Crisis of the Republic: Memory, History, and the Hermeneutics of Citizenship

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Dedication

This dissertation is for Jennifer, to whom I owe so much more than this simple dedication could even begin to repay.

Table of Contents

Introduction

I.   Politics and History

Recently, there has been a surge of attention focused on the question of historical memory, much of which has been dedicated to tracing out its political manifestations: how historical memory impacts the contemporary well-being of nation-states, or various collectivities embedded within nation states. This body of literature as a whole covers a wide range of episodes, from slavery reparations (Spinner-Halev 2012), to holocaust memorials (Booth 1999), to Native American land claims (Hendrix 2008), and is largely concentrated on tracing the specific ways in which historical memory plays a role in politically traumatic episodes, "in countries where the past is one of grievous injury, where large sections of the population have been silenced by mass violence". (Rahman 2010, 62) Typically, these grievous historical episodes are characterized as ones in which the weighty and difficult memories of trauma produce a contemporary situation where politics is necessarily truncated due to the fact that memory is 'out of joint'. In writing about contemporary war trials, Michael Ignatieff neatly summarizes this idea when he describes these troubled communities as "not living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies" (Ignatieff 1997, 15). In Ignatieff's precise formulation, historical memory appears to come to the fore as an important component of politics when a political community is expressly navigating a transition from trauma to a 'healthier' set of political and social arrangements

The philosopher Avishai Margalit offers another, more comprehensive contribution to this type of discourse. In *The Ethics of Memory*, Margalit states that "collective memory has agents and agencies entrusted with preserving and diffusing it. One sort of agent should be of particular concern for those who are interested in the questions of what we should remember and what, if anything, we should forget…The agent I have in mind is the moral witness" (Margalit 2002, 147). Margalit, like Ignatieff, seems to anchor his conception of memory, and his role of 'moral witness' in the situation of 'transitional justice'. Also like Ignatieff, Margalit's ethics generally is similarly burdened with responding to an immediate and catastrophic environment. Margalit asserts that "what we expect from a moral witness is an elucidation of the dark and sinister character of human sacrifice and of the torture and humiliation inflicted by evil regimes" (Margalit 2002, 170). Again, we see the recourse to historical memory when describing a social response to 'evil regimes'.

While not denying the importance, or the catastrophic nature of those historical episodes, it seems that allying historical memory almost exclusively to such examples works to legitimate a certain arrangement of politics from a more critical reading. Specifically, if these instances of extreme political instability are to be taken as paradigmatic examples of history and memory being 'out of joint', does that then imply that stable liberal democratic political systems have somehow all 'correctly' ordered their relationship to the various strains of memory that run throughout their history? Does liberalism present itself as being a 'post-historical' political arrangement, able to surmount or settle definitively with the issues surrounding historical memory that plague

political regimes 'in transition'? Margalit seems to believe so, writing in the introduction to *The Ethics of Memory*, "a democratic regime, so it seems to me, anchors its legitimacy not in the remote past but in the current election. It would seem, therefore, that liberal democracies are exempt from an orientation to the past and rest their power on their vision of the future. Dwelling on the past in a democracy is as irrational as crying over spilt milk" (Margalit 2002, 11-12). By separating the functioning of power and politics from memory, is he allowing this categorical distinction of historical/non-historical regimes to serve as an ideological barrier to questions that we should be able to pose to liberal democratic regimes?

This dissertation will argue that, far from transcending history, or thinking of its politics in non-historical terms, even stable, engagement with contemporary politics needs to begin with the acknowledgement that political communities are fundamentally historical communities. The failure to do so is not simply academic, but works to create political conditions in which a certain conception of citizenship can emerge that fundamentally disempowers citizens as political actors. To help illuminate that connection between a political-historical sense and the emergence of a certain idea of citizenship, I would like to turn to the democratic theory of Sheldon Wolin, who I believe offers a strong argument about just how this historical understanding of the political community is connected to issues central to contemporary citizenship.

II: The Presence of the Past and the Crisis of the Present

How Wolin analyzes modern conceptions of citizenship, and how it relates to the possibility of democratic activity within a political community centers around what he

sees a certain type of loss within contemporary citizenship, and this loss is essential to our claims about the urgency of seeing contemporary societies as historical. The democratic loss that he charts is, according to Wolin, our contemporary failure to exist as 'political beings', by which he means the growing lack of, "our capacity for developing into beings who know and value what it means to participate in and be responsible for the care and improvement of our common and collective life," (S. S. Wolin 1989, 139) and actively "originating or initiating cooperative action with others" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 150). But I argue that, for Wolin, what is lost is not just a general sense of taking part in action, or perhaps a consequence of the rise of political apathy, but something more central and important. What is key is that, for Wolin, democracy requires, "a citizen who can become an interpreting being, one who can interpret the present experience of the collectivity, reconnect it to past symbols, and carry it forward" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 141). A democratic citizen, for Wolin, is one that actively engages in the process of interpreting the past of one's political community in the hopes of engaging in democratic action to carry to community into the future. I would like to make the argument that Wolin's crisis of democracy, or perhaps a crisis of citizenship, is, at bottom, a hermeneutic-interpretive crisis. If democracy is to be pursued, then it must be pursued at least in part on this hermeneutic-interpretive level, which means that the more a society sees itself in strictly non-historical terms, or that denies the importance of its historicity, the more difficult it becomes to carry forward a conception of citizenship that is democratic, in Wolin's sense of the word. All of these various concerns culminate, I believe, in a powerful theoretical idea that appears in *The Presence of the Past,* but does not receive extended treatment by

Wolin himself: the idea of democracy as entailing a 'public hermeneutic'. Even though Wolin largely ignorers this idea, I argue that it offers us a robust way not only to understand the various concerns that Wolin has regarding democracy and citizenship.

Wolin's crisis of citizenship and is returned to and elaborated upon by Wolin in his most recent work, *Democracy Inc*. Here Wolin writes of what he sees as a full-blown and fully matured crisis in American citizenship and a nearly obliterated existence of American democracy. What is *not* held onto is the hermeneutic nature of political life. I assert that while Wolin's overall political crisis is a powerful diagnosis of modern politics and his connection of historical memory to a structuring of permissible/impermissible politics is similarly important, the diagnosis he offers in *Democracy Inc* is necessarily incomplete because he departs from the immensely historical theorization that characterized *The Presence of the Past*. What was so promising about Wolin's work in *The Presence of the Past*, linking potentials for democracy and citizenship to this conception of a 'public hermeneutic' disappears in his later work, to the detriment of the overall project.

In the chapters that follow I hope to accomplish two interrelated theoretical (political) tasks: using historical material I will deepen and flesh out the Wolin problematic that he begins to develop in *The Presence of the Past*, by insisting on relationship between citizenship and this idea of a 'public hermeneutic', and from there developing a coherent theory of how politics can and should be understood hermeneutically. Secondly, by bringing Wolin into theoretical conversation with the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, I hope to return to Wolin's work an importance

that can come from more fully elaborating this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' and placing Wolin's theoretic project firmly within it. I believe that the development of this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' is important not only because it allows us to see political communities as immediately historical, but it also creates a condition by which that very historical understanding can be seen as a powerful force for the encouragement and development of Wolin's citizens who can perhaps exist more successfully as political beings. The work of Paul Ricoeur is important to this investigation because he engages in the very language that Wolin discards in his later work. That this language and perspective is lost in *Democracy Inc.*, renders Wolin's arguments more tenuous, so my hope that that by re-engaging this type of language and theoretical investigation, the deficits of the latter work can be overcome.

III.   Outline of the Work

In his essay, "Existence and Hermeneutics", Paul Ricoeur argues that in putting together a philosophy that is both hermeneutic and phenomenological, there are two ways to do so, the short route and "the long route, the one I propose to travel" (Ricoeur 2007, 6). In the spirit of this 'long route' of Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy, these dissertations take a bit of a circuitous route to get from Wolin to Ricoeur. Although it is a bit of an indirect route, I believe the journey will be fruitful because it produces an enhanced conception of the relation between hermeneutics, the past, and politics, within which to situate both Wolin and Ricoeur, as well as the relations between the two thinkers.

