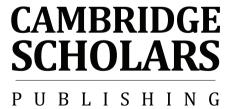# Civilisation and Fear

Civilisation and Fear:
Anxiety and the Writing of the Subject

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INTRODUCTION

Paradoxically, if nature has always been a source of fear, civilisation – its other and at the same time the epitome of progress and order – has not only doubled fear itself, but also added its new sister, anxiety. In effect, the notions of civilisation, fear and anxiety can hardly be separated. Fear – either linked with anxiety or distinct from it – lies at the foundation of civilisation which promises to shelter us from these afflictions as much as it proliferates them. Confronted no longer with the adversary powers of nature, humans have to face now the adversary powers produced by their own endeavours and ideologies. Each effort aimed at attaining an equilibrium results in new, unexpected rifts and breaches into which fear and anxiety grow. Out of the games played between fear and civilisation there emerge new versions of the human subject: *homo rationalis*, *homo civilis*, *homo anxius*.

This volume represents a collection of papers devoted to the many relations between fear and society, culture and civilisation – both Western and Eastern, contemporary and past. The articles gathered here approach the relationship of civilisation, fear, anxiety and the subject from multiple perspectives. Relating to modern critical thought, including that of Kant, Hegel, Freud, Derrida, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, they investigate the objects, causes and effects of fear: reality, nature, reason, libidinal excess, atheism, critical discourse, technological advances, conspiracy, terrorism, capital punishment, the diversity of cultures, and the breakdown of civilisation as a whole; most of all, however, they explore the various shades of fear itself. Following the different ways of "writing the subject," the volume has been divided into three parts, whose themes, however, overlap and intertwine.

Part I, *Homo rationalis et politicus*, begins with a paper by **Horst Ruthrof** ("In Fear of Reason"), in which he subjects to scrutiny the various predicaments of reason since the European Enlightenment and the so-called splitting of reason (*Vernunftspaltung*), including its critiques by Husserl, Adorno, Horkheimer and Heidegger. Relating to Habermas and Derrida, Ruthrof eventually draws political conclusions and proposes tentative solutions for a civilisation "without fear of reason." If Ruthrof gives a panoramic view of Western intellectual debates, the next two papers focus specifically on Great Britain. **Richard Davies** ("Fear and

Terror in the Formulating and Conduct of British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years") – referring to the times of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin – explores interactions between British foreign policy and the "fear of the foreign world" as well as the ways in which fear itself was a driving force behind the formulation of that policy. The questions, however, that lurk behind his analysis are not only that of fear, but also of whether "we can defend civilisation, our idea of civilisation, by uncivilised means." **Garry Robson** ("Fear, Fragmentation and Vulnerability in Contemporary Britain"), on the other hand, focuses on the "fearful times" of contemporary Britain, especially within three communal spheres particularly apt to accommodate fears and anxieties: the young, public space and migration.

Two subsequent articles take us beyond Europe and investigate cultural disparities and paradoxes between Western, especially Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, and East Asian approaches to rationality and nature as well as their political consequences. **Yingchi Chu** ("Why Does China Fear Critical Discourse?") explores the question why contemporary China rejects the idea of universal human rights and why it fears politically motivated critical discourse. A partial answer, at least, lies in the fact that notions such as "human rights" and "critical discourse" have no linguistic equivalents in the Confucian tradition and are incommensurate with the conceptual grid of the Confucian world picture. Having demonstrated that, Chu then follows the evolution of *piping* and *pipan* – the alleged Chinese "equivalents" of *critique* or *critical discourse* – through the Mao era to their contemporary usage. **Maria Korusiewicz** ("Between Fields of Fear and Gardens of Compassion: The Approach to Nature in Western and Japanese Traditions"), in two historical surveys contrasts the Western tradition of viewing nature as an external and potentially threatening world with the harmonious Japanese view of nature and humans as a continuum. However, she also points to a paradoxical reversal of contemporary ecological practices in Japan, where an "enormous devastation of the natural environment" has taken place in recent decades, and in the West, where environmental ethics, environmental aesthetics and ecology seem rather to follow the traditional eastern way.

The section closes with a return to the issue of the fear of rationality. On the example of Robert Boyle, **Karolina Lebek** ("Robert Boyle's *The Christian Virtuoso*, Experimental Philosophy and the Fear of Atheism in Restoration England") analyses the apparent clash between the official religious stance of the Restoration and the potentially atheistic character of natural philosophy and experimental sciences, and lays bare the side effects of the fear of being accused of atheism – a question still relevant in

some countries and cultures – in various strategies of the constitution of knowledge. **David Schauffler** ("A Spectacle Is Haunting Europe: Guy Debord and the Fear of Money") has a close look at Guy Debord's multifarious and rather uninhibited adaptation of the Feuerbachian concept of spectacle. Ironically, as it seems, he sees the "haunting" nature of the concept in its conceptual promiscuity, its lack of semantic constraints, and its overgeneralising scope and all-pervasiveness. Schauffler looks for the causes of such a semantic dissolution of the concept in Debord's intellectual debt to surrealism – a suppressed version, we might say, of the fear of the rational.

