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The Concept of the Political in
Contemporary Western and Non-Western Political Thought

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The concept of the political in contemporary Western and non-Western political thought [1]

Noël K. O'Sullivan [2]

ABSTRACT:

In 1959, Reinhardt Koselleck published Critique and Crisis, in which he argued that the dominant tendency of political theory since the Enlightenment has been to subsume the political under the moral. Since then, other thinkers have echoed Koselleck's contention, and have described recent liberal political theory in particular as a 'flight from the political' (Freeden, 2005, 2008).[3] In this situation, one of the main challenges confronting contemporary Western political theory is to end the flight from the political by clarifying what the concept of the political involves. But how is this to be done?

The first step is to see what guidance can be got from five of the most notable recent responses to this situation, each of which would be defended with varying degrees of success as offering a genuinely political theory. One has been made by neo-Kantian liberal thinkers whose concept of the political is best represented by the work of Rawls. The second has been made by defenders of a very different form of neo-Kantianism generally called discourse theory and best represented by Jürgen Habermas. The third may be described as the agonal theory of the political, represented here by the work of Chantal Mouffe. The fourth response is the postmodern concept of the political, of which I shall take the late Richard Rorty as the main representative. Finally, there is the pragmatic, or modus vivendi, concept of the political represented by the thought of John Gray.

After examining how these five influential schools of thought have attempted to theorize the political, I will turn to a small group of contemporary political theorists – notably, Michael Freeden at Oxford, Raymond Geuss and John Dunn at Cambridge, and Margaret Canovan, formerly of Keele University - whom I will suggest have been more successful than the representatives of the five schools just mentioned in pointing out the manner in which the future study of the political should proceed. In the final part of the paper I will consider, albeit briefly, how the concept of the political has been theorized in non-Western thought.

*Keywords: Western, Non-Western, political thought, Koselleck, contemporary
       political theorists*

I. THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

One of the most distinguished scholars from Heidelberg University is Reinhardt Koselleck (1923-2006).[4] In 1959, Koselleck published *Critique and Crisis*, in which

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[1] I am grateful to Catherine Marshall and Stéphane Guy, the editors of **The Victorian Legacy in Political Thought** (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2014) for permission to use some of the material in a chapter called 'Beyond the Victorian legacy' which I contributed to their book.

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[3] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 113. See also Freeden's essay 'Thinking politically and thinking ideologically' in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 13 no. 1, Feb. 2008, pp. 1-10. Kosellec's own position may be found in Koselleck, R. (1988), *Critique and Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press), pp. 11-12.

[4] The importance of Koselleck's work on modern history has been belatedly acknowledged in a recent book by Niklas Olsen that has done much to extricate Koselleck from the shadow of his mentor, Carl Schmitt. Olsen, N. (2012), *History in the Plural* (Berghahn Books).

he made what many would still regard as an extraordinary claim. This was that the modern Western world has almost completely lacked any serious political thought ever since the age of Hobbes and Absolutism. The reason, Koselleck maintained, is that what is generally regarded as political theory has been, in reality, a flight from the political characterized, more precisely, as a tendency *to subsume the political under the moral* (Kosellek, 1988). The result has been a body of liberal democratic theorizing which is gravely impoverished by its inability to understand the autonomy of the political – its irreducibility, that is, to the moral – and which therefore, Koselleck maintained, leaves the door open to extremist movements of the totalitarian kind.

Since Koselleck's book appeared, other thinkers have echoed his thesis, although from somewhat different standpoints. At Cambridge, for example, Raymond Geuss recently argued (in *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 2008) that the dominant tendency of contemporary liberal political theory has been to treat political philosophy as a branch of applied ethics, which means treating politics as a sphere for applying independently constructed moral rules or principles.[5] At Oxford, Michael Freeden also echoed Koselleck's critique of modern political thought when he recently described it as a 'flight from the political'.[6] Since many other scholars have adopted a similar critical attitude towards the moralistic approach to the political, I think that one of the main challenges confronting contemporary Western political theory is to end the flight from the political by clarifying what a genuine study of politics entails.[7] But how is this to be done?

The initial step is to consider the five most notable attempts to rectify this situation that have been made during the past few decades by thinkers who would all claim to be offering, with varying degrees of success, a genuinely political theory. The first is the response of neo-Kantian liberal thinkers best represented by the later work of John Rawls. A second response involves a different version of neo-Kantianism best exemplified by the discourse theory of Jürgen Habermas. The third response is the agonal theory of the political originally developed in particular by Koselleck's mentor Carl Schmitt, but which I will consider here in the revised and more moderate form found in the work of Chantal Mouffe. The fourth is the postmodern response, of which I shall take the late Richard Rorty as the main representative. Finally, I will consider the pragmatic (or *modus vivendi*) response represented by John Gray.

After examining these five attempts to theorize the political, I will turn in the final part of the paper to a small group of contemporary British political theorists – notably, Michael Freeden at Oxford, Raymond Geuss and John Dunn at Cambridge, and Margaret Canovan, formerly of Keele University – whom I will suggest have been more successful than the five schools of thought just mentioned in pointing out the direction in which future work on the concept of the political should proceed. I will also refer in the same connection to the work of Claude Lefort in France.

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[5] Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP), pp. 6-7.

[6] See footnote 1, above.

[7] See for example Canovan, M. (1996), *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar); Dunn, J. (1960), *Interpreting Political Responsibility* (Cambridge: CUP: Cambridge); Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP); Williams, B. (2005), 'Realism and moralism in political theory, in *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton: Princeton UP); Newey, G. (2001), *After Politics: The Rejection of Politics in Contemporary Liberal Philosoph*y (Basingstoke: Palgrave); Rawls, J. (1993), *Political Liberalism* (NY: Columbia UP).

1. THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL IN NEO-KANTIAN INDIVIDUALIST THOUGHT: THE POLITICAL AS THE QUEST FOR A RATIONAL CONSENSUS BASED ON UNIVERSALLY VALID PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE

Perhaps the most influential attempt to theorize the concept of the political in recent decades has been inspired, in liberal political thought at least, by neo-Kantian theory. What unites neo-Kantian theorists is the conviction that a just society must secure individual rights in a social order from which power and serious conflict have been eliminated by a rational consensus grounded on universally valid moral principles. It is this identification of the political with universally valid moral rules that has led even thinkers sympathetic to liberal theory, such as Bernard Williams, to accuse neo-Kantian theorists of, in particular, a tendency to 'make[s] the moral prior to the political' (Williams, 2005).[8]

Interestingly, the force of this charge has been acknowledged by John Rawls, the best known neo-Kantian theorist, in connection with what may be regarded as the classic formulation of the individualist form of neo-Kantian theory he provided in his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*.[9] Although the immediate response to that book was a widespread tendency to welcome it as a landmark in the rebirth of post Second World War political philosophy, critics rapidly pointed out that at least three considerations made it impossible for Rawls to distinguish clearly between the moral and the political. The first was his adoption of a homogeneous conception of individuality, by which all particularity is stripped away from those placed behind the veil of ignorance. As Rawls himself put it, 'To begin with, it is clear that since the differences among parties are unknown to them, and everyone is equally rational and similarly situated, each is convinced by the same arguments. *Therefore, we can view the choice in the original position from the standpoint of one person selected at random*'.[10] The result of this procedure is that the principal precondition for the existence of the political, which is the simple fact that human beings are different from each other, is automatically eliminated at the very outset of Rawls' thought.

The second source of Rawls' inability to theorize the political was his belief that reason can provide an Archimedean point from which to establish an objective, unitary conception of justice. In fact, the political problem in the modern world, as Hobbes recognized long ago, is constituted precisely by the inability of reason to ground a consensus of the kind Rawls desiderates: moral, cultural, religious, ethnic and sexual diversity are all too deep-seated for reason to provide a definitive, incontestable conception of justice of the kind he seeks.

The third source of Rawls' inability to theorize the political was his conviction that the main social problem is that of distribution, with the corresponding assumption that when this is solved, no important sources of conflict remain. In making this assumption Rawls merely reflects the social democratic optimism which was characteristic of the early post war period. More recent political developments, however, have led to criticism of the distributivist ideal on several grounds. Misgivings have arisen, for example, about the apparent indifference of theorists of social justice about how the wealth to be distributed was to be produced in the first place; about the growth of a dependency culture fostered by state welfare provision; about inflationary government deficit spending designed to win elections through

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[8]Williams, B. (2005) *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 2.

[9] Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[10] I Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 139. Italics added.

offers of 'free' goods and temporary boosting of employment figures; and about the intrinsic instability of the 'middle way' ideal with which distributivist theorizing was frequently associated on the ground that it seemed in practice to involve a constant increase in central planning of the economy. These pragmatic difficulties associated with the distributivist conception of social justice favoured by Rawls may, however, be ignored in the present context since the relevant point, as was just noted, is that Rawls himself acknowledged his philosophical failure to theorize the political adequately in *A Theory of Justice* and set out to remedy this defect by publishing another book, *Political Liberalism* (1993),[11] of which the title itself indicates that his aim was to go beyond a moralistic standpoint.

Political Liberalism attempted to remedy the limitations of Rawls's earlier moralism by abandoning his earlier strategy for discovering universal principles of justice by placing citizens behind a 'veil of ignorance'. Instead, Rawls now invoked the concept of an overlapping consensus that was intended to incorporate moral and political diversity into his philosophy. In other words, the principles of justice were no longer identified as timeless moral truths discerned in a condition of ignorance about our actual identity but were linked instead to historically based principles of right said to be implicit in the overlapping consensus about the political good found in any actual society, to the extent that it is well-ordered. It was immediately pointed out by critics like John Gray, however, that Rawls' attempt to avoid assimilating the political to the moral had retained the characteristic neo-Kantian reduction of the political to rule-following, thereby assimilating it to a quasi-legalistic process. As Gray put it, in Rawls' supposedly 'political' liberalism, justice is thought of as 'a matter, not for political decision, but for legal adjudication' (Gray, 2000).[12] This, however, was not the only difficulty.

No less problematic was Rawls' attempt to purge the public realm of any manifestations of pluralism of which he morally disapproved. As Rawls himself put it, his concern was not with 'pluralism as such', which might be described (he adds in a significant phrase) as an 'unfortunate condition of human life', but only with 'reasonable pluralism.'[13] This highly 'sanitized' approach to the political, to use Patrick Neal's apt phrase, is evident above all in Rawls' identification of the principal modern Western political problem as one which arises from disputes about the good life. As Neal remarks, this interpretation of the pluralist predicament treats politics as if it were 'analogous to a philosophical debate amongst friends'[14] in which conflict over anything as vulgar as wealth, power, ethnicity, greed or vainglory is eliminated.[15]

Finally, Rawls failed to justify his assumption that individuals will place political considerations relating to justice above their personal comprehensive conceptions of the good. Perhaps they would, but as Hobbes noted, it is foolish to rely on this since to do so requires 'a generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuers of Wealth, Command or sensual Pleasure; which are the greatest part of Mankind.'[16]

The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that even the most impressive post-war theorist of liberalism has not escaped the tendency to subordinate the political to the moral

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[11] Rawls, J. (1993), *Political Liberalism* (NY: Columbia UP).
[12] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 16.
[13] Rawls, J. (1993) *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 144.
[14] Neal, P. (1993) 'Vulgar Liberalism,' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 21 No. 4, Nov. 1993, p. 635.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Hobbes, T., *Leviathan* 14:200. Quoted by Neal, P. (1993) 'Vulgar Liberalism,' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Nov., p. 636.

perspective by making politics primarily a process of implementing a rational consensus about the nature of the good society.

Rawl's neo-Kantian attempt to base liberalism on a rational consensus, then, has not answered Koselleck's charge of subordinating the political to the moral. I will turn now to the alternative version of neo-Kantian liberalism developed by Jürgen Habermas, who is the most influential representative of the discourse theory of the political.