The first two chapters present a detailed analysis of Wolin's work in democracy, focusing specifically on *The Presence of the Past* and *Democracy Inc*. In these chapters I attempt to demonstrate the way that Wolin's work almost unconsciously utilizes this idea of a hermeneutic philosophy. Despite the fact that Wolin does not offer a sustained theory of interpretation within his democratic theory, I believe that his idea of democracy, can be best understood by taking greater account of the way in which a certain relationship between history and politics animates his early concerns. Chapter two is an extended analysis of how this relationship between history and politics, this spectral 'public hermeneutics' that we find in Wolin's early work on democracy drops away in *Democracy Inc*., and how the loss of that hermeneutic concern weakens his overall theoretical project. From there I argue that a more robust conception of democracy as a 'public hermeneutics' can strengthen Wolin's work, reanimating the importance of his political concerns and his political project more generally.

Chapter three is where the detour begins. If we are commit to this Wolin/Ricoeur understanding of citizenship, we need to arrive at a conception of politics that primarily involves acts of interpretation. I begin by forwarding a conception, borrowed by Paul Ricoeur, of hermeneutics that is 'ontological rather than simply epistemological'. What I mean by this move is that we cannot simply understand hermeneutics as a method of investigation, but as what Ricoeur refers to as the 'universal problem'. For Ricoeur, this means that our entire world and our existence within it must be understood hermeneutically, we relate to every part of our world through the ongoing collective and individual acts of interpretation. Or, as he writes in *Lectures On Ideology and Utopia*,

"what is a relation to the conditions of existence if not already an interpretation?" (Ricoeur 1986, 144). I outline an understanding of politics as a realm of competition over what will be define as 'imaginary' and 'interpretative' elements, which is further developed through an analysis of the Funeral Oration from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, showing how political speech constructs what Nicole Loreaux calls 'social imaginaries'. I develop the larger social importance of these imaginaries by turning to Cornelius Castoriadis, who helps us to see how these institutions function in society and how they serve as important parts of our political world. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, Castoriadis is a very important step forward, and an even more important half a step back. Though he helps draw our attention to the symbolic nature of politics, his theorization, which separates the historical from the creative (the democratic, in his terminology) fails to see how hermeneutics, as a process of interpretation of inherited symbols and ideas, might function as a resource for the construction of the symbolic nature of society that he links to democracy.

Chapter four helps us to remedy some of the deficiencies in Castoriadis' work by turning to the writings of Niccolo Machiavelli. I argue, following J.G.A. Pocock, that we need to see Machiavelli as a theorist concerned with the idea of natural decay and corruption, but I also argue that history is a means by which Machiavelli believes communities can stave off that decay. While Machiavelli is far from offering us a 'hermeneutical' conception of politics, he does take an important step in that direction: that is, how institutions have been interpreted over time is Machiavelli's key concern and

he posits a very strong relationship between interpretation, practice, and the political health of the community.

In addition, I believe that Machiavelli offers an important argument concerning the relationship between historical memory and political practice. In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli writes of the 'return to first principles' but the question remains just why and how these first principles must be returned to, and how a republic might be able to return to them? Is he positing a type of political nostalgia? In answering this pressing question, we will see just how important to Machiavelli's political thinking his concern for interpretation truly is. I argue that, instead of political nostalgia, Machiaveli is offering these first principles as a motivational force for powerful political activity and creativity.

Chapter five expands upon the connection between the interpretation of history and citizenship by analyzing the writings of Max Weber. I contend that in his writings on Nationalism, Weber presents us with an idea of the nation as a 'community of memory' as a means to enlargen citizen responsibility and action and to counteract the 'crushing tendencies' of bureaucracy and capitalism in a disenchanted age. This chapter serves as a bit of a bridge of sorts, tying the types of dynamics that we see in operation in Machiavelli's work with the more contemporary political concerns that Wolin seems to have regarding contemporary citizenship and political life. What is most important for my analysis of Weber is the way in which he refuses to empty his concept of citizenship of historical content and simply think of them as abstract entities. Instead, Weber offers a very distinct understanding of citizenship as a category that can only be thought of with the 'heritage' of its own historical lineage, but a lineage of a specific sort. Weber asserts

that descendants must be able to recognize a certain commonality with their ancestors, while not being unduly constrained by the past actions of those very same ancestors. In this way, Weber highlights the difficulty of thinking of contemporary citizenship as a category shot through with history, memory and acts of interpretation, even though it is one of the only things Weber believes we still have recourse to in our disenchanted age. My departure from Weber concerns the way he theorizes memory as part of the nation itself in a way that seems to allow for very little difference, which can very easily become a formula for thinking about citizenship and memory directly from the perspective of the state, or other hierarchical positions, which Wolin would take great issue with and I believe Ricoeur allows us to avoid.

Chapter six locates the work of Paul Ricoeur firmly within the discussion of citizenship, history, and interpretation that has emerged thus far. The addition of Ricoeur allows us to move from the Weberian conception of the state to a more phenomenological conception of memory and citizenship where the citizen exists in relation to the state but our mode of thinking is, to some degree, 'de-essentializes' the state in a way that eludes Weber's own analysis. Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy will allow us to highlight some of Wolin's own democratic concerns. By more fully engaging this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' through the hermeneutical impulses of Ricoeur's philosophy, we can view Wolin's democratic theory through a lens that offers us not just clarity, but a means to substantialize some of the concerns Wolin has but he himself does not fully articulate. It also allows us, by tying citizenship and democracy to a flesh out conception of this idea of a 'public hermeneutic', allows to avoid the deficiencies that Wolin's later work on

democratic theory seems to exhibit, and see this re-invigorated theory of democracy as a

vital and important means to think of our collective existence.

Chapter One

But of course, the act of writing a constitution is never the end of the story.
-Josiah Ober, *Athenian Legacies*

I.   **Sheldon Wolin: Citizenship in America**

Sheldon Wolin asserts that political theory "is primarily a civic and secondarily an academic activity" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 1). If political theory is to occupy both of these positions, this means that any properly theoretical investigation must illuminate a corresponding civic or political problematic. In *The Presence of the Past*, the critical investigation that Wolin is interested in is "collective existence and with the political experiences of power to which it gives rise," (S. S. Wolin 1989, 1) and Wolin conducts this general inquiry through several direct theoretical investigations centered around understandings of constitutionalism and meditations on the political importance of the American bicentennial celebrations of the late 1980's. However, this constitutional-commemorative context serves as a theoretical lens to illuminate what for Wolin is a larger political crisis: a crisis of contemporary American[1] citizenship and the loss of a mode of being most easily defined as immediately political, understood by Wolin to mean, "our capacity for developing into beings who know and value what it means to participate in and be responsible for the care and improvement of our common and collective life" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 139). Wolin later makes the more explicit claim that this is not simply a general lack of 'political' being or awareness, but is a condition that renders citizens less than capable of engaging in democratic practices where, "ordinary

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[1] Though specifically American in its immediate context, the manner with which Wolin elaborates his argument seems to support the idea that his contention is concerning citizenship under conditions of modern power and systems of political representation and, in his own words, de-politicization.

individuals are capable of creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment" (S. Wolin 1995, 58). This stunting of the capacity of citizens to act *as* (more) democratic participants serves as the pivot point around which his meditations revolve, and forms the 'civic' component to his critical-theoretical enterprise.

Before we can grasp the contours of Wolin's 'crisis of citizenship', it is imperative that we understand exactly what Wolin means by 'citizen': how he theorizes this term will impact how he comprehends the accompanying crisis. In doing so, one element immediately stands out as the primary thrust of his theorization: a rejection of the abstract 'empty' citizen of the contract theory tradition. As Wolin himself makes clear, "in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the memory less person was said to exist in a state of nature where no social, political economic distinctions existed…the same lack of historicality surrounds the society that results from the Rawlsian contract. It begins with no past, no legacy of deeds or misdeeds, nothing to remember" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 142). In rejecting the 'abstract citizen' as a suitable theoretical model, Wolin is making two important but interrelated points.