The papers included in Part II, *Homo civilis*, centre around fears imposed or brought about by civilisation and focus on the subject as *civis* menaced by threats, indictments and limitations. **Jeremy Tambling** ("Civilisation, Fear and Terror") traces the notion of civilisation back to the eighteenth century and examines its various interconnections with fear and anxiety via the writings of Kierkegaard, Freud, Derrida, Burke, Benjamin, Žižek, Hegel, and Blanchot, among others. While proposing that "there is a pattern of fear generating forms of civilisation," Tambling also ponders over the question of how civilisation itself spawns fear and to what extent fear is necessary for civilisation to prosper. **Thomas Dutoit** ("Fear of Castration and the Beheading of Civilisation: Kant, Reik, Freud, for Derrida") finds the focal point of the interplay of civilisation and fear in death penalty construed as the law of talion. Looking – with recourse to Derrida's twenty lectures on the death penalty – at Kant's, Reik's and Freud's pronouncements on the subject, he delves into the controversy between two extreme views of death penalty seen, on the one hand, as "the most civilised, rational and therefore justified response to violence," and on the other hand, as "the most fearful, irrational, and therefore nonsensical cause of violence."

The two papers that follow look at two different aspects of the experience of the civilised subject: the nostalgia for the natural environment and the fear of the memory of violence. **Alina Mitek-Dziemba** ("The Waning of Experience? (Neo)Pragmatism and Its Pastoralist Fears"), referring to land-art, first depicts the intimate relation between the human and nature expressed in a non-conceptual, experiential language of art, and then uses it as a background to focus on the philosophical views of neo-Deweyans (John McDermot, Larry Hickman, Richard Shusterman), who stand in opposition to the Rortian language-centred version of neopragmatism and put emphasis on the metaphysics of experience, readopting thus the original Deweyan aesthetics and environmental perspective. Mitek-Dziemba foregrounds the fear of the neo-Deweyans of the waning of immediate

experience effected by its surrogate: the environment "mediatized" through the "fragmentation and mechanical information processing." **Wojciech Kalaga** ("Crowds and the Fear of Memory") discusses the experience of crowd violence and its relation to collective memory. In an attempt to demarcate a crowd episode, Kalaga first examines examples of ideologically laden crowd theories and introduces a new, contemporary version of the crowd – either internet or tabloid based – which he calls "network crowd." Drawing on Henri Bergson's concept of memory as virtuality, Kalaga applies its tenets to the experience of a crowd event and to the various strategies of forgetting in fear of remembering its aftermath. The paper which completes Part II turns from fear to security. **Hanna Mamzer** ("Ontological Security: Socio-Cultural Context") examines differences in the ontological security within modern and post-modern societies, the latter being characterized by a high degree of changeability, flexibility and uncertainty. Mamzer sees ontological security as "an essential condition which must be fulfilled in order to project one's actions into the future." Drawing on the work of a number of sociologists and intellectuals, notably Anthony Giddens, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault, she identifies potential dangers impending over the post-modern subject and emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's ontological security.

Part III, *Homo anxius*, examines various aspects of anxiety and fear ingrained in or imposed upon the human subject. **Agata Bielik-Robson** ("*Homo anxius*: Modernity on Its Way from Fear to Joy") traces the idea of *homo anxius* back to Johann Gottfried Herder and offers a historical sketch of the concept up to Freud's account of the constant latent psychic anxiety in terms of libidinal excess. Taking Freud as a point of reference, Bielik-Robson then argues that later developments in psychoanalytic theory, especially those inspired by Adorno's critique of Freud, offer "a messianic vision of the human condition finally freed from the excess of fear," and optimistically attempt to turn "the vinegar of anxiety" into "the wine of delight." **Maciej Nowak** ("Beware of the *Cant-Spray of Banality*: The Significance of Fear and Intellectual 'Screamers' in the Disciplining of Civilisation"), looking at fear as an obligatory "leitmotiv of human existence," also takes Freud as a starting point and approaches fear as a factor "conducive to the making of civilisation," at the cost, however, of the ego's remaining in permanent conflict with the id and the superego. In this context, Nowak discusses Arthur Koestler's idea of humanity's need for "screamers" and his concept of the "split mind." To Nowak, "split-mindedness" eventually aids man in developing "an optimum environment helping him to come to terms with his fears and anxieties." **Sławomir Masłoń** ("Thy Neighbour as Thy Double: Fear as Social Link") examines

– within the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis – the figure of "the double" invented by the Romantics, but persisting into postmodernity as the question of the (evil) other. Masłoń argues that "the culture of 'respect for the other' is founded on the fear of the Evil Other as substance" and sees fear as the "sole content of the social," the only factor linking the members of the society and instigating their organisation into groups. **Tomasz Kalaga** ("Terror and Dread: The Significance of the 'Unfamiliar' in the Ontology of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*") addresses the notion of fear in the context of Heidegger's discussion of the conditions for authentic existence of *Dasein*. Kalaga first examines the difference between *Furcht* and *Angst* as modes of attunement and then considers them in the light of their relation towards the *existentiale* of understanding. The notion of the unfamiliar as the cause of the highest intensity of fear is then discussed as grasped by the forestructure of understanding and shown to occupy the liminal place between "the known" and "the nothing," inducing existential consequences for Dasein that are similar to those effected by *Angst*.