2. THE DISCOURSE THEORY OF THE POLITICAL

I want to turn now from the individualist version of neo-Kantian liberal theory offered by Rawls to a second version of the neo-Kantian attempt to theorize the political known as the 'discourse' or 'deliberative' theory of the political.[17] The specific contention uniting different varieties of discourse theory is that legitimacy is unattainable in modern democratic states without unconstrained participation in a process of free and rational public debate. In this respect, discourse theory echoes Rousseau's concern to construct a public realm based on a General Will - a collective rational will, which is, arrived at through equal participation in public debate. In Seyla Benhabib's words, 'legitimacy in complex modern democratic societies must be thought to result from the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all matters of common concern.'[18]

The most influential representative of discourse theory is Jürgen Habermas. Habermas' starting-point is a rejection of liberal theory on the ground that it fails to recognize that the political is a medium in which something far more basic and fundamental than rights and interests is at stake. What is at stake, to be precise, is identity – or, more accurately, our identity as free and equal agents. This requires, in the first place, that political theory abandons what Habermas regards as the self-centred 'monological' view of reason associated with the individualist tradition and recognizes instead the inherently 'dialogical' character of rationality. In practice, Habermas stresses, this recognition cannot be brought about merely by solitary intellectual reflection, since that leaves monological reason intact; it only comes about through actually experiencing the communicative dimension of political life, in the course of which the social character of personal identity is established. For this experience to be undistorted, all participants must be equally well placed to appreciate the norms which govern what Habermas terms the ideal speech situation. Although these norms are implicit in all communicative situations, they are only made fully explicit in the ideal one. What characterizes this ideal situation is, above all, the fact that fellow participants achieve the mutual transparency at which communication ideally aims.

Three main problems are created by Habermas' version of discourse theory, of which the most important is perhaps Habermas' aim to provide neutral principles for political decision-making for those who have diverse conceptions of the good. These principles, which Habermas believes (as was just noted) are implicit in ordinary speech situations, are intended to guarantee the neutrality of both inputs and outcomes by eliminating special pleading by participants in the political process. What is not

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[17] See, for example, Benhabib, S. (1994) 'Deliberative rationality and models of democratic legitimacy,' *Constellations*, 1, no. 1, 26-52; Cohen, J. L. and Arato, A. (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press).

[18] Benhabib, S. (1994) 'Deliberative rationality and models of democratic legitimacy,' *Consttellations*, 1, no. 1, p. 26.

clear is why Habermas assumes that it is possible to arrive at neutral procedural limits for framing the political process in a way which is non-political. In this respect, his version of discourse theory echoes Rawls' quest for a form of 'reasonable pluralism' arrived at by purging the social order of intractable kinds of diversity. Quite simply, there is no neutral vantage point available of the kind Habermas seeks since, as Niklas Luhmann puts it, in the modern world 'The theorist of cognition himself becomes a rat in the labyrinth and must consider from which position he observes the other rats (Luhmann, 1988).'[19]

Even if this difficulty is passed over, discourse theory presents a second problem, which is that it assimilates the political process to one of rational 'will formation'. As a result, it obscures the main fact of political life, which is the existence of power, by 'internalizing' the political relationship – transforming it, that is, from an external encounter between different selves into an encounter between higher (more rational) and lower (less rational) parts of a single self.

Finally, Habermas' version of discourse theory assumes that ideal communication not only brings with it mutual transparency, but that transparency in turn brings agreement and harmony. It is not clear, however, why Habermas ignores the possibility that transparency, even if it can be achieved, might not bring conflict and hatred instead of harmony. This situation, it need hardly be said, is all too familiar when intense romantic relationships go wrong. At the specifically political level, Israel and Palestine understand each other very well, but this does not guarantee a solution of any kind to their conflict.

The problem with the discourse theory of the political, then, is that the equation of the political with the rational on which it relies fails to come to terms with the possibility of conflict inherent in social existence. To that extent, the discourse theory of the political may be seen, like the individualist version of neo-Kantian theory provided by Rawls, as a flight from the political into a moral utopia.

3. THE AGONAL CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL

The third attempt to theorize the political is provided by defenders of agonal theory, of whom the best known is Carl Schmitt. For Schmitt, the essence of the political is the existential conflict between Friend and Foe. Schmitt emphasizes, it should be added, that it is not necessary for the Foe really to exist but only that people believe they are in fact threatened by it. Hitler's use of anti-Semitic propaganda is an excellent illustration.

In the interwar era during which Schmitt initially formulated his theory, his position was plausible in two respects. On the one hand, it seemed to fit the situation of Weimar Germany, in which parliamentary institutions had failed to provide effective political integration. On the other, it provided an antidote to the tendency of liberals and socialists to favour a concept of the political within which power and conflict were viewed as transient phenomena. The concept of the political provided by Schmitt's version of agonalism is too extreme to be satisfactory, however, since it is open to the charge of oversimplification on two grounds. Very briefly, the first ground, which has been developed in depth by Niklas Luhmann, is that Schmitt's theory sought a degree of social unification which ignored the complexity of modern societies (Thornhill,

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[19] Luhmann, N. (1988) *Erkenntnis als Konstruktion* (Bern: Benteli), p. 24.

2007).[20] The second ground is that the main reason why Schmitt could not come to terms with social complexity was that his concept of the political implicitly elevated war into the ideal type of all social unity.

The extreme nature of Schmitt's version of agonalism, then, prevents him from offering a coherent concept of the political. It would be a mistake, however, to identify agonal theory exclusively with Schmitt's extreme version of it. Such a view is unsatisfactory since it ignores two more moderate versions which have sought (albeit in very different ways) to use it to defend anti-utopian forms of liberalism and democracy rather than to dismiss those ideals, as Schmitt did, as intrinsically self-destructive.

The essence of the two moderate versions of agonal theory to be considered is the claim that conflict is not only an unavoidable aspect of politics but also a positive one, since the core of the political process is a mutual struggle by diverse citizens for a secure sense of self-identity. The first moderate version is provided by the American political philosopher William Connolly, the second by the Belgian philosopher, Chantal Mouffe.