The first point is primarily theoretical: the notion of the 'abstract citizen' is a poor way to understand the very category of citizenship. Wolin believes that what the category discards in order to achieve better philosophical 'purchase' are in fact essential. In a review of the work of John Rawls, Wolin writes, "Rawls's fiction[2] is tantamount to a denial of the contemporary political relevance of those historical scars inflicted on particular groups that helped to shape not only their identities but their notions of political

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[2] The fiction that Wolin is referring to here is, of course, Rawls's use of the 'abstract citizen', behind the veil of ignorance' as an adequate starting point for a properly 'political' philosophy.

rationality" (S. S. Wolin 2004, 538).   What is lost in this highly de-contextualized manner of theorizing citizenship is precisely that: the context.   It is the context of citizenship, that for Wolin produces the identity and rationality of the citizen, or citizens understood collectively.   Therefore, any theoretical enterprise that attempts to 'understand' the category of citizen as an abstract category may in fact be able to grasp it, but for Wolin, there is an unbridgeable divide between 'abstract category' and 'citizen'. One can theorize about one or the other, but not both simultaneously.

The second point that Wolin is more difficult to extrapolate; it is much more political and contains a certain amount of irony. Through Wolin initially seems to be interested in discredit the abstract category itself, he actually ends up buttressing the idea of the abstract citizen as a tool for understanding contemporary politics, while simultaniously disparaging (despairing) the conditions that make this connection possible.   As Wolin notes, the emergence of the 'abstract citizen' is not simply a contemporary construction, but is the result of a long lineage of theorization about politics, finding significant traction with the contract theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, *The Federalist Papers* and, notably for Wolin, *The Constitution of the United States* itself.   This inclusion is quite important to Wolin's formulation for a constitution, as he sees it, is much more than simply a theoretical document or enumeration of rights and responsibilities. Instead, a constitution must be thought of as "about power: about what power is to be used for, by whom, and according to what understandings and justifications, as well as to privilege certain public meanings and symbols…a constitution is an attempt to constitute the conditions that will favor certain

forms of politics over others" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3-4). Thus, if a constitution is a way of (theoretically) organizing relations of power and politics, we must assume that the formulations contained within will have immediate and immense political consequences on those relations. This then, forms the heart of Wolin's second injunction against the idea of 'abstract citizen'. It may be a faulty way of fully grasping the contours of what can (ideally should) be considered a citizen, but it has not only entered our theoretical lexicon, but has been deployed by documents of immense rhetorical and political import. What are the consequences of such theorization, what political effects follow from this legitimizing of a certain category of citizenship, and one type of self-understanding, rather than another?

For Wolin, the consequences are immense, and this ties his two claims together in an immediate political question. If citizens are constructed by context, and if the overriding theoretical and political context that we find ourselves in today is one that has largely been influenced by this abstract category of citizen self-understanding, what type of citizen has thus been produced. Wolin posits the idea that what has been constructed is largely an idea of citizen as object rather than subject. In his analysis of the political theories of *The Federalist Papers*, Wolin notes that one of the most fundamental political principles of the document was the idea of federal power being exerted directly upon in significant and continuous manner. For Wolin, how this idea is legitimated ties directly into the category of 'abstract citizenship'. The legitimacy of this type of national power deployment was largely produced, "by abstracting the citizen from his local culture and reconstituting him as a new kind of being, one who would be the object of national

administration rather than an active subject in local self-government" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 134). Here, Wolin demonstrates that by producing an idea of citizen that is highly de-contextualized and 'abstract', a certain deployment of power is able to arise and, in time, become quite accepted. This arrangement of power works to produce not simply a citizen as object but also one that lacks a certain type of political nature: a strong sense of subjectivity, activity and responsibility for politics, whether quotidian or exceptional.

If the abstraction of citizenship produces a citizen as object, with a truncated sense of political responsibility and inability to 'act' politically, is there some type of counterforce that Wolin thinks we may have recourse to as a political antidote to this underdeveloped capacity? Throughout *The Presence of the Past*, Wolin invokes the idea of 'local culture' as being able to fill just such a role, but what exactly does Wolin mean with this idea of 'local culture'? And moreover, if this political crisis is directly tied to the inability of citizens to engage in democratic practices, what are the immediate connections between local culture and the idea of democratic practice, as Wolin understands them?

II.   Local Culture and Plurality

In his essay, *E Pluribus Unum*, Wolin offers some striking claims on behalf of this idea of local culture that prove to be fundamental for understanding Wolin's ideas of democracy and a democratically developed citizen. In this essay he contrasts what he sees as a centralizing tendency in the political landscape of The United States, *Unum,* which Wolin characterizes as "political exodus from a condition of political polytheism to one of political monotheism" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 124), with the idea of local pluralities,

Pluris, which are understood by Wolin to be "the diverse political cultures of the separate states…local shrines identified with particular places, values that cannot be separated from the physical places where they have been experienced" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 125). Wolin sees this 'political monotheism' mostly clearly in the claim to national unity "in which lineage, cultural homogeneity, religious uniformity, and political institutions are represented as a seamless web" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 124) and produces a particular deployment of national power by emphasizing certain rhetorical and political themes. As Wolin notes, "Thus, *Unum's* pattern is woven of such primary elements as national unity, patriotism, centralization, and state. Its subthemes are power, majesty and control" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 123). Ultimately, this centralization of power produces the very same effects that Wolin links to the emergence of the 'abstract' citizen: a powerless, but highly power-receptive populace, one that becomes, "the object of national administration rather than an active subject in local self-government" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 1). In fact, this idea of *Unum* that Wolin is trying to develop exists very much in that same mode of political rationality. Power is not only reinforced, but also removed, from local centers of activity, to more distant and concentrated places.

If this centralizing tendency of *Unum* produces a concentration of power that is substantially removed from the level of the citizen which then makes the deployment of political power easier and more consistent, the diversity of local cultures represented in the idea of *Pluris* would seem to speak to a breaking up of that smooth functioning of power. In the specifically American context that he is offering as his field of investigation in this essay, Wolin sees these cultures as the individual states versus the

centralized national state, although in other writings Wolin has seen these 'local shrines' as a much more diverse array of locations and institutions. More important to this investigation however, is Wolin's insistence not simply on the ability of local culture to disrupt and complicate the functioning of political power, but that active and engaged citizenship can only emerge from within this array of local cultures. In the essay "What Revolutionary Action Means Today", he explicitly links this idea of a citizenship with this broad yet robust collection of local connections. Here, Wolin defines a 'political being' as "a person whose existence is located in a particular place and draws its sustenance from circumscribed relationships: family, friends, church, neighborhood, workplace, community, town, and city. These relationships are the sources from which political beings draw power…and that enable them to act together" (S. S. Wolin 1982, 27). In connecting the potential for citizenship with a certain array of relationships and locations, Wolin is reinforcing, though slightly recasting Hannah Arendt's connection between political freedom and proximity. In her work, *On Revolution*, Arendt draws the conclusion that, "because of the enormous weight of the [federal] Constitution and of the experience in founding a new body politic that the failure to incorporate the townships and the town-hall meetings, the original spring of all political activity in the country, amounted to a death sentence for them" (Arendt 1990, 9). While Wolin and Arendt have several contrasting concerns, her discussion of the ultimately irony of the American Revolution contains strong echoes of Wolin's concern over the apolitical 'universality' of *unum*. Arendt's tragic conclusion that the local centers of political activity produced strong political/revolutionary movements and longings for political freedom that

eventually settled on a national form of political management that severely threatened the very continuity of survival of those local forms and locations of political expression, tracks neatly with Wolin's own trajectory of the American political experience and the diminishing capacity for strong political citizenship. In both cases, it is the neglect of these local centers of politics or (for Arendt) action and freedom in favor of a more removed center of that power proves to be the important, development. And inextricably bound up with that question is the issue of the capacity for citizens to engage in continuous, meaningful political activity.