Literary discourse, both as an anaesthetic against fear and as aesthetics of fear, is the territory explored by **Wit Pietrzak** ("The Anxiety of a Dearth of Context: An Attempt at Constituting the Subject in Literary Culture") and **Jacek Mydla** ("Fear: Aestheticised/Anaesthetised"). Pietrzak refers to Richard Rorty's treatment of textuality (fiction, poetry, science and philosophy alike) as literary culture, but exposes its "inherent scare of the flux" in which the human subject, deprived of stability, is thus doomed to dwell. If Rorty advocates the novel as a means to counter the horrors of the flux, Pietrzak turns to poetry as a mode that "teaches us to confront the horror of the world denuded of essentials, ideal and idols." He then explores poetry's aptitude to recontextualise reality and argues that such a poetic recontextualisation "forms a central tenet of the constitution of the anxiety-ridden modern subject." Jacek Mydla focuses more specifically on the aesthetics of fear in literary tradition since Edmund Burke's "recognition and legitimisation of terror." Observing, however, that the "theory of aesthetised fear" did not really go much beyond "some very crude if basic distinctions" (e.g., that of Ann Radcliffe between terror and horror), he posits the need to reconstruct the aesthetics of terror on the basis of the body of texts which have been written with the aim of evoking fear in the reader. Referring to the works of Radcliffe, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Orwell and Lovecraft as well as to the sermons of Jonathan Edwards, Mydla examines the strategies operative in the construction of "fearful implied readers."

The two papers which close both this section and the whole volume deal with anxiety-ridden realms of the public sphere. **Michał Różycki** ("The Science of Conspiracy – The Fear of Technology in Contemporary Conspiracy Theory Narratives") explores the fear of technology as articulated and incited in the narratives of contemporary conspiracy theory. Różycki traces the appearance of technology in "paranoid writings" back to 18th century anti-Masonic and anti-Illuminati literature and then – in an attempt to reveal "how the anxieties created by the Cold War mentality became transferred onto the conspirational narratives" – he focuses on the exemplary negative interpretation of technology in the so-called "New World Order" conspiracy theory, with special attention paid to the documentaries of Alex Jones. Nature's other, technology, may thus not only evoke fear as source of ecological devastation, as demonstrated earlier in this book, but also as a potential threat to human liberty. Anxiety for liberty, now in the context of copyright coercion, is also the theme tackled by **Marcin Sarnek** ("'You Wouldn't Steal a Movie': Copyright Intimidation Campaigns and New Models of Prospective Punishment"). Sarnek identifies three relatively successful strategies of musical content providers in their struggle against piracy, leading either to the abolishment of the "peer-to-peer" kind of software or to its stigmatisation as "potentially illegal and definitely immoral"; these strategies, however, evoke strong disapproval since – as he notes – "they often tend to represent legal behaviours as immoral or repulsive." Against this background, Sarnek analyses the instruments of intimidation and the mechanisms of coercion directed both at individuals and organisations, and discusses, within a broader social and cultural context, the tensions in the intellectual property debates caused by such intimidation practices as well as prospective models of punishment.

While by no means encouraging the reader to return to the state of barbarity, this volume exposes the fears and anxieties brought about by civilisation either as its inevitable by-products or as its inherent qualities. It also delineates various predicaments and dilemmas, niches and stratagems of the subjects written thus within and by the civilisation's fear. Without offering a univocal diagnosis or universal remedies – for such ventures border upon impossibility – the book attempts to reveal the diverse machineries and mechanisms of the production of fear as well as the reasons for its ineradicability from the subject's constitution, and, indirectly, encourages an implementation of and a debate on the strategies of both resistance and acquiescence to the fears and anxieties of the human condition within a world of crises.

—Wojciech Kalaga

PART I:

HOMO RATIONALIS ET POLITICUS

CHAPTER ONE

IN FEAR OF REASON

HORST RUTHROF

Introduction

Sausages aside, culture kills. When the ancestral spirit is questioned, when the true, original customs are undermined, culture summons its aggressive defences. From ancient *mythos* to contemporary history, xeno-phobia and cultural slaughter seem like a never-ending story, in the face of which UN interventions look like so many hopeless gestures. As a response to what they perceive as a threat, cultures have developed centri-petal as well as centri-fugal mechanisms designed to guarantee the sur-vival of their particular, even if historically shifting, belief systems. Because such systems are emotionally charged and negatively defined, they celebrate towards the centre and bristle towards the Other. But what precisely is it that makes cultures and entire societies fear the existence of other cultures? A fear of human universality? A fear of what truly links us all? A fear of reason?

Shifting our attention from local cultures to the global scene, we cannot but observe a growing aversion to reason. The shrinking shelf space in bookshops, especially in the Western world, formerly dedicated to philosophy, politics, sociology, hermeneutics, literary theory, linguistics, and history tells the sad story of disciplines being replaced by new age wishy-washy accounts of anything and everything, a celebration of cults and the occult, of cooking, clairvoyance and astrology. Information over-load has produced a numbness of the brain to be relieved by recipes of finding oneself, even if there is nothing to be found other than a pathetic feeling of being OK and perhaps well looked after by some providential, cosmic constellation. Much of such literature, reinforced by its televisual cousins, suffers from a serious case of *fallacy of scale*, that is, a dubious assumption that large scale relations, say amongst planets, could have specific effects on an individual Mr or Mrs Smith in a Yorkshire village.

While the universal grammar of Boolean logic informs and underpins much of our daily lives world wide, we seek physical and emotional satisfaction in activities hostile to a *vita humana* as contemplation: "I shop, I pump iron, I run, ergo sum." Life as impulse. Reality as sensation.