At the heart of Connolly's defence of agonalism in his book *Identity/Difference* is the assumption that identity is never given or natural, but is always constructed or factitious (Connolly, 1991).[21] Identity, that is, is forged in an endless process of self-creation. This process, however, inevitably creates differences which entail cruelty to others, and may even involve their systematic exclusion. As Connolly himself puts it, 'every form of social completion and enablement also contains subjugations and cruelties within it. Politics … is the medium through which these ambiguities can be engaged and confronted, shifted and stretched.'[22]

Politics, on this view, is an endless attempt to soften the cruelty and exclusion which are inevitable aspects of the quest for identity. Seen in this light, politics is the quasi-religious activity of atonement for sins of transgression we are forever doomed to commit without intending to. It is the activity we engage in, more precisely, when we realize that although we cannot rise above the cruelty inherent in existence, we can avoid labelling and categorizing others in a way which jeopardizes their own search for a secure personal identity. The aim of politics, in a word, is to avoid turning the enterprise of self-creation, with all the differences it entails, into an occasion for demonizing and excluding the other.

It is now possible to locate the main problem posed by the agonal theory of the political, in Connolly's version of it. This is a profound liberal guilt complex inspired, as was just noted, by a quasi-religious vision of social life as involving inescapable cruelty to others. As an account of the political, Connolly's version of agonalism accordingly fails because it subordinates the political to a quest for a morally vindicated life. What is especially problematic about his identification of the political with moral sensitivity of this kind is that it places all human beings on trial simply for being what they are, making their continued existence a matter of mutual moral sufferance in view of the cruelty that existence inevitably entails. The potentially illiberal implications of this quasi-religious account of the political are obvious, since

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[20] See Thornhill, C. (2007) 'Niklas Luhmann, Carl Schmitt and the Modern Form of the Political', in *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 10, no. 4, Nov. 2007, pp. 499-522.

[21] Connolly, W. (1991) *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (N.Y., Cornell University Press).

[22] Connolly, W. (1991) *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (N.Y., Cornell University Press), p. 94.

all human activity automatically becomes morally suspect and exposed, in principle at least, to the charge of involving the unacceptable infliction of harm and social exclusion.

I turn now to the far less moralistic version of the agonal theory of the political provided by Chantal Mouffe, who provides an eloquent summary of her own interpretation of it in the course of arguing that politics does not consist in eliminating conflict by creating a rational consensus, as neo-Kantian thinkers maintain, but aims, rather,

> at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is always concerned with the creation of an 'us' by the determination of a 'them'. The uniqueness of democratic politics does not consist in overcoming this us/them opposition -- that is impossible -- but in the different way in which it is established. The problem, more precisely, lies in finding a way of establishing the us/them discrimination which is compatible with the pluralist character of contemporary democracy in particular (Mouffe, 2000).[23]

Mouffe adds that, from the agonal perspective, the 'real meaning of liberal democratic tolerance' does not consist in merely 'condoning ideas we oppose, or being indifferent to standpoints we disagree with' but rather in 'treating those who defend them as legitimate opponents'.[24]

In order to be brief, I will mention only the two major problems created by Mouffe's agonal concept of the political. One is the danger of excessive optimism about the possibility of accommodating deep conflict within an agonal framework. Mouffe can only cope with this problem by placing her faith in letting a thousand flowers bloom, while hoping that they won't choke each other in the process. The other problem is that the degree of participatory enthusiasm required by agonal politics is unlikely to be forthcoming in modern Western societies in which most individuals prefer to pursue private interests rather than engage in agonal debate in the political arena.

4. THE POSTMODERN CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL

The postmodern interpretation of the political is primarily shaped by the rejection of what Lyotard termed 'metanarratives' - of all attempts, that is, to legitimate social and political relationships by presenting them as natural, rationally grounded or inevitable. The reverse side of this deconstructive scepticism is a sense of the contingency of all identity and all social and political relationships which is shared by agonal theorists like Connolly, as already noted. In the case of postmodern thinkers, however, the impression has often arisen that they are ultimately inspired by a purely negative ideal of deconstruction that regards all social relations as merely masks for power and domination. It is to the credit of the American philosopher, Richard Rorty that he sought to combine sympathy for the anti-rationalist and anti-foundationalist aspects of postmodern philosophy with a more positive formulation of the political implications of postmodern philosophy by focusing on what he regards as the two most fundamental features of the political for postmodern theory.

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[23]Mouffe, C. (2000) 'Towards an agonal democracy', in O'Sullivan, N. ed., *Political Theory in Transition* (London: Routledge), p. 126.

[24] Mouffe, C. (2000) 'Towards an agonal democracy', in O'Sullivan, N. ed., *Political Theory in Transition* (London: Routledge), p. 126.

In our postmetaphysical age, Rorty maintains, the political must be detached from earlier attempts to ground it in an objective reality and regrounded instead on the sense of contingency which is now inescapable. The appropriate response to this sense of contingency is not to fear it, on the mistaken assumption that it entails irrationalism and relativism, but to embrace it positively. In order to do that, however, those who have arrived at a sense of contingency must view their personal identity with a sense of irony. More precisely, the liberal ironist Rorty admires is one who is 'sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that [his or her] central beliefs and desires refer back to [an essence] beyond the reach of time and chance (Rorty, 1989).[25] For such citizens, irony is the secret of freedom, which consists precisely in the recognition and acceptance of contingency.[26] And their postmodern concept of the political is most appropriately embodied in a form of regime which Rorty terms a liberal utopia. In the public realm, this is marked by a ceaseless attempt to achieve an ever more inclusive ideal of solidarity, rather than to implement some supposedly independently grounded conception of the good society. In the private realm it is marked by an endless quest for self-perfection which is always regarded, however, ironically. So far as the public realm is concerned, the ideal of solidarity which provides the content of the postmodern concept of the political is marked by the absence of any rational foundation. So far as it is possible to speak of a foundation for it, this is provided by imagination, not reason, since imagination alone enables the emotionally-based division between 'them' and 'us' to be broken down. Only imagination, then, enables a person to be regarded as 'one of us'.