But is this opposition simply a matter of multiplicity versus unity, or is there something within this condition of plurality that Wolin is attempting to bring to light? By setting this initial conflict between *Pluris* and *Unum* in the American, and more specifically immediately post-colonial period, Wolin offers a bit more detail. In this context, Wolin notes that "*unum* is the mytheme for the transformation of several states, with their diverse and conflicting loyalties…into something new, a "consolidation of power," as the Founders described it, a unified people whose oneness would for the immediate future be represented by the state" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 128). Seen as a rhetorical and political tactic at work within *The Federalist Papers*, which, for Wolin, serve as the clearest distillation of this theme, the idea of Unum becomes the centerpiece of a "notion of theory which favors the reduction of difference to enable us to advance generalizations" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 135). Thus, it is not simply a matter of numerical multiplicity, but recognition of a certain type of cultural, or at the very least political, diversity that can resist a the drive to generalization and uniformity that Wolin sees as

very important to the emergence of a potentially democratic citizenry. Whereas, in Wolin's estimation, the 'abstract citizen' represents the emergence of a political construction that allows for power to operate relatively easily upon citizens from a distance and at a substantial remove from their own individual participation, the existence of local cultures would, in effect, act as a buffer to the smooth deployment of power over citizens.

To reinforce this point, Wolin refers to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws,* specifically his ideas concerning decentralized power. On Wolin's reading, Montesquieu "adopted the idea that inherited rights and aristocratic institutions formed a natural barrier to absolutism, but he expanded it to include a complex array of local institutions and local bodies of law and custom" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 131), and saw these local bodies and inherited rights as a means to 'complicate power' much the same way that Wolin sees the multiplicity of the *pluris* (at least potentially) complicating the functioning of power on the national level. And where Montesquieu saw these inherited and local qualities as so many barriers against absolutism, for Wolin, this plurality might be able to serve as a barrier against a continuously anti-democratic functioning of power. But this brings us to an important and difficult complication: it seems that the counter-example Wolin offers to that of the 'abstract' citizen is one mired in the context of aristocratic privileges and rights. To say that this context is not empty or abstract may in fact be a plausible thesis, but if the alternative to 'abstract national politics' is ''substantive aristocratic-feudalism' does that in any way allow for a political and cultural system where 'ordinary individuals' would be any more able to act in common? Aristocracy may be a barrier

against absolutism, but that, in and of itself does not make it a bastion for democracy. How then is it that Wolin can utilize this conception of largely aristocratic rights, privileges and legal arrangements to defend a properly democratic conception of cultural patterns and diversities? How does Wolin attempt to shift from aristocracy to democracy within the idea of cultural or local practice and is he successful?

III.   Democracy's *Birthright*

Wolin looks to wed the feudal/aristocratic idea of *pluris* with the idea of commonality inherent in *demos* through his development of the concept 'birthright' as a political/critical term. For Wolin, the idea of birthright stands in opposition to the abstract 'contract' just as *pluris* stands in opposition to the idea of *unum*. Whereas the contract[3] posits "a memoryless person…it begins with no past, no legacy of deeds or misdeeds, nothing to remember. The contract depends upon collective amnesia," (S. S. Wolin 1989, 142) the birthright, "was an inherited identity…a collective identity, bound up with a people and extending over time." (S. S. Wolin 1989, 137). That the birthright is pregnant with an 'inherited identity', a pervasive historical quality that the contract explicitly neglects is what Wolin believes preserve the diversity of the aristocratic *pluris*. But if the condition of the birthright is one of history and identity, what of the content and why is that of political importance? For Wolin, it is the very condition, historical and inherited identity that provides the substance of the act of 'taking part' in politics. This is

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[3] For Wolin, the theoretical concept of the contract is primarily the invention of the 'contract theorists' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while updated by contemporary thinkers such as John Rawls, but in the context of the essay, he is not simply looking at the political theoretical deployment of this term but also the uncanny way in which, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the concept has become so widespread as to impact the self-understanding of citizens and political actors. So the criticism of the contract in this essay is both a theoretical rejoinder to the tradition of contract theory as well as a civic rejoinder to rethink the impact of contract theory on collective political understanding in the contemporary world.

the insidious result of the 'universalized' citizen of the social contract, by rendering citizens equal only insofar as the contract strips them of the inherited conditions (birthrights) the theorist has subsequently removed perhaps the necessary conditions of political consciousness while not solving the political social and economic issues that these conditions point to. As Wolin notes, in his critique of Rawls:

> The original position imposes a certain sameness upon beings who, prior to that moment, would otherwise be dissimilar. If we accept that inequality is sociologically richer than Rawls's category of 'disadvantaged' suggests – that it is grounded in cycles of poverty, ignorance, crime, and disease, and is a matter of everyday pain and despair to many – then the suspension of that experience is, in effect, a discounting of it. It is difficult to recognize Rawls's conception of an abstracted equality and undistracted rationality as a plausible account of human actors, since those actors have been deprived of essential human attributes, such as historical memory, and retain only the barest social consciousness. (S. S. Wolin 2004, 548)

Thus, Wolin's introduction of the idea of the birthright is an attempt to provide us with a richer social consciousness and overcome the 'bad conscience' of the contract tradition. Although Wolin does not use the term explicitly, it appears that Wolin conceives of citizenship in a more phenomenological manner. He writes, "the idea of a birthright denies that we are 'thrown into the world.' It asserts, instead, that we come into the world preceded by an inheritance." (S. S. Wolin 1989, 138). In this temporally and historically structured conception of citizenship, Wolin is nearly recreating Alfred Schutz's concept of a 'social actor' that is found in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Schutz links the very definition of the acting agent to this strong sense of what one might call a 'thick temporality', where **inherited** elements of the past must be seen as continually informing and affecting the motivations, means and practices of social action and interaction. These elements force us to understand that "motivational understanding…is not tied to the world of directly experienced social reality (*Umwelt*). It can take as its object any action of the more distant worlds of contemporaries (*Mitwelt*),

or predecessors (*Vorwelt*), or even to a certain extent of successors (*Folgewelt*)" (Schutz 1967, 30). A contemporary social actor can only "come to know the world of my predecessors through records and monuments. These have the status of signs, regardless of whether my predecessors intended them as signs for posterity or merely for their own contemporaries" (Schutz 1967, 209). Ultimately, this condition of absolute 'pastness' that Schutz attributes to both predecessors and the larger 'world of predecessors' does not mean that there is a similar lack of connection between contemporary social actors and their various predecessors. Although there can be no purely social or simultaneous connection, the 'records', 'monuments', and 'signs' that make up our contemporary understanding of these predecessors inhabit and color our contemporary existence.

Schutz's insistence on understanding our contemporary world as filled with signs and monuments (both consciously and unconsciously constructed as such), helps to produce an understanding of a lived environment in which this previously lived world of predecessors still exists, and partially structures our field of action. As Paul Ricoeur notes, Schutz's work demonstrates how "the direct relationship of the I to the Thou and to the We is temporally structured from its very beginning. We are oriented, as agents and sufferers of actions, toward the remembered past, the lived present, and the anticipated future of other people's behavior (Ricoeur 1988, 113-114). This does not mean, however, that the actions of contemporaries are somehow fully determined by the inherited signs of the past. In this regard it is worth noting Ricour's apt characterizations of Schutz's social world as one in which agents are **oriented**, and that the contemporary world is **structured**, rather than **determined**.

This 'remembered past' that 'temporally structures' our acting world seems to be close to what Wolin is developing through his idea of the birthright, and perhaps helps us to clarify exactly what Wolin means by the 'inheritance' of the birthright. The birthright has "a historical quality without being merely historical. A birthright is defined by the historical moments when collective identity is collectively established or reconstructed (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140). The birthright is, for Wolin, intimately connected to memory and collective identity and goes beyond being simply a 'merely historical' phenomenon. It exerts a certain type of structure upon the contemporary world and the actions of individuals and groups therein, Wolin's idea of a birthright hopes to produce a self-understanding of citizenship as, not a determined outcome, but an identity largely conditioned by this web of historical and memorial relations.