Perhaps the most worrying observation from the perspective of our own profession is that the very basis on which positive claims can be made with conviction, such as the tenets of a universal human rights discourse, has been increasingly undermined by an ill-researched critique of language itself. Talk of "empty signifiers" in Ernesto Laclau, of "flickering signifiers" in Katherine Hayles, the hyperdiscursivity in Chantal Mouffe, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, as well as all forms of radical historicism, inexorably lead to the circularity of *performative paradox*. Once we let go of the *signified*, in whatever form, we have lost the ground of even the most modest sort of communicability.[1] We have lost the very condition that permits discursive variation. Now there is nothing to be discursive about. It is well worth noting here that Jacques Derrida, wisely and in spite of his critique of the wobbliness of conceptuality, never abandoned the *signified*.[2]

In local cultures and global behaviour alike, as well as in much academic writing in the humanities, then, we can observe an aversion to *reason*. Yet whenever reason is so rejected, its mechanisms appear *denigrated*, by shrinking it to a narrow form of instrumentality, by holding it responsible for human catastrophes, or by denying the deep constraints which most cultures have learned to respect for survival and continue to reflect in meaningful discourse. But neither in its simplest form, as the linking of subject-predicate relations by way of causal connections for the purposes of drawing conclusions from premises, nor at its most complex, as the transcendent ground of the social, of what makes us human, can reason be denied, still less held responsible for fascism or terrorism.

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[1] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985); Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," *October* 66 (1993): 69–91; Ernesto Laclau, "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 36–46; Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (London: Verso, 2000).

[2] Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc. abc …," in *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, ed. Samuel Weber and Henry Sussman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 162–254.

Modernity Defined as "the Acceleration of the Splitting of Reason"

I have elsewhere described modernity as "the acceleration of the splitting of reason."[3] As a topic, reason as *ratio*, *raison*, *Vernunft*, etc., is a relatively recent event in human evolution. In its relentless continuing process of splitting, reasoning is foregrounded in many cultures, in Buddhist logic, in Greek mathematics and philosophy, pursued and strengthened by Islamic thinkers between 800 and 1200, and radically elaborated during the European Enlightenment.[4] As an ongoing process, *Vernunftspaltung* and its acceleration is not something that should be imposed on other cultures with missionary or military zeal characteristic of colonialism, but rather viewed as an invitation to a way of thinking that holds the promise of liberation. It is in this sense that the evolution of reason should be regarded as the core of the "incomplete project" of modernity.[5]

The dismantling of the unitary heliocentric belief system by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton pulled in its wake an encouragement to apply reasoning outside authority to all and any field of human activity, from the outrageous idea of freedom of the press (1787), to the inconvenience of having to stop witch burnings (1701), to universal human rights (1776), the separation of state powers (1756), arguments against the death penalty (1764), the separation of melodies (1721), the notion of tolerance (1689; 1710), up to Kant's summary slogan in a footnote of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: *"Our age is, in an especial degree, the age of Kritik, and to Kritik everything must submit."*[6] Kant uses "critique" and "critical" in two senses, in a small sense, as opposed to dogmatism and scepticism, that is, as a methodological correction pointing us to validity of argument rather than to truth or falsity of propositions, and in a broad sense, as *systemic critical intervention.* It is in this broad sense that the Enlightenment has left us as its main heritage the enlarged Horacean

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[3] Horst Ruthrof, "Modernity: Vernunftspaltung," *Philosophy Today* 50 (2006): 324–37, from which a number of arguments have been incorporated here.
[4] Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd* (Averroes), trans. Olivia Stewart (London: Routledge, 1991); Ian Richard Netton, *Al-Farabi and His School* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[5] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 3–15.
[6] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), xxii, footnote a.

admonition of *aude saper, outside the strictures of authority*, complemented in 1791 by Schiller's "erkühne dich, weise zu sein" (dare to be wise).[7]

Forms of Reason

When in his three *Critiques* Immanuel Kant split reasoning into at least six different procedures as critical tools, he offered us a significant step beyond the Leibnizian separation of analytic and sufficient reason.[8] I list these because their variety and purpose stand in stark contrast to the narrow conception of reason which we typically find in the critiques of the Enlightenment.

Importantly, the *Critique of Pure Reason* not only elaborates *pure* reasoning, independent of empirical content, but also, towards the end of the book, the empirical concept. In its formal guise, in mathematisation as empty relations, all reason can do is prevent error. Because both subject and predicate are secured by stipulated definition, pure reason cannot invent anything new but only act as a guide for correct reasoning. In stark contrast, in its empirical form, reason is limited by the wobbliness of the boundaries of conceptual exposition as well as by the infinite regress of conceptual analysis, a critique which in general terms anticipates Derrida's "infrastructures."[9] A third form of reasoning, found in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, borrows the definitional stipulation of the subject-predicate relation from formal reasoning, but fills it with moral content, which places reason in the phenomenal, social world. Here, reason produces social rules.[10] This is why in its radical, transcendental reduction, the categorical imperative, reason provides not so much a content oriented form of moral behaviour as a definition of the social itself. A fourth form of reasoning emerges in the *Critique of Judgment*, where complex phenomena can only be judged by *reflective reason*, according to which, as in Peirce's *abduction*, individual cases are interpreted by way of inventing a law

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[7] Friedrich Schiller, "Über die Grenzen der Vernunft," in *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, ed. Ehrhard Bahr (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), 55.

[8] Gottfried Leibniz, *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, trans. Robert Latta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 61–62, 235–39, 414–15.

[9] Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (A 727ff.); Horst Ruthrof, "The Infrastructures of Deconstruction: Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*," *Southern Review* 21 (1988): 203–10, and P*andora and Occam: On the Limits of Language and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 96–98.