In the present context, criticism will be restricted to the three main problems presented by Rorty's attempt to construct a postmodern concept of the political in terms of an ideal of solidarity. The first is that his own ideal of solidarity appears to perpetuate the binary division between them and us which Rorty wishes to transcend. As Rorty puts it, 'the force of "us" is, typically, contrastive in the sense that it contrasts with a "they" which is also made up of human beings - the wrong sort of human beings.'[27] What this ignores is the possibility that the 'us' Rorty has in mind may not consist of the nice, progressive people he seems to envisage but may, on the contrary, have a majority (as J. S. Mill feared) of unenlightened citizens, in which case the postmodern concept of the political may not liberate diversity, as Rorty wishes it to, but may leave individuals and minorities unprotected against oppressive forms of majority solidarity.

The second problem presented by Rorty's postmodern concept of the political is its fundamental ambiguity. More precisely, it may be interpreted in two potentially conflicting ways. One is in terms of a substantive consensus on fundamental values, which is inevitably bound to oppress those who do not share it. The other interpretation involves a formal or procedural interpretation of solidarity, of the kind associated in particular with the model of civil association from Hobbes to Oakeshott and Rawls. The fact that this latter, formal or procedural interpretation has been the basis of the American liberal democratic ideal makes Rorty's neglect of it especially surprising.

The third problem is Rorty's attempt to insert into the postmodern concept of the political an incontestable principle for distinguishing between public and private issues. Private issues, he maintains, are ones which relate entirely to the personal project of self-creation, whereas public ones concern the implementation of social purposes. The problem is that Rorty assumes, with enormous self-confidence, that he possesses an absolute vantage-point when it comes to deciding whether a particular

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[25]Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP), p. xv.

[26]Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP), p. xv.

[27] Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP), p. 190.

issue or thinker is to be assigned to the private or public sphere. The possibility of such a vantage-point, however, is wholly inconsistent with his postmodern stress on the contingency of all moral and political standpoints.

When these problems are borne in mind, they have the perhaps ironical - to use one of Rorty's own favoured terms - result that a philosophically radical search for a postmodern concept of the political ends in what critics have not been slow to label as a somewhat complacent conservatism, rather than in the radical affirmation of diversity at which postmodernism more usually aims.

5. THE PRAGMATIC (OR MODUS VIVENDI) CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL

I turn, finally, to the pragmatic concept of the political. The core of this concept is a rejection of the post-Enlightenment quest for a rational consensus in all its forms in favour of a *modus vivendi* politics of compromise. Amongst theorists of the pragmatic concept of the political, the most philosophically ambitious is John Gray, who advocates a neo-Hobbesian ideal of peaceful coexistence which seeks only, Gray writes, 'to reconcile individuals and . . . conflicting values to a life in common' (Gray, 2000).[28]

The principal requirement of the *modus vivendi* concept of the political, Gray maintains, is the adoption of an instrumental attitude towards rights and democracy – an attitude, that is, which encourages us to think of them, in the manner of Hobbes, as no more than 'convenient articles of peace, whereby individuals and communities with conflicting values and interests may consent to coexist'.[29] A particular attraction of this instrumental attitude, Gray believes, is that it avoids the tendency to define the political in terms of the rule-following which is characteristic of neo-Kantian philosophers like Rawls.[30]

Although Gray's rejection of rule-based approaches to the political is welcome, his *modus vivendi* approach creates the danger of reducing the political to an unprincipled embrace of power. Gray attempts to defend himself against this charge by insisting that in order to be acceptable, any compromise must be 'reasonable', and not just based on power considerations. The problem with this view, however, is that Gray's concept of what is reasonable appeals to a set of universal, non-instrumental values and rights, which is inconsistent with the rejection of rationalist universalism that inspired his *modus vivendi* concept of the political in the first place.[31]

In order to avoid the charge of inconsistency, Gray explains that *modus vivendi* theory does not in fact deny universal human rights, but only rejects the ideal of a single universal political regime which liberalism has generally associated with implementing them.[32] He is unable, however, to explain convincingly where these universal rights come from. Gray's principal argument about their origin is a pragmatic rather than a moral one. It consists, more precisely, of the claim that all 'reasonably legitimate' regimes in the contemporary world must have the following characteristics:

a rule of law and the capacity to maintain peace; effective representative institutions; and a government that is removable by its citizens without recourse to violence. In addition, they require the capacity to assure the satisfaction of

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[28] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp.5-6.

[29] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 105.

[30] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 16.

[31] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 21-2

[32] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 21.

basic needs to all and to protect minorities from disadvantage. Last, though by no means least, they need to reflect the ways of life and common identities of their citizens.[33]

Although most of us would probably regard these as admirable sentiments, it is difficult to see how a moral or principled basis for them can be provided by the neo-Hobbesian instrumental theory upon which Gray mainly relies in his formulation of the pragmatic concept of the political. A further criticism is that the sort of civic identity provided by Gray's version of *modus vivendi* theory is too thin to provide an effective bond for the deep modern pluralism which Gray defends.[34]

The best efforts of the five most influential contemporary schools of Western political theory, then, have failed to produce a satisfactory philosophical response to the accusation made half a century ago by Koselleck, to the effect that much modern political thought is in fact profoundly anti-political since it tends to subsume the political under the moral. As I said at the beginning, however, there are several British scholars whose recent work on how the political is to be studied illuminates more clearly the direction future research should take. Foremost amongst them are Michael Freeden at Oxford, Raymond Geuss and John Dunn at Cambridge, and Margaret Canovan, formerly of Keele University. Since Freeden's work provides the most systematic response to the problem, it provides a convenient jumping board for constructing an agenda for that research involving ten key requirements.

II. ON THEORIZING THE POLITICAL

According to Freeden, an adequate study of the political requires nothing less than a new discipline he describes as 'the political theory of politics', the aim of which is to end the 'flight from the political' by reconnecting political theory to the domain of politics (Freeden, 2005).[35] The principal condition for this reconnection, Freeden maintains, is a more empirically grounded, less abstractly normative approach to the study of the political than the one that has dominated political theory during recent decades in particular. Freeden's concern, he emphasizes, is not to supplant normative theorizing, but only to urge normative theorists to base their work on a more accurate identification of the actual features of the political.[36]

At Cambridge, Raymond Geuss made a similar point when he recently appealed for a more 'realist' type of political philosophy that does not start from 'how people ought ideally (or ought 'rationally') to act', but from 'the way . . .social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate' in a particular society at a given time (Geuss, R.).[37]

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[33] Gray, J. (2000) *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 107.