In addition to the birthright being a means by which we can see our contemporary world as structured (though not determined) by signs and monuments of our predecessors, there is a further importance that Wolin sees to the idea of birthright. In proposing citizenship as something that is animated by the categories of history, inheritance, memory and identity, Wolin believes that citizenship can then be more clearly seen as "an inherited obligation to use it, take care of it, pass it on, and, hopefully, improve it" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 137). He seems to be convinced that it is only by locating a self-understanding of our 'citizenship' within these thick categories of belonging, that by re-acquainting citizenship with the concept of birthright, and all that it entails, we can begin to shift to that more action based concept of citizenship, and recapture something of the participatory ideal that is "not primarily about 'taking part,' as in election or office

holding. It means originating or initiating cooperative activity with others" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 150). But this understanding of citizenship as activity seems to lead us into a bit of a paradox concerning the relationship of the 'inheritance' of a birthright (something seemingly oriented to the past) with the ability or freedom to act (something that is seemingly oriented toward the future). This paradox can only be resolved by looking more closely at the very content of Wolin's birthright, which I believe allows us to see just how a relationship between this orientation toward the past of the inheritance and the orientation to the future contained within the freedom of action are related.

IV: Democratic Preservation

The idea of the birthright initially seems to speak to the idea of preservation, that an understanding of citizenship that takes this idea of the birthright seriously has a vested interest in the preservation of something essential from the past and carry it into the present, and preserve it for the future. In this sense, it is again helpful to have recourse to Schutz. In characterizing a potential dynamic of the relationship between contemporaries and predecessors, Schutz asserts that, "what at first glance may appear to be a social relationship between myself and one of my predecessors will always turn out to be a case of one-sided Other-orientation on my part. The cult of ancestor worship is a good example of such orientation toward the world of predecessors" (Schutz 1967, 208). Is Wolin highlighting this type of relationship, does this conception of citizenship bears an elective affinity with a mentality of 'ancestor worship'? This seems plausible, especially given Wolin's pointed use of the English Philosopher Richard Hooker to explain and characterize the idea of birthright. Most notably, there seems to be a great deal of

preservation inherent in Hookers formulation (quoted positively by Wolin) that "so the act of a public society of men done five hundred years thence standeth as theirs who presently are of the same societies, because corporations are immortal; we were then alive in our predecessors, they in their successors to live still" (Hooker 1989, 92). Wolin has elsewhere argued that Hooker is in fact a major theoretical forerunner of English conservative thought, noting that, "Hooker…was…far closer to the kind of constitutional conservatism which began to take shape in the seventeenth century and received its most distinctive expression with Burke" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 29). What is the impact of this theoretical lineage on Wolin's idea of the birthright? Does this produce (or re-produce) a type of politics of nostalgia or Burkean historical consciousness?

Because Wolin connects the idea of the birthright to the establishment of collective identity, what needs to be grappled with is the idea (found in Hooker) of collective wisdom and reason and how it directly relates to the connection of contemporaries and predecessors, and what resulting relationship that might have to the Wolin's own democratic ideals. Given Hooker's "limited faith in [individual] reason"[4] (S. S. Wolin 1955, 36), as well as his strong Christian/Aristotelian conviction that "society was a natural grouping" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 34), Wolin demonstrates how Hooker is forced to elaborate and defend to a certain conception of collective wisdom in order to provide a type of rational basis to political authority. For Hooker, this collective wisdom does not come from any currently assembled deliberative body or collective but

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[4] Although Wolin notes that this 'limited faith' is something that the conservative political/theoretical lineage (most clearly discerned in Burke own doctrine of prejudice) shares, he takes great pains to demonstrate that Hooker (as well as Burke) is far from being an 'irrationalist'. Rather, because of the strong religious element in Hooker's writings, humankind must never be understood apart from its 'sinful nature' and natural imperfection.

from "a kind of historical reason shaped by the experience and wisdom of other ages." (S. S. Wolin 1955, 36). Moreover, "nor was it the collective reason of a particular time that was superior, but rather the shared agreement which linked together past and present generations" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 37). This type of collective wisdom, an explicit 'linking together' of the past and present works to minimize the political present insofar as, "the present moment is without enduring significance, and therefore without claims, except in relation to a divine and an historical order" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 47). Given this active divine presence, politics becomes little more than a matter of preservation, and the imperfect world of human reason can only be effectively ruled by this type of trans-historical collective wisdom that will always act in deference to, 'our venerable predecessors'.

This is not to say that Hooker, or conservatives tout court are simply defenders of a status quo or nostalgic dreamers of a type of restoration. Hooker, as Wolin notes, was to some extent an advocate of reform, but only of a certain type: reform that takes as both its bearings and its designs the very 'venerable predecessors' that inform Hooker's collective wisdom. In this sense, then, we see that "reform, in short, was a method of continuity. Hooker also voiced…that the statesman mush cast his eye back to earlier generations and forward to succeeding ones if he is to preserve continuity" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 9). If politics is to be ordered by a type of divine history and collective wisdom that sees as its most important task that of preservation, does that seem to negate the very type of 'politicalness' that Wolin is trying to recapture, the idea of citizens as actively sharing in power and collectively working to 'create new cultural patterns'? If society is

to be structured along the lines of this divine/historical/collective rationality that is clearly

set apart from and above claims of individual rationality (which are at least slightly

suspect), as well as claims of contemporary collective rationality, (which exist apart from

this divine ordering of history and therefore are at least potentially dangerous and partial)

authority has, as its as its ultimate justification and referent, the continuity of this

historical wisdom and, only as a distant second, contemporary political consent. This is

made clear in Hooker's idea of 'tacit acceptance'[5] where, in disputing the Puritan idea of

the election of clergy by a congregation, Hooker believes that surrendering this power for

convenience and the smooth functioning of authority is legitimate and desireable, as

active consent is not as important as the maintenance of the organic society and

preservation of the historical claims upon which it is based (Hooker 1989). Wolin sums

up as such: "consent nowhere played the role in Hooker's ideas that it did in Locke's: as

a rug under the feet of the governors, ready to be jerked out from beneath them by the

nervous fingers of the citizenry" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 43). Clearly, these strongly anti-

democratic elements that figure into this politics of preservation are all theoretical strands

that Wolin needs to extricate his theory from if the idea of the birthright is to have the

democratic consequences he believes it truly has.

These issues are not simply theoretical demands, but carry with them strong

contemporary political importance that have recently found modern elaboration in

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[5] For Wolin, this is another distinguishing characteristic of English conservative though, which he distinguishes from the consent based theories of English liberal thinkers like John Locke, although a type of 'tacit consent' plays a fairly prominent role in his own contract theories – a fact that Wolin curiously overlooks.

various arguments[6] that speak to the 'wisdom of the founders' and 'the original intent of the constitution' as examples of this type of 'collective wisdom' that must be preserved through strong political continuity and 'originalist' constitutional interpretation and jurisprudence. Jeremy Elkins, writing specifically about American constitutional thought notes that for originalism, "the meaning of the Constitution is simply and naturally given by the intentions of the founders…and the that greatness of the original Constitution lies in the fact that it did not merely establish, but was founded upon, a higher law – one grounded in the natural, divine order of things" (Elkins 2005, 284-285). Often, the natural law of originalist thought is directly tied into the Christian theological armature of Hooker; Charles Rice, for example, drawing largely on the thought of Augustine, writes that "the Constitution itself [is] subject to the higher natural law and the law of God" (Rice 2002, 57). Although much originalist jurisprudence makes reference to 'natural law' and eschews overt Christian theology, the Christian structure that Hooker uses largely animates the contours of 'natural law' in this rendering.