[10] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1967).

under which the individual case can be subsumed.[11] Any such sub-
sumption requires yet another form of reason, Kant's *teleological reason*,
his top-down procedure of stipulating an interpretive frame for the bottom-
up reasoning of reflection.[12]

These five kinds of reasoning form a chiastic structure across the three
Critiques according to their relation to an interpretive community. In
formal reason, *sensus communis* is restricted to procedural veto, without
however affecting the propositional content of the judgment. At the other
end of the structure we find reflective and teleological judgments depend-
ing heavily on the input of the community. Since in these kinds of judg-
ment neither subject nor predicate are secured, it is *sensus communis* that
steps in to provide interpretive guidance, in art as well as in science; in
short, in all complex procedures of judgment.[13]

Kant's sixth form of reasoning, *transcendental reasoning*, is a meta-
method by which all reasoning procedures can be assessed within an over-
all system of rational moves. Hence questions such as "How are synthetic
a priori judgments possible?" Though it is vulnerable to the charge of
producing no more than a top-down inferentialism, without it, interpre-
tation in any complex form proves impossible.[14] In its minimal form,
transcendental reasoning appears in the hypotheses of empirical investi-
gation; in its most complex applications it provides the methodological
glue that forges arguments into a coherent interpretive rationale.[15]

Given the interpretive promise inherent in this palette of forms of rea-
soning, which the hermeneutic tradition never quite managed to fulfil and
which was eliminated in analytical thinking, it is curious to note that cur-
rent Enlightenment bashing, much like its historical precursors, has
reduced Enlightenment reasoning to an *instrumental* and *military* force.

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[11] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963), 357f.; Charles
Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles
Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 5,
189; Floyd Merrell,"Abduction Is Never Alone," *Semiotica* 148 (2004): 245–75;
K. T. Fann, *Peirce's Theory of Abduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970),
passim.
[12] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 317–476.
[13] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 123, 213–18.
[14] Richard Brandom, Articulating Reasons: *An Introduction to Inferentialism*
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
[15] Jaakko Hintikka, "Transcendental Arguments: Genuine and Spurious," *Nous* 6
(1972): 274–81.

Objections to Enlightenment Reason

If modernity can be described as an historical phase identifiable by its exceptional concentration of moments of "accelerated *Vernunftspaltung*," then it should not be surprising that *unitary reason* in whatever form – metaphysics, fundamentalist religions, fascism, Maoism, and others – is suspicious of modernity's projects. Indeed, there is a long list of objections by writers who saw the liberation of reason from authority and tradition as a threat to their beliefs. Each of these objections appears to have been motivated by a special kind of fear of the effects which an emphasis on reason would produce. Kant's friend and critic Georg Hamann, for instance, wrote in 1784 that he thought that the Kantian edifice seriously undermined our sense of tradition and the spiritual side of humanity.[16] This objection cannot however apply to the *Critique of Judgment* of 1790, in which the combination of bottom-up reflective reason and top-down teleological reason offers a sophisticated method for speculative interpretation, including readings of the "tradition." A century later, Nietzsche deplores the elimination of the will in mere "contemplation" which he fears will transform reason into the "determinable rigidity of the mechanical process."[17] Arthur Schopenhauer famously attacked Kant's transcendental reasoning employed in the schematism chapter of the first *Critique*, suggesting that Kant would have us calculate the height of a tower by measuring its shadow. By contrast, the empiricist Schopenhauer proposes to put the measuring stick directly on the tower.[18] What apparently didn't occur to Schopenhauer was that his measuring stick is precisely the sort of schema Kant is talking about. Even measuring is not as empirical as Schopenhauer has us believe. No empiricism without transcendental thought.

Other attacks on reason rest on the fear of losing the distinction between "good and evil,"[19] the claim that reason naturally aligns itself

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[16] Johann Georg Hamann, "Metacritique on the Purism of Reason," in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 154–67.

[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924), 79.

[18] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), 552, 555.

[19] Leszek Kolakowski, "The Idolatry of Politics," *Atlantic Community Quarterly* 24 (1986): 223.

with racism,[20] or that there is an affinity between reason and sexism.[21] Precisely the opposite should be argued, for it was the Enlightenment that produced the tools with which such attitudes could be analysed as the process of *Vernunftspaltung* took hold in the refinement of moral reasoning. A more serious rebuttal is required for meeting the critical arguments we find in Husserl, Heidegger, and Adorno and Horkheimer, sharpened into a slogan by Lyotard. Yet even in the writings of these thinkers we cannot but note the familiar double move, the radical shrinking of the diversity of reason to a narrow spectrum of instrumental thinking and the elaboration of a concomitant loss. In "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity," which forms part of Husserl's "Vienna Lecture" of 1935, Husserl suggests that European scientific thinking has chosen the wrong path. "The European crisis," he writes, "has its roots in a misguided rationalism"; the "*ratio* represented by the rationalism of the age of Enlightenment was a mistake."[22] What Husserl identifies as the core error of modernity was the reduction of reason to "objectivism." Anticipating Heidegger's later critique of techno-logos, Husserl calls this form of reason a "being-in-advance," a pre-determination of the world by formalisation. However, since the world as a whole also contains "spiritual beings" such a reduction is illegitimate. "Einstein does not reform the space and time in which our vital life runs its course." The reduction of reason to "naturalism" and "objectivism" for Husserl is ultimately a failure of "method." The barbarous descent of reason we find later elaborated in Adorno and Horkheimer is keenly anticipated in the Vienna Lecture as a prophecy: Europe has the option of descending "into barbarity" or being reborn "from the spirit of philosophy."[23]

Nine years after Husserl's lecture, Adorno and Horkheimer explore the first part of Husserl's prophecy. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) speaks of the Enlightenment as a "program" of disenchantment, the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for the imagination.[24] Tracing the roots of the Enlightenment back to Francis Bacon's "In Praise

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[20] Richard H. Popkin, "The Philosophical Bases of Racism," in *The High Road to Phyrrhonism* (San Diego, 1989), 79–102.