[34] As Thomas Bridges has remarked, a purely instrumental view of citizenship does not 'make clear in what sense citizenship . . . is a good to be desired for its own sake'. Bridges, T. (1994) *The Culture of Citizenship: Inventing Postmodern Civic Culture* (Albany: State University of NY Press), p. 203.

[35] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 113.

[36] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 114.

[37] Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP), p. 9.

The second condition for a more realistic study of the political, Freeden maintains, is recognition of *the ineliminability of power from the political*.[38] This reincorporation of power into the political, Freeden stresses, must acknowledge power to be 'a normal, indeed pivotal, political phenomenon and . . . a potential resource to be harnessed to the attainment of human and social ends'.[39] Geuss too attaches a similar importance to reincorporating power into the political when he writes that 'To think politically is to think about agency, power and interests, and the relations among these'.[40]

The third condition for a realistic study of the political, Freeden writes, is recognition that not only power but conflict is an intrinsic part of the political. In other words, the political must be acknowledged, in the light of past and present observation, to be 'the site of durable dissent as a structural inevitability.'[41] Normative theorizing which seeks an ideal consensus, in consequence, is in danger of underplaying the structural aspect of dissent

The fourth condition for a realistic study of the political is emphasized especially by Margaret Canovan. This is the need for a deep historical knowledge of the particular societies being studied on the part of any thinker theorizing the concept of the political. This need arises since only historical knowledge, Canovan maintains, can overcome the tendency of liberal political theorists in particular to forget the part played by power in the actual creation of their native liberal democracies and political frontiers (Canovan, 1996).[42] As matters stand, Canovan remarks, liberal theorists too often yearn for a politics purged of the unpalatable Machiavellian and Hobbesian episodes in the history of their own societies.[43] This is particularly true, she adds, of the liberal attitude to the role played by nationalism in the history of liberal democracies. Nationhood, she reminds her readers, is 'a tacit premise in almost all contemporary liberal thinking'[44] - including, Canovan emphasises, the theorizing of liberal thinkers who are explicitly hostile to nationalism.[45] The truth is that

The current discourses of democracy, social justice and liberalism all in their different ways presuppose the existence not just of a state, but of a political community. The question of how this body politic is constituted is regularly passed over by theorists, but . . . all concerned, while writing in terms that seem to apply to all humanity, tacitly assume that nation-states can be taken as given. To make sense, democracy requires a 'people', and social justice a political community within which redistribution can take place, while liberal discourse of rights and the rule of law demands a strong and impartial polity. The resounding silence of most . . . thinkers on the topics of boundaries, the generation of political solidarity and the sources of political power bears witness to their presuppositions.[46]

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[38] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 116.
[39] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 116.
[40] Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton UP, Princeton, NJ), p. 25.
[41] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 123.
[42] Canovan, M. (1996) *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 2. Italics added.
[43] Canovan, M. (1996) *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 3.
[44] Canovan, M. (1996) *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 1.
[45] Canovan, M. (1996) *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 237.
[46] Canovan, M. (1996) *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 2.

Above all, Canovan writes, failure to root the study of the political in knowledge of history means that political idealism, especially in its liberal form, is left with a void where a theory of power ought to be.[47]

The fifth condition for an adequate analysis of the political, Freeden maintains, concerns the kind of reason appropriate for understanding actual political practice. More precisely, it is vital to appreciate that political actors are not detached agents seeking universal principles, but are 'decision-makers, option-rankers, dissent and conflict regulators, support mobilizers, and vision-creators'.[48] Geuss makes the same point in Aristotelian terms when he observes that politics is not a sphere for the application of independent ethical theories but is more like the exercise of a craft or art, requiring 'the deployment of skills and forms of judgment that cannot easily be imparted by simple speech, that cannot be reliably codified or routinised and that do not come automatically with the mastery of certain theories.'[49]

Recognition that political actors are not detached agents seeking universal principles of reason that would provide right answers for all major policy decisions is accompanied, Freeden notes, by a sixth condition for the anaysis of the political, which is acknowledgement of the *impossibility of closure or finality* - the impossibility, that is, of eliminating the place of choice in a political decision, in order to present it as the only necessary, legitimate and consensual outcome of political reasoning. Putting it slightly differently, Freeden argues that closure is impossible because of the inescapable part played in the domain of the political by *ambiguity, indeterminacy, inconclusiveness and vagueness*.[50]

The seventh condition for an adequate study of the political is closely connected to the previous one: it is recognition that a key element of the political studied by the 'political theory of politics' is *negotiation*. Political decisions, Freeden adds, not only presuppose choice between a plurality of possible policies: they also entail a *ranking or prioritizing* process which involves negotiation as a constitutive element of the political - negotiation, more specifically, between a plurality of decision-making centres outside the state structure. Acknowledging the centrality of negotiation in particular to the study of the political, Freeden observes, means that the 'focal area' of the 'political theory of politics' is shifted away from the sphere that Rawls called political liberalism to the comprehensive doctrines or ideologies Rawls banished from politics. In short, 'One of the cores of the political - dissent and its attempted regulation through negotiation - is sited in the relationship between these so-called comprehensive doctrines'.[51]

The eighth condition for an analysis of the political is recognition that it is not merely a sphere of negotiation but also a sphere of *collective decision-making*. Since in political contexts collective decision-making involves persuasion, the analysis of the political must incorporate a concept of rationality that permits, in principle at least, a positive role to be assigned to rhetoric in the process of deliberation. What must be

[47] Canovan, M. (1988), 'Crusaders, Sceptics and the Nation', in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3 (3), 237-253, p. 241.
[48] Freeden, M (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?' *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 115.
[49] Geuss, R. (2008), *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton UP, Princeton, NJ), p. 15.
[50] Freeden, M (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*: Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134. The topics mentioned are analyzed on pp. 117-124.
[51] Freeden, M. (2005), 'What Should the ''Political'' in Political Theory Explore?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 113-134, p. 127.

recognized, in other words, is that rhetoric should not automatically be treated negatively as a form of purely manipulative reasoning but may, on the contrary, play a commendable role in the structure of the political by conveying weight to an argument, as well as by fostering agreement through taking account of different levels and kinds of intelligence amongst those being addressed.