In addition, originalism often produces a type of political thought that can be seen as (at least) lukewarm and (at most) hostile toward the democratic will of the political community. Writing about the originalist thought of Harry Jaffa, Matthew Frank notes that Jaffa takes to task scholars of constitutional thought[7] "for expressing the view…that the 'values' embodied in the Constitution derive all their legitimacy from no source deeper than the will of the sovereign people" (Frank 1996, 392). For Jaffa, grounding

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[6] Although this type of political ideology is quite wide and varied, Wolin's major rhetorical targets in *The Presence of the Past*, include: politically, the nationalism of the Reagan administration; jurisprudentially, Robert Bork; and theoretically, *The Closing of the American Mind*, by Allan Bloom.
[7] Here, Jaffa is also taking to task the jurisprudence of Robert Bork and William Rehnquist, whom many people would associate with 'originalism'.

constitutional principles solely in the will of the people is directly equivalent to the idea

that "there is no foundation in reason for the distinction between right and wrong" (Jaffa

1994, 83) and instead we must remember, "it is not simply the will of the people that is to

be paramount under the Constitution by the rational and moral will, formed in accordance

with 'the laws of nature and of nature's God[8]'" (Jaffa 1994, 273). Although in this

rendering Jaffa does seem to combine the will of the people with natural law, it begs the

question just how much authority the will of the people can actually share with a divine

order? How much will do the people actually possess?

Not all originalist thinkers are, at least at initial glance, interested in

delegitimizing the will of the people. Keith Wittington defends originalism on the

grounds that it actually "best facilitates the realization of a political system grounded on

popular sovereignty" (Whittington 1999, 3); and much of his work is animated by, as

Susan Burgess notes, "a tension between a desire to remain true to the founders'

objective constitutional expression and a desire to foster subjective expression in popular

constitutional expression" (Burgess 2001, 932). By limiting the judicial branch to

originalist constitutional interpretation, it opens a space for creative, possibly democratic,

political activity: "Our inheritance from the founders is not just a law, but the power to

make law. The judicial adoption of originalism ensures that we do not squander that

inheritance" (Whittington 1999, 217). However, this tension between the objective

expression of the founders and the subjective expression of popular sovereignty is never

adequately balanced in Whittington's formulations and result in an attenuation of

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[8] Does this, then, mean that Jaffa's mentioning of the will of the people in this context is nothing more than the requisite lip service he feels he has to pay.

democratic potential that other forms of originalist thought also succumb to. In the first, there is a tension between the 'creative development' of the constitution and those parts that are beyond development. As Burgess notes, Whittington advocates "the regular practice of constitutional construction by the popular branches as a means of empower the people, through their agents, to continue to develop the Constitution – *at least that part of the Constitution that is not fixed by original intent*"[9] (Burgess 2001, 935). Given the sprawling adoration that Whittington has for the founders, to the point where "Whittington's work contains no direct criticism of the founding, and no indication of why he supports the founders' substantive political choices" (Burgess 2001, 934), and the breadth with which original intent can be utilized, just how much room does the Constitution truly have for 'development'? It seems that any true discussion of the democratic potential of Whittington's originalism hinges largely on the elaboration and specification of just what is 'fixed by original intent'.

If the strength of the Constitution, and the power of original intent, is not fixed by natural law, it must rely, as Whittington repeatedly declares, on the fact of sovereignty. "The Constitution is authoritative, that is, because it is the last sovereign will that existed" (Elkins 2005, 287), and that its adoption by the sovereign 'people' lends to it the credibility of sovereignty that makes originalism the correct treatment of the Constitution: it is the only form of interpretation that has full recourse to the sovereign will. In constructing the argument, Whittington is not blind to the mythology of the literal adoption of the Constitution by the sovereign people as such. He goes so far as to admit that the adoption of the constitution was not, and could not have been unanimous

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[9] Italics added.

and even states that popular sovereignty itself is a fiction and a metaphor. However,[10] Whittington believes that because the Constitution became accepted over time means that the metaphor of popular sovereignty can be justifiably used as the defining element of the Constitution. The authority of sovereignty was bestowed **retroactively** in Whittington's account and in his formula, "popular sovereignty is only ever possible in what has already passed" (Elkins 2005, 288). However, Whittington does not seem to see the democratic deficit in this conceptual schema. He believes that "by maintaining the principle that constitutional meaning is determined by its authors, originalism provides the basis for future constitutional deliberation by the people" (Whittington 1999, 156) and that "the existing Constitution is a placeholder for our own future expression of popular sovereignty" (Whittington 1999, 133). Instead of providing an actual groundwork for the production of actually existing sovereign power, Whittington places sovereignty, and thus the legitimate process of 'constitutional construction' beyond the reach of any actually existing (potentially) democratic people. As Elkins sums up the formula:

> Only by treating the sovereign as a past people that never was until after it was can we assure the sovereignty of a future people that won't be until it is past. For Whittington, the myth of the Constitution's enactment by the people serves not to open up the question of popular sovereignty and of the relationship of the people to the Constitution, but to render popular sovereignty as that which is always too early or too late. (Elkins 2005, 289)

The application of tacit consent to the founding, and the retroactive application of the myth of popular sovereignty upon the document itself bestows it with an authority that becomes impossible to replicate in the present, because we cannot retroactively apply tacit consent to contemporary political activity. As such, a 'deficit of sovereignty' will

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[10] Much like Hooker's idea of 'tacit consent'

always exist that Whittington's own legitimizing process, by definition, will not and cannot bestow upon contemporary politics. Thus, although Whittington attempts to justify originalism as a means to defend democracy, what he actually defends is sovereignty, and only sovereignty of a particular type, which is made possible by his own temporal application of sovereign authority. His constitutional theory, and its use of tacit consent may effectively demonstrate a more democratic or sovereign constitution, but it does so at the very expense of a sovereign contemporary citizenry.

This contemporary manifestation of a politics of continuity is in direct contrast to the dynamic that Wolin sets forth in *The Presence of the Past*. Though Wolin makes it clear that the intentions of the essays in the book 'revolve around the Constitution' to 'elicit further meanings' from the document itself, he flatly rejects the idea of meaning as being linked to some type of divine/historical province:

> Each angle is chosen in the belief that it will illuminate the present political condition. Circling the Constitution is not offered as a way of establishing the "real" meaning of it nor the "intent of the founders," both of which strike me as incoherent notions induced by a misplaced Biblicism. A constitution is not a revelation, and the Philadelphia Convention was not an epiphanic moment. (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3)

Moreover, Wolin's understanding of democracy in direct contrast to the politics of continuity represented in originalist thought. Throughout *The Presence of the Past*, as well as other later writings of Wolin, "Democracy is committed to the claim that experience with, and access to, power is essential to the development of the capacities of ordinary persons…power is…something to be used collaborative in order to initiate, to invent, to bring about" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 154). This explicit linking of 'ordinary people' to both 'power and 'invention' seem to run contrary to a politics framed by either 'natural law', 'god's law', or 'originalism': here, citizens are entrusted with an access to

sovereignty. Neither the restrictions that natural law places upon political creativity, nor the deficit of sovereignty that comes with tacit consent and authority of originalism are present in Wolin's understanding of democracy.

But this brings us to a certain paradox that needs unraveling. Sheldon Wolin is summarily rejecting the theoretical Biblicism that underscores 'original intent' while forwarding an alternative idea – the birthright – that quite consciously draws on biblical language and example,[11] and while also drawing quite consciously on a theorist, Richard Hooker, whom Wolin has identified elsewhere as one of the originators of the very type of divine/historical theorization that Wolin himself is writing in direct response to. How then does Wolin balance this idea of the birthright within a self-consciously democratic context that manages to draw on issues of collective identity, inheritance and historicity without having ultimate recourse to the divinely historical collective that Wolin identifies as a guiding thread of European (specifically English) conservative thought? How can a birthright enable a fully active and expressive 'politicalness' to "become incorporated in the everyday lives of countless people" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 150) instead of suppressing the political activities and potentialities of 'the present moment' under an historical authority that would render "the modern democratic overtones of an active popular will" (S. S. Wolin 1955, 43) nearly nonexistent, beyond the mere duty of preservation?

While Wolin indeed imbues the idea of 'birthright' with collective identity and the historical inheritances of ideas and memory, the very idea of inheritance is given a more contestable, and thus less firmly fixed definition: one that grasps historical material

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[11] In introducing the idea of the birthright into his theoretical discussion, Wolin initially draws upon the biblical story of Jacob and Esau.