[21] Robin May Schott, "The Gender of Enlightenment," in *What Is Enlightenment?* ed. James Schmidt, 471–87.

[22] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 290.

[23] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences …*, 292–99.

[24] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1986).

of Knowledge" in his *Novum Organon* (vol.14), they single out the notion of *technique*. The radio, thus, reappears as "sublimated printing press, the Stuka as more effective artillery, remote control as the more reliable compass." Ever since Bacon's scientific dialectic between principles and empirical propositions, we were on the way towards formal logic as "the great school of uniformation."[25] The "schema of the calculability of the world" and the "number became the canon of the Enlightenment."[26] Commitment to calculability, fused with the biblical mission to take command of the world, the "Enlightenment relates to things as does a dictator to people," such that "representability flips over into functionality."[27] For Adorno and Horkheimer the "mastery of nature draws the circle into which the *Critique of Pure Reason* banished thinking." In the epoch from Galileo to Kant, nature has been transformed into a "mathematical manifold." The more machinic our thinking in subjugating Being, the more blindly it proceeds in its reproduction. As a consequence, "Enlightenment flips back into mythology, from which it never managed to escape."[28]

No doubt these are the results of *one* strand of Enlightenment reason. Yet to limit our analysis of the Enlightenment to a mythical instrumentality at the exclusion of all other achievements is a massive distortion. The notions of tolerance, freedom of the press, illegitimacy of torture, the campaign against witch burnings, the universality of human rights and a long list of other incisive changes in European thinking all rest on forms of reason excised from Adorno and Horkheimer's description. What is particularly dubious is the theme of fascism as a direct outcome of Enlightenment reasoning, a theme radically taken up by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his poignant observation that the project of the Enlightenment was terminated in Auschwitz.[29] Not only does this require the denial of a substantive portion of Enlightenment thought, it also asks us to forget that there are much more likely candidates for responsibility for the emergence of German fascism: romanticism, nationalism, the Versailles Treaty, poverty, the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic, the recall of German loans by the US Reserve Bank, the inability of the US to relieve Germany's economic woes and, above all, the votes of the Zentrum Party, consisting mainly of Catholics and Protestants, that helped defeat the majority Socialists in the Weimar Parliament in early 1933, ushering in the *Ermaechtigungsgesetz.*

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[25] Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, 20ff.

[26] Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, 23.

[27] Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, 25f.

[28] Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment,* 43; 42; 44.

[29] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 18f.

As William Shirer sums up the occasion, "Thus was parliamentary democracy finally interred in Germany."[30] Finally, to so equate Enlightenment thought with fascism is to misread their most fundamental difference: the driving intellectual force of the Enlightenment was an accelerating process of splitting reason into a diverse manifold. In contrast, fascism has shown itself to be one of the most rigorous and disastrous forms of *unifying and unified reason*, if we can call necrophilia and organised mass murder a form of reason at all.

Now to Martin Heidegger's much celebrated "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953).[31] Resuming Husserl's theme of Enlightenment "objectivism," Heidegger offers a critique of techno-logos which we can sum up in eight brief steps. (1) It is doubtful that we will remain master of techno-logos since it is "no mere means" but also a "way of revealing." (2) The essence of technology is the transformation of nature into a mere resource (*Bestand*) for maximum yield at minimum cost. (3) Since the process of "unconcealment" is beyond our control, what we do with nature will at the same time affect humans themselves, such that "man is challenged more originally than are the energies of nature." (4) Technological being is characterised by enframing (*Gestell*) which "entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces," a process that includes us. (5) Though we do not have to pursue technology blindly, or "rebel helplessly against it," we must realise that we are not entirely free but rather are the ones "spoken to." The real threat is not the lethal machine, it is our ignorance of having already been "afflicted" in our essence. (6) The essence of technology is "ambiguous." Once we have realised technology as a form of revealing, we have encountered the process of revealing itself. This has the potential of showing us what we can "set against the essence of technology." (7) Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, reflective confrontation with it must occur in a domain at the same level but at the same time be "fundamentally different from it." Such a domain is art and reflection on art. (8) As a form of questioning, such reflection Heidegger calls "the piety of thought."