Finally, a ninth condition for the study of the political is perhaps best spelt out by the French political thinker, Claude Lefort. This concerns the crucial issue of the *standpoint* from which the political is to be studied. This issue has already been touched upon above, in connection with Freeden's insistence that the relevant standpoint is that of actors and not of detached theorists, but it is now necessary to go a step further and indicate that the standpoint of the agent involves two vocabularies – one ethical, the other descriptive.

What is at stake in connection with the final requirement for studying the political is the need for an intellectual standpoint free from the positivist modes of thought for long associated with political science, sociology, behaviouralism and structuralism. The problem, more precisely, is that positivism provides no way of refuting thinkers like Foucault who claim that the basic reality of all social life is power, and that all political reality may therefore be analyzed in terms of a single vocabulary, viz. that of power. Any other way of describing political reality is dismissed as a form of 'false consciousness' of one kind or another.

A standpoint of this kind accordingly makes it impossible to recognize that in order to theorize the political, it is necessary, as was just said, to use two very different kinds of vocabulary. One is indeed a vocabulary of power, while the second is an ethical vocabulary of authority, law and obligation. To this it may be added that the first vocabulary is distinguishable, but not separable, from the second: power, in other words, is only legitimate when it is used by legally constituted state authorities to implement the law. What must now be added is that the vocabulary of authority, law and obligation may be described as politically 'constitutive', in so far it defines the relationship which constitutes men as citizens - a relationship, more precisely, in terms of their mutual subscription to the norms of law.

The crucial question raised by the distinction between two kinds of political vocabulary has not yet been faced: it concerns how to answer the charge that the second kind is really just a form of illusion or false consciousness which serves to veil power and domination. The best explanation of why positivist methodology provides no way of resisting this challenge was given by Claude Lefort in the course of his explanation of why radical ideologies like Marxism tend towards totalitarianism. They do so, Lefort argued, because they fail to understand that acknowledgement of the political requires acceptance of what he terms the 'symbolic' nature of political discourse, by which he means the subjective language of self-interpretation used by modern democratic citizens.

It is only when the 'symbolic' language of citizens is heeded that a distinction can be drawn between power and authority: when it is ignored, only a language of power is possible, with the result that any aspect of the social order may be presented as a mode of domination, as radical political theory maintains. If the symbolic language is ignored it is always possible, for example, to dismiss the concept of individual rights

in terms of which civil society is structured as a form of bourgeois alienation (Lefort, 1986).[52]

The ninth condition for theorizing the political, then, is that we can only avoid a reductionist approach to that concept by incorporating the self-interpretation of political participants themselves into the political.

I will end the critique of the impoverishment of the study of the political by moralistic impulses that ignore the nine above requirements by referring to an incisive comment by John Dunn about what he termed 'the severely limited intellectual felicity of a political theory confined to articulating [norms provided by a] general theory of the right or the good (Dunn, 1990).'[53] The 'infelicity' of approaching the political in this way, Dunn writes, consists in forgetting that 'The world of politics. . is by its very nature a world of danger and potential extremity.' For a realistic study of this dangerous world, Dunn adds, a moral approach must therefore be qualified by a 'causal understanding of the human world as this [actually] is, and [by a refusal] to subordinate understanding of how this world really is to the importunities of … projective [moral] desires.' [54]

III. SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL IN NON-WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

These, then, seem to be the conditions for studying the concept of the political in a way which rescues it from the long-established subordination of the political to the moral in Western thought about which Koselleck complained. In order to complete the survey of how the concept of the political has been handled in modern thought, however, it will be useful to end with an all too brief sketch of the treatment of the concept in non-Western thought. This large subject has recently been made manageable by an illuminating essay by Bhikhu Parekh on which I shall draw heavily in what follows. In order to avoid possible misunderstanding, however, it is not suggested that Parekh himelf offers a 'non- Western' voice, but only that he has attempted to characterize non-Western political thought. Nor is it assumed that an 'essentialist' characterization of the term 'non-Western' is possible, in the sense of identifying a non-Western perspective uninfluenced (or 'uncontaminated') by Western influences.

A general reflection Parekh makes about the different concerns of Western and non-Western political thinkers provides an excellent point of departure. Broadly speaking, Parekh notes, what primarily interests non-Western thinkers are issues relevant to movements for modernization and national independence such as the following:

> the nature and sources of social change and conflict, how to build
states, the basis and limits of the reformist role of the state, the nature of
political power, the role of ideology in justifying the rule of dominant groups,
the relation between morality and politics, and more recently the nature and
basis of human rights and how best to accommodate ethnic and cultural
diversity. They are therefore attracted to those Western thinkers who discuss
these questions from historical and sociologicial ponts of view [rather from

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[52] Lefort, C. (1986), 'Pushing back the limits of the possible', in Thompson, J. B., ed.. *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 313-17.
[53] Dunn, J. (1990) *Interpreting Political Responsibility* (Cambridge: Polity Press). p. 196.
[54] Dunn, J. (1990) *Interpreting Political Responsibility* (Cambridge: Polity Press). p. 196.

the point of view of an examination of the nature of the political as such] (Parekh, 2003).[55]

As Parekh mentions in the passage just quoted, a concern with problems of modernization and independence has not precluded interest by non-Western thinkers in the relationship between morality and politics that has played a central role in Western thought. In non-Western political thought, however, the approach to this issue is not inspired by a search for an autonomous, non-moralistic concept of the political as found in Western thinkers like Koselleck and, more recently, Freeden, Geuss, Dunn and Canovan. As Parekh notes, it is inspired, rather, by a non-theoretically motivated desire for a model of politics built on what are assumed to be absolute moral and spiritual foundations.[56]

