expect it to support initiatives which will enable Afrikaans to

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[89] Cf. Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,' pp. 42-4. Breytenbach's frequent use of metaphors of nomadism and polytheism often reinforce this sense of Afrikaans - and perhaps language and culture more broadly - as properly pre-capitalist.

[90] There is an significant qualification to this argument which I am leaving aside here: that the non-Afrikaner majority are also marginalised on the basis of not having highly-rewarded business and technical skills, which are usually, but not always, the preserve of the propertied. For this reason, projects such as the proposed Afrikaans university at Oudtshoorn could improve the prospects of a small number of Afrikaans-speaking coloureds

[91] Breytenbach, 'Andersheid en Andersmaak,' p. 33.

flourish in the new South Africa.[92] The most vigorous answer to the authors of the open letter came from a group of 34 'highly influential Afrikaner business leaders' - led by Willie Esterhuyse - who presented Thabo Mbeki with a declaration of their 'hope and trust'. According to this declaration, Mbeki has established a 'sound basis' for a 'mutually advantageous relationship between the state, business, organised labour and society'.[93] Afrikaner capitalists have flourished in the new South Africa, with their share of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange growing from 24% in 1996 to 35% in 2000. Pro-capitalist language campaigners have been outflanked by real capitalists.

To the extent that the new politics of Afrikaans has recognised the impact of capitalism, it has done so in the context of the cultural homogenisation brought about by globalisation. The defenders of Afrikaans understand that the globalising ethic considers human activity valuable to the extent to which it produces profit, therefore considers culture valuable insofar as it consists of commodities, and language insofar as it facilitates the efficient production and circulation of commodities, and has very limited need for Afrikaans on either count.[94] But they are at the same time consistently blind to the class forces of globalisation within South Africa, and within the Afrikaner community itself.

But the weakness of any campaign for Afrikaans in the new South Africa does not mean that its Afrikaner critics are on any firmer ground. For there remains a fundamental dilemma which faces Afrikaners, or any other South Africans, who are committed both to maintaining and developing Afrikaans and also to the cause of human liberation, if this is understood as more than formal political rights. This dilemma exists whether they struggle for language and minority rights to be recognised more fully by the state, or do not. In either event, in turning towards the natural constituency for Afrikaans - or for language or minority rights which will benefit Afrikaans in the first place - they come to depend on people who have a strong material interest in defending the fruits of oppression and exploitation, even if they no longer defend apartheid itself, and opposing any struggle for liberation which goes beyond formal equality to ensure that all South Africans can participate equally in the making of their future.

In this context, those defending Afrikaans will find it increasingly difficult to do so on the basis of non-racial capitalism. It is likely that many will turn against non-racialism, even if they cannot seek a return to racial domination. Even if they should succeed in gaining certain

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[92] Jan-Jan Joubert, 'Afrikaanse Kapitaal kan Taal laat Gedy,' Rapport, 10 October 1999; cf. Jakes Gerwel, 'Dis Tog Beter as Roodt se Ligsinnigheid,' Rapport, 9 April 2000; Gerwel, 'Volkskritiek in die Beste Sin,' Insig, May 2000, pp. 66-7.

[93] 'Afrikaans Business Boost for Mbeki,' Sunday Times, 20 February 2000; on Esterhuyse, cf. Jakob Regop, 'Gaan Willie Thabo se Jakes Wees,' Die Burger, 28 July 1999.

[94] On globalisation, cf. 'Redaksioneel,' Fragmente 1 (1998), pp. 3-5; Johann Rossouw, 'Wat Presies Bedreig Afrikaans? Notas oor die Dood in die Parogiale Pot,' Fragmente 1 (1998), pp. 108-9; Breyten Breytenbach, 'Brief oor die "Kannaland-Projek",' Fragmente 5 (2000), p. 9. In each case, the issue is discussed in passing, and as if the process of globalisation were located somewhere outside of the Afrikaner community, or even South Africa. The most extensive defence of Afrikaans in the new South Africa - Z.B. du Toit's Nuwe Toekoms - lacks any such critical perspective on globalisation, and identifies itself with the 'victory of liberal democratic politics and market-directed economics', and even such tokens of the global power of the capitalist West as NATO's bombing of the former Yugoslavia in 1999 (pp. 16, 19, 48 et passim).

concessions on this basis, there will be a considerable price to pay for such gains. Political activism aimed at securing airport announcements or electricity accounts in Afrikaans is perhaps to be preferable to political apathy and withdrawal. But such activism will leave its mark on political ideas. It will leave little room for reflection on its own fundamental assumptions, of the kind which has characterised the dialectical tradition in South Africa over the past 150 years. To the extent that the new politics of Afrikaans require the largely uncritical acceptance of capitalism and its inequalities, it will abandon crucial parts of the legacy of Afrikaner dissent in South Africa, and leave all South Africans the poorer.

It is very difficult to imagine that the new politics of Afrikaans will be conducted on any basis except that of uncritical acceptance of capitalism. But the dialectical tradition has proved to be resilient, and it might have further life in it yet. It is possible that some at least of those who claim the legacy of Afrikaner dissent should understand that it is not non-racialism, but the capitalist form of non-racialism in the new South Africa, which threatens the principles they seek to uphold. The situation of Afrikaners committed to upholding their language and to human liberation differs from that of the majority of South Africans only in that they encounter the defects of our current 'liberation' earlier, and in a more explicitly cultural and linguistic form. But their dilemma will turn out to be the dilemma faced by us all.

Dialectical thought has flourished always in the margins and interstices of society. It seeks to follow the movement of contradictions while the major social institutions are designed to resolve or obscure them. This mode of thought seeks out the hidden cracks in prevailing ideas and conjunctures, anticipates the unexpected, imagines a future vastly different from the present, and examines the potentialities of the present to seek a basis for its realisation. The dialectical tradition in South Africa has been no different from this. But the margins and interstices of South African political and intellectual life are under unprecedented pressure today, as ideas and activities are brought into line with the needs of the market. Dialectical thinking is hardly explained or defended, and its vocabulary is easily appropriated by institutions concerned with stabilising and harmonising contradictory interests and outlooks.[95]

And yet the dominance of the market will create new margins and interstices, in South Africa and globally. The next significant reconfiguration of South African intellectual life will surely take place when increasing numbers of black South African graduates - the supposed heirs of the new South Africa - discover that the career paths promised by the market do not materialise. The political and philosophical directions which will be explored in such a context will depend largely on the resources that are available. We can only speculate about the prospect of a political practice in which increasing numbers of the oppressed and exploited are enabled to locate their condition within dialectical analysis, test and develop that analysis on the basis of their experience, and guide their collective action through it. When that moment comes, it is my hope that this study will have a modest contribution to make towards these tasks.

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[95] E.g. Tito Mboweni, 'Nedlac Needs a Dialectical Approach,' Cape Times 3 June 1996.

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