When Heidegger selected art and thinking about art as a prescription for healing our enframed humanity he was not alone in this. Benjamin before him spoke of the revolutionary potential of aesthetic objects, a topic

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[30] William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (London: Pan Books, 1968), 249.
[31] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2004), 307–41.

revived recently by Andrew Feenberg in the domain of popular culture.[32]
Heidegger's reasons for privileging art, though, rest on a very different
sort of motivation, visible in his theorization of *Seinsvergessenheit* as an
initial violation of the right philosophical stance to the world. *Seinsverges-
senheit*, he insists throughout his writings, can be remedied only by a
return to truth as *Entbergen*, the *aletheia* of Presocratic thought. With
reference to Parmenides, Heidegger speaks of "the untrembling heart of
unconcealment" as a hallmark of the "meditative man."[33] Taking *aletheia*
as his point of departure, he develops his tripartite distinction of truth and
his theory of *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetting of the difference between
Being and beings, the ontic-ontological difference. The three notions of
truth at the centre of his argument are: (1) Presocratic *aletheia* or truth as
unconcealment (*Entbergen*); (2) Plato's idea or truth as idea and represen-
tation; and (3) Aristotle's logos or truth as proposition.[34] Steps (2) and (3)
are identified as the irrevocable pathways, two forms of *Seinsvergessen-
heit*, that have alienated humans from their true philosophical destiny: our
originary experience of Being. As the still growing popularity of
Heidegger's thinking testifies, the force of his *Fundamentalontologie*
cannot be denied. Viewed in the cool light of reason, though, Heidegger's
choice amounts to nothing less than arresting the history of reason at the
point of its very birth in Western thought. But what is Heidegger's moti-
vation for taking us back to the poetic-philosophical attitude of
Parmenides? We can discover a moral-philosophical impulse, namely to
return us to a more humane way of Being, and an emotive impulse, that is,
his yearning, as he himself says, for "the simple essence of the truth of
Being" (Das einfache Wesen der Wahrheit des Seins).[35] Whether simplic-
ity, essence, truth, and Being have ever been so combined in an originary
fashion cannot be more than an intriguing question. To be sure, in
Heidegger's writings, it is a powerful and seductive postulate. But is it
cogent?

    Given Heidegger's critique of techno-logos and his commitment to
presocratic thought, I draw the following conclusions: (1) Heidegger's
aletheia is arbitrary; (2) Standing in awe of unconcealment makes us vul-
nerable. It undermines critical reflection, which rests on *Vernunftspaltung*;
(3) Art and poetic thoughtfulness enrich human life rather than functioning

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[32] Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology* (London: Routledge, 1999); though
it must remain a moot point whether popular culture by itself contains any critical
potential.
[33] Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1961), 387.
[34] Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern: Francke, 1955), 12f.
[35] Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1947), 25.

as its basis and final purpose, even if we were to assume that there was any such purpose at all; (4) Heidegger's nostalgia for the *unitary reason* of *aletheia* stands in conflict with thinking in terms of moral law (human rights, minorities discourse), political institutions (democratic safeguards; the checks and balances of modern states); education (in all disciplines); ethics; or medicine as a research field; (5) The idea that *das Zuhandene* as the things of the world will reveal themselves to us in the right way if only we "hearken" to them in the appropriate manner is an expression of a certain kind of hopefulness; a certain tone of voice rather than an argument; and (6) Heidegger's curtailment of *apophantic logos* and its applications is unconvincing because (6.1) they are forceful facts; art and poetry are no substitutes; (6.2) they are continuing; and evolving into ever new forms (branches in the process of *Vernunftspaltung*); (6.3) they are accelerating rather than static or merely continuing; (6.4) logos achieves much more than just mathematisation; (6.5) techno-logos is a deep feature of the modern world. Indeed, to recreate a world in the spirit of Heidegger would amount to something like a philosophical Morgenthau Plan.

Fundamentalism in the Light of Boolean Logic

If we were to chart fundamentalist belief systems in terms of their semantics and syntax, they could be represented as steep pyramids at the apex of which can be located a highest value, a *summum bonum*, as for instance Chairman Mao, or deities such as the vengeful Jehovah of the early Old Testament, or an Allah who applauds suicidal religiosity. An important characteristic of this kind of pyramid is the strict hierarchisation of its values, with firm top-down control of all aspects of human life from the apex. Examples of such pyramids are the medieval Catholic Church, the German fascist state, and the kind of theocracy we observe in present-day Iran. Compared with such pyramids, modern liberal democracies would have to be represented as truncated figures, without any clearly identifiable pinnacle of values, replaced by a flattened top at which a number of governing post-Enlightenment principles compete with one another.[36]

Suppose we place these two opposing representations within a coordinate system consisting of a vertical axis x representing a hierarchy of values, abbreviated as the axis of *semantics*, and a horizontal axis y representing "mere" differentiation, abbreviated as the y axis of *syntax*. We can

[36] Horst Ruthrof, "The Semiotics of Intercultural Exchange: Ostensive Definition and Digital Reason," *Semiotica* 154 (2005): 387–440.

now draw a historical trend line from a point high on the *x* axis across the top of the steep pyramid down across the top of the flattened pyramid until it crosses the mere syntax line *y* at zero value level. At this level the *y* axis represents the most minimal form of syntax imaginable: *indifferent differentiation*. This form of differentiation was accomplished theoretically in the 19th century in Boolean logic by which we can express anything and everything in combinations of two values, 0 and 1. Since the 1950s, Boole's sleeper has now been practically applied to greatest possible effect in the electronic bit stream of our computers.

Looking at the rigidity of values characteristic of fundamentalist belief systems from the perspective of Boolean mathematics reveals an intriguing situation regarding the definition of *information*. Gregory Bateson's formulation of information as "a difference that makes a difference" here appears to fail in one specific respect.[37] The greater our emphasis on meaning as a value, the less relevant Bateson's definition turns out to be at the level of *indifferent differentiation*. In the digital-binary bit stream, "dog," "sacred," "sheitan," "Allah" and the "Prophet" are all swallowed up, indifferently ordered as mere items in a high speed sequence, with all value differentiation removed. When Osama bin Laden instructed his fellow warriors on his laptop, he inadvertently accelerated the trend line towards the level of *indifferent differentiation*. Though no direct outcome, but rather an indirect result of its *semantic and pragmatic effects*, this innocuous technical form of reason undermines fundamentalist intentions in the very process of harnessing it for religious-political ends.