Bearing in mind that the primary interest of non-Western political thinkers is in techniques of control aimed at securing independence and development, it is not surprising that their interest in a thinker like Marx, for example, has tended to 'accentuate the positivist and historicist aspect' of Marxist thought, rather than the more Hegelian aspect that has frequently interested Western sympathizers – the aspect, that is, associated with the dialectical struggle of consciousness for the internal spirittual development of the individual. J. S. Mill is likewise widely read by non-Western thinkers, but attention is focused, as in Marx's case, on Mill's philosophy of history. Mill's utilitarianism is also studied, but what is relatively neglected is the focus of Western scholars on his theory of liberty.[57] Machiavelli, to whose thought the concept of the political is fundamental,

> arouses little interest, largely because [what is regarded as] his amoral view of politics is believed to lie at the basis of the Western treatment of non-Western societies and is to be scrupulously avoided by those keen to build politics on moral and spiritual foundations.[58]

Finally, the quest for a coherent concept of the political by a contemporary thinker like Rawls has received relatively little attention outside the West for the simple reason that Rawls is regarded as 'too Western and even American in his philosophical assumptions and cultural sensibilities' for him to have anything significant to say to non-Western societies. In addition, Rawls' 'individualist and voluntarist account of society, his failure to engage critically with or even to take a serious account of non-Western beliefs, and his concern to detach political thought and practice from comprehensive doctrines also limit his appeal.'[59]

Despite the characteristics of non-Western political thought just noticed, Parekh rightly emphasizes that it should not be dismissed as involving a much more narrowly

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[55] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578.

[56] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 576.

[57] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 576.

[58] I Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 576.

[59] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 576.

confined range of ideas that its Western counterpart, since the contrary is true. In reality, the resources of non-Western political thought are rich, but different from those found in the West. The precise difference, Parekh suggests, is that:

> In the West, political institutions and discourse surrounding them have evolved steadily over a fairly long period of time. As a result there is a broad consensus on a number of core beliefs, such as the nature and importance of the state, individual rights, the relative autonomy of the economy, secularism, constitutionalism, and the nature and conduct of international relations. By contrast, political structures in non-Western societies are still relatively fluid. Some of the inherited institutions of the past continue to be a part of lived reality, historical memories of pre-modern ways of life and thought are still fresh and arouse nostalgia, and political thinkers have available to them not only the intellectual resources of the West but also those of their own traditions.[60]

When the different practical concerns of non-Western thinkers are combined with the different intellectual resources available to them, it is possible to understand why non-Western thinkers are unlikely to aim at constructing a 'free-standing political theory' or consider, in other words, theorizing the political as an autonomous relationship. The reality, Parekh concludes, is that this would in practice require 'sustained and rigorous philosophical analysis, a wide range of intellectual and moral sympathy, an acute sense of history, and so on, [which] is beyond the reach of most [non-Western] political theorists.'[61]

It may well be felt that this restricted survey of non-Western political thought should have included specific coverage of such topics as the body of post-colonial theoriizing associated with thinkers like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha (Sethi 2011)[62], if only because their work has presented a powerful challenge to the universalist claims of Western neo-liberal theories (Krishna, 2009)[63] and emphasized, more generally, the role of power and conflict in politics (Inayatullah, N., and Blaney, D. L. (2012)[64]. To that extent, it is true that non-Western post-colonial thought may be regarded as fulfilling some of the conditions listed above for a political theory of politics. Nevertheless, post-colonial theorizing is only incidentally and sporadically concerned with this enterprise, since the main concern is with forging a distinctive non-Western political vocabulary that reflects non-Western understandings of political community embodied in concepts such as *ubuntu* (Smith, 2012) [65] and *daoism*

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[60] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 576.

[61] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, p. 577.

[62] See for example Sethi, R. (2011) *The Politics of Postcolonialism, Empire, Nation and Resistance* (London: Pluto Press).

[63] Krishna, S. (2009) *Globalization and postcolonialism: Hegemony and resistance in the twenety-first century* (London: Rowan and Littlefield).

[64] Inayatullah, N., and Blaney, D. L. (2012) *International relations and the problem of difference* (London: Routledge); Agathangelou, Anna M. and Ling , L. H. M. (2009), *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (London: Routledge).

[65] Smith, Karen (2012), 'Contrived Boundaries, Kinship and *Ubuntu:* a (South) African view of "the international", in Tickner, Arlene B. and Blaney, David L., eds., *Thinking International Relations Differently* (London: Routledge), pp.301-21

(Ling, 2013),[66] as well as those of *umma, khalsa panth* (Shani, 2008)[67] *praja* and *rashtra* (Behera, 2007)[68]. In particular, the influence of such thinkers as Fanon and Foucault has meant that many post-colonial theorists have unwittingly adopted an ill-defined Western idea of domination which (in Lefort's language) fails to take account of the symbolic self-understanding of the citizens on whose behalf they claim to speak.

IV. CONCLUSION

My conclusion, bearing in mind this review of both contemporary Western and non-Western thought, is simply to return to Koselleck's contention that, even in the West, reflection on the concept of the political has been comparatively rare in the modern period as a whole. If it is, in fact, only in the past few decades that a relatively small number of Western thinkers like those discussed above have endeavoured to rectify this situation then, as Parekh notes, 'it is hardly surprising that no non-Western society has so far thrown up a major political philosopher or even a major political philosophy'.[69]

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[66] Ling, L. H. M. (2013) *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (London: Routledge).

[67] Shani, G. (2008), 'Toward a Post-Western IR: The *Umma, Khalsa Path,* and Critical International Relations Theory', *International Studies Review,* vol.10, no.4, pp. 722-34

[68] Behera, N. C. (2007), 'Re-Imagining IR in India', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol.7, no.3, pp.341-368

[69] Parekh, B., (2003) 'Non-Western political thought' , in *The Cambridge Hisroty of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, ed. Ball, T. and Bellamy, R. (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 553-578, pp. 577-8.

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