(memories etc) without them serving as blinders that work to close off democratic activity. As Wolin notes, "we inherit from our fathers, but we are not our fathers[12]" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140), and it is this separation of inheritance (memory) from identity that he is pursuing through his discussion of the birthright, and which separates his concerns regarding historical memory from those of more conservative thinkers or from the various schools of constitutional originalism.

Rather than the inheritance of memory serving to fix ideas in place, Wolin locates the idea of the birthright within the very context of contestability. The most important element of Wolin's understanding of 'inheritance' is precisely the lack of finality or fixity, the need for continuous political activity to even comprehend what it is that is being inherited, and to elaborate our place in the world. As Wolin notes, "Historical things "are"; they have spatial and temporal attributes that can be described. But, as elements of a birthright, they have to be interpreted. Interpretation is not historical description but a theoretical activity concerned with reflection upon the meaning of past experience and of possible experiences" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140). These 'historical things' that make up our inheritance are fundamentally ambiguous, in that, "they are contestable; and because contestable, there is not absolute finality to the interpretation. Birthrights are transmitted, and because of their meaning will have to be reconsidered amidst difference circumstances" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140). Thus within Wolin's

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[12] This gendered use of language seems to serve a very specific political point in this essay (and in the collection of essays more generally). First, he seems to be using it to more succinctly compare his idea of the birthright with the biblical story, which is rooted in a gendered narrative. Secondly, this seems to be a strategic rhetorical ploy on Wolin's part to self-consciously critique the type of historical/political narrative that surrounds the familiar motif of the 'founding fathers'. In doing so, Wolin is not simply disrupting general ideas about democratic politics, but is specifically disrupting the coherence of that very type of narrative.

conception of birthright is the necessity of interpretation, which produces a demand for political activity in the present, rather than subordinate it to either fixed political ideals or historically constituted precepts of settled law. It is only in recognizing that the historical materials of the birthright manifest themselves as phenomena that must be interpreted before being understood and engaged with that he can maintain his concern with the democratic political capacity of citizens.   Historical material enables rather than constrains political activity only when it is accompanied by the ongoing necessity of interpretation.   The birthright is not simply the inheritance of a fixed and established collective identity but is in fact the very thing that, through the process of interpretation, the collective can use to reestablish and reconstitute its own identity.

It is here, within this ambiguous legacy of inheritance that Wolin's full concern with constitutional thought emerges. Wolin does not attempt to deny the importance or the centrality of the constitution as an historical and political document. In fact, it is precisely due to its political centrality that Wolin incorporates the idea of the constitution into his discussion, where he defines it as an indispensable part the 'lost' birthright of citizens that he hopes to recapture. But as perhaps the prime example of a birthright, a constitution necessarily carries with itself an ambiguous legacy in its very existence as an historical document and political product. As Wolin writes, "Thus, the Constitution is part of our inheritance. Its formation and contents can be described historically, but the interpretation of its origins and documents have been highly contestable subjects and remain so. No interpretation enjoys undisputed hegemony" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140). While on the one hand a constitution is a concrete historical document, a 'record of our

predecessors' to use Schutz's terminology, it remains for Wolin only partially known and thus incomplete. A constitution can only exist as a political resource if we are forced to continually interpret its meaning and purposes in light of contemporary situations and conditions. Why this interpretation is so important for Wolin, and what it allows us to understand about contemporary democratic practice and potential, has a direct link to the operations of historical memory in the context of contemporary politics.

That the act of interpreting a constitution is necessary if citizens are to engage their full political potential becomes clearer if we understand that "a constitution is simultaneously a political and a hermeneutical event" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). As a political event Wolin remarks that "Constitutions are not neutral or purely formal…Constitutions and their politics are about power: about what power is to be used for, by whom, and according to what understandings or justifications, as well as to privilege certain public meanings and symbols" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). What Wolin is trying to make manifest is the idea that certain modes of narrating or conceiving of an historical past works primarily to produce, reproduce and uncritically naturalize the boundaries of both permissible/impermissible politics as well as understandings of permissible/impermissible citizenship. A certain conception or interpretation of the past works to produce that very conception of citizenship. Wolin seems to offer us an answer to a very pressing question about the shape and content of political communities: just how does this dominant conception of citizenship, with its corresponding political and cultural boundaries, emerge and gain/maintain the amount of discursive and political power that it has?

If a certain historical (memorial) conception of the past creates an understanding of citizenship, as well as corresponding boundaries to (re)enforce that self-understanding, we can see what Wolin wants to accomplish by bringing together citizenship with interpretation. If one of the primary powers that a political citizenry has is the ability to create new cultural patterns, it means that they must first, necessarily, reinterpret past events, ideas and documents in order to question the cultural and political boundaries that were the result of previously held interpretations. The historical memories that such interpretations helped to produce also helped to legitimate the cultural patterns and political self-understandings that Wolin sees as the potential target of democratic actions. Thus, for democratic action (or a truly political citizenry) to produce new cultural patterns, it is this nexus of interpretation and memory that must be engaged and challenged – but only insofar as that challenge, and the corresponding acts of reinterpretation – allows for these new cultural and political boundaries to emerge.

V: Re-interpreting Democracy

This call of interpretation allows us to contextualize Wolin's bringing together of democracy with rebellion in a way that shows it to be seen as a much more creative process. In "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy", Wolin turns his analysis toward ancient Athenian democracy, asserting how the very idea of democracy is seemingly synonymous with transgression and rebellion. Wolin writes that "the political challenge of the demos inevitably overflowed the customary and institutional boundaries within which elites were attempting to fix politics. Consequently, democratic politics appeared as revolutionary and excessive" (S. Wolin 1995, 48). This repeated link

has led some commentators to despair that his conception of democracy is simply agonistic, at best, and destructive at worst. This position is perhaps best expressed by George Kateb when he writes, "Modern fugitive democracy…enacted denunciations of the nature of things, of the history of things…the democratic energies of creation are redirected to destruction" (Kateb 2001, 56). Here, Kateb is focusing on the connections that Wolin has drawn between the twin ideas of 'democracy' and 'revolution', and forwards the conclusion that, by allying the two terms together so closely, Wolin produces an understanding of democracy that is irresponsible because of its destructive nature. Even an enthusiastic commentary notes that Wolin, "describes democracy as a mode of action that is episodic, fugitive, and challenges boundaries. The demos is activated and takes shape in the midst of revolt, resistance, and revolution, releases of human energies that contest established boundaries, institutions and practices" (Gabardi 2001, 563). As Gabardi illustrates, even theorists sympathetic to Wolin's project seem to draw conclusions similar to some of the most trenchant critics of his theorization.[13]

This interpretation is quite easy to understand. Wolin often characterizes democracy as something that resists being settled into a stable form, which form necessarily truncates and distorts the energy and potential of democracy. Furthermore, this form that distorts democracy is typically embodied in the very idea of a 'constitution', and Wolin goes to great lengths to disentangle the two concepts. In

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[13] For a similar interpretation that seems to fall somewhere between the two examples above, but relies on much the same interpretation, see Zumbrunnen (2008). Josiah Ober (1996) offers a criticism of Wolin that is less concerned with the destructive nature of his conception, and more with the fugitive and ephemeral nature of Wolin's definition. In fact, in Ober (2005), he takes a position quite complimentary to Wolin when he worries over the political desire to pursue nondemocratic solutions that favor 'good ends (constitution order)' and not to prioritize 'fallible means (democratic process)'. Although Ober seems to be more concerned with the 'costs' of democracy than Wolin, this type of political diagnosis resonates quite strongly with Wolin's major concerns.