According to the literature on bin Laden, he had two clearly stated aims, one political, the other religious, the two being inseparably intertwined.[38] The first is the removal of apostate Islamic regimes on the

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[37] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 16f.
[38] Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001); Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York: Forum, 2001); Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, eds., *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2002); Tony Coady and Michael O'Keefe, eds., *Terrorism and Justice: Moral Argument in a Threatened World* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Noam Chomsky, "Who Are the Global Terrorists?" in *Worlds in Collision*, ed. Booth and Dunne, 128–37; Alan M. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2003); Samuel P. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars," in *Newsweek*, Special Davos Edition, December 2001–February 2002; Seamus Miller, "Osama bin Laden, Terrorism and Collective Responsibility," in *Terrorism and Justice*, ed. Coady and O'Keefe, 43–57; Aleksandar Pavkovic,

Arabian peninsula and the defeat of the new crusaders and Israel. His second and main aim is the recreation of the original Islamic congregation, the *umma*, an imaginary ideal religious state which never existed as an historical fact but which his words and actions have made into a political reality as a dream to be fulfilled by all true believers. Given bin Laden's ideal, nothing could be more destructive to the dream pyramid of pure Islamic values than the latest form of European instrumental reason: entirely indifferent and high-speed differentiation. It goes without saying that Osama bin Laden is chosen here only as a paradigmatic case of fundamentalist anxiety in the face of restless reason. But why should there be such anxiety? It would appear that the subsumption of everything within the *unified reason* of fundamentalist beliefs is profoundly challenged by modernity defined as a moment of "the acceleration of *Vernunftspaltung*."[39] After all, fundamentalism can only handle *bits* of modernity. The centripetal tendency of the pyramid of hierarchised belief is incompatible with the centrifugal tendency of runaway concept formation which relegates yesterday's ideas and facts to the dustbin of history or at least allocates them a new place in an ever new and rapidly morphing world.

Beyond the Fear of Reason – Tolerance – Hospitality

If under the onslaught of European and US ideas and practices the political unconscious of many non-Western cultures responds with resistance, this, in my view, has only in part to do with capitalist expansion and its military backup and much more with the kind of transformation to their cultures the adoption of the process of the splitting of reason in all its forms will bring about in the long run. After all, many cultures welcome economic, political, and social improvements of the kind enjoyed by France and Sweden. On the other hand, anxieties are typically produced by thought processes that are fundamentally alien to belief systems. China is sensitive to the introduction of critical discourse of the sort that has evolved out of the Enlightenment because in its long history such a form of reasoning has been almost entirely absent and when it did make a brief appearance was banned as criminal thought long before the present

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"Toward Liberation: Terrorism from a Liberation Ideology Perspective," in *Terrorism and Justice*, ed. Coady and O'Keefe, 58–71; Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America* (London and New York: Granta, 2002); Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 22 (2001).
[39] Ruthrof, "Modernity: Vernunftspaltung," 324, 327.

regime.[40] The notion of universal human rights, for example, was foreign
to Confucian thought until the nineteenth century, and to this very day the
insistence on personal rights still tends to be regarded as immoral to a
certain degree. Yet while instrumental reason, especially in its Boolean
form, poses no threat to a secular society such as China, it does so to fun-
damentalist belief systems. Whether they are aware of this relation is
irrelevant.

Closer to home, on what grounds do Christian churches even in the
most advanced political systems object to certain kinds of stem cell
research? Is it an unacknowledged fear that the particular splitting of
medical reason that is here occurring right in front of our eyes will some-
how further erode the hold the Church has so long enjoyed over the secu-
lar sphere? Now the boot is on the other foot, with the secular state accus-
ing the church of immorality, on the basis of democratic legal systems
built by a process of *Vernunftspaltung*, for the protection of children.

In some quarters, though, reason of the kind initiated during the Euro-
pean Enlightenment does appear to prevail in the end. After years of trad-
ing intellectual insults, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida finally came
close to presenting a unified front on the question of extremism. In inter-
views arranged and published by Giovanna Borradori in 2003, Habermas
repeated his long-standing insistence on the incomplete project of moder-
nity and the fundamental threshold of the European Enlightenment as a
benchmark for global cultures, while Derrida offered a critique of the
notion of tolerance, first theorised by John Locke (1683), arguing for a
new form of *global hospitality*.[41] Such impulses are useful guidelines if we
wish to leave behind us the hyperdiscursivity of much of our current
theorisations in order to acknowledge a set of post-Enlightenment princi-
ples worth defending.

Conclusion

Perhaps it would be wise to restrict culture to good beer and sausages,
wine and bouillabaisse, bamboo brandy and dim sims, ice cold beer and
prawns on the barbie, to reasoning in all its forms and hospitality widened
to include every decent human being, and an extended hand to whoever is

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[40] Yingchi Chu, "Why Does China Fear Critical Discourse?" (paper presented at
the conference "Civilization and Fear," organised by the University of Silesia,
Ustron, Poland, September 2010).
[41] Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen
Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,
2003), 71–74, 75–81, 124–28, 127–30, 161f.