Wolin's own words, "I attempt to show that 'constitutional democracy' is not a seamless web of two complementary notions but an ideological construction designed not to realize democracy but to reconstitute it and, as a consequence, repress it" (S. Wolin 1995, 32). In contrast, Wolin produces a more unsettled idea of democracy, one that that he reads in the Athenian democratic politics of the fifth-century. In this idea of democracy we see that "the politics of the demos was disorderly and often rebellious, defined by its opposition to existing arrangements rather than by them…Athenian democracy was less a constitution in the Aristotelian sense of a fixed form than a dynamic and developing political culture, a culture not only of participation but of frequent rebellion" (S. Wolin 1995, 41-43). In trying to disengage democracy from a settled form (i.e. 'constitutional democracy), Wolin seems to be left with nothing more than a concept that is nothing more than, in Hegelian terms, negative content. Hence, we begin to understand more clearly Kateb's criticism that Wolin "never produces a theory of justice or even sustained thoughts about it" (Kateb 2001, 45), and that Democracy without settled form becomes nothing more than democracy as, "eruption for the sake of eruption, apart from its content or even because of its lack of content" (Kateb 2001, 45). This reading, however, is incomplete and does a disservice to Wolin's work, in that it overlooks several important components of his theorization that an increased attention to memory and interpretation can help to illuminate.

While not denying the important connection between democracy and rebellion in Wolin's work, it would be a mistake to treat rebellion and democracy as identical terms. In fact, Wolin goes to great lengths to set up a sort of triadic relationship between

'constitution', 'democracy', and 'rebellion'.   In the very introduction to "Norm and Form", Wolin explicitly sets out this relationship:

> My concern in this essay is with the political uses of "democracy" in relations to two diametrically opposed notions that symbolize two equally opposed states of affairs. One is the settled structure of politics and governmental authority typically called a constitution, and the other is the unsettling political movement typically called revolution. Stated somewhat starkly: constitution signifies that suppression of revolution; revolution, the destruction of constitution. *The two notions, though opposed, are connected by democracy* (S. Wolin 1995, 29).[14]

Although it may be fair to say he does not clearly elaborate the specifics of the dynamic between the three terms, it is evident that Wolin is attempting to draw a *relationship* between democracy and revolution, and goes to some lengths to make it clear that the terms are **not** identical. Rather, democracy exists in a space between constitution (form) and revolution (destruction), or more specifically, democracy can only be understood as existing in the tension between the two other terms. Furthermore, there is a curious linguistic maneuver that Wolin uses to describe what he seems to understand as the experience of democracy. In this description of democratic action, Wolin writes that "historically, it falls to democracy to have to reinvent the political periodically, perhaps even continually…democracy is a political moment, perhaps the political moment, when the political is remembered and recreated" (S. Wolin 1995, 55). If, in Wolin's estimation, democracy is simply a formless action with purely negative content, why do we see the continued recourse to 'memory', 'recreation' and 'reinvention' in his descriptions? How does the destructiveness of revolution have anything in common with (re)creation? Further, how does this linking of the transgression of boundaries, relate to democracy's 'restorative power'?

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[14] The italics are my addition.

Kateb might be correct in his assertion that Wolin never produces an explicit theory of justice, but what Wolin's insistence on transgression accomplishes is the creation of the possibility for the pursuit of justice; without naming the specific content of 'justice' he is searching for a political means to make such an activity possible. If we understand the relationship between constitution and democracy anew, could we say that what is being transgressed in democratic activity is not the 'constitution' itself, but a certain *historical interpretation* of that constitution, which results in a destabilization of the forms and limits of political activity and legitimate political claims that are enabled and (re)enforced through such an interpretation. Furthermore, the ability to reinterpret the 'dominant symbols' and 'public meanings' can be transgressive insofar as it destabilizes the political order that relies on such public meanings and symbolic representation to maintain a certain configuration of power and political structure. Guided by this reinterpretation, when Wolin seems to pit democracy against the idea of a constitution, what we really see Wolin attempting to destabilize (or transgress) is a settled idea of 'proper politics' that is supported by the accepted 'form' of the constitution – not simply a set of rules that are agreed upon, but (most important for Wolin) the unequal forms of power that emerge. Wolin sees democracy as a means to question the inequalities that are written into such a settled form of politics.

Through reinterpretation, Wolin opens up the possibility for (provisionally) resettling these terms and relationships in a way that responds to such inequality or injustice. But, in order to accomplish these tasks, the very memories and interpretations that buttress these inequalities must be questioned and destabilized, for the link between

memory and present experience is more than a fleeting connection; it is one of intimate co-existence. In describing that intersection, Henri Bergson writes, "memory, inseparable in practice from perception, imports the past into the present" (Bergson 1991, 73). In his description of bicentennials, Wolin makes a similar pronouncement on an explicitly political level when he writes that they "are rituals organized to promote a mythic history…an official story that narrates a past to support an image of collective identity that confirms a certain conception of the present" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). What Wolin draws our attention to is that any conception of the present necessarily is a settled form of power dynamics and inequality that are buttressed in part through an understanding of the past, an explicit political memory that 'imports the past into the present' as a mode of legitimization.

A democratic response to these forms of inequality destabilizes the present to draw these inequalities into relief and question them, but only so long as the interpretations of the past that stabilize them are somehow transgressed. As such, transgression is not simply destruction devoid of content but it is a thoroughly political activity that allows us to see and call into question the very fabric of inequality contained within a settled form of politics, and potentially to open a path toward the remedy of those forms of inequality and injustice.

This ability, to transgress through interpretation, is precisely what Wolin is trying to recover through his incorporation of the term *birthright* into this theorization. A citizen that is in 'possession' of his or her birthright, laden with history and identity is not in such a position to simply inherit a stable and fixed form. Rather, citizens possess such

historical consciousness in order to destabilize such inherited meanings. "Birthrights are transmitted, and because of that their meaning will have to be reconsidered amidst different circumstances…our birthright is composed of these ambiguous historical moments, and so its political meaning is rarely obvious." (S. S. Wolin 1989, 140-141). The inherent ambiguity of this legacy, the destabilization that comes with all historical inheritance necessitates a certain type of citizen. "This calls for a citizen who can become an interpreting being, one who can interpret the present experience of the collectivity, reconnect it to past symbols, and carry it forward" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 141). This notion of citizen as an interpretive being ties directly into Wolin's second major definition of a constitution: a hermeneutical event. After all, a constitution can only truly legitimize a set of power relations if that document (and corresponding relations) are understood and interpreted in a certain way. If we can understand citizens as interpreting beings, we can see how this process of interpretation can be a continually unsettled process consisting of, "[rituals] of remembrance that contributes to the continuing formation and reformation of a public memory and collective identity… They are an element in a continuous process of interpretation, a public hermeneutics" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 82). This idea of a public hermeneutics can help to situate more clearly the importance, in Wolin's theorization, of the citizen who can become an interpreting being.

VI: A Public Hermeneutics

Wolin immediately situates this idea of a 'public hermeneutics' within a field of power relations that are quite unbalanced, perhaps almost to the point of despair. In continuing to define a 'public hermeneutics' Wolin claims that, "various authorities shape

collective understandings, which, in turn, produce reliable social behavior in support of the regime and its leaders" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 82). These 'authorities' are presented many guises: written rhetoric (*The Federalist Papers*), spoken rhetoric (political addresses), ceremonial events (bicentennial celebrations, elections), theoretical understandings. However, all of them serve to shape behavior and control/limit politics through the settling of interpretations. But would citizens as interpreting actors be able to engage with this 'public hermeneutics' by perhaps challenging certain memories and interpretations that could enable a more robust contestation of these settled forms of social/political behavior? Clearly if an essential part of the ongoing legitimacy of contemporary political institutions/arrangements is the ever present 'public hermeneutics', then citizens, as interpretive beings could meaningfully engage in this 'public hermeneutics' in a challenging manner: a democratic-interpretive power to complicate and transgress the centralizing modes of interpretation that serve to buttress existing social arrangements and obfuscate relationships and discourses of injustice.

If the hermeneutical side of citizenship is that important for Wolin, and is intimately connected to his understanding of democratic activity, it seems to be this very same aspect that he laments as being all but lost in the transition that he sees toward a depoliticized/ahistoricized citizenship. This is clearly evident when one considers the two major backdrops against which he is writing *The Presence of the Past*: the Bicentennial celebration of the American constitution, and the powerful and popular political rhetoric of the Reagan administration. The worry that Wolin saw with the ongoing fervor of the bicentennial celebrations was precisely the anti-hermeneutical

understanding of events and artifacts they fostered in the citizenry at large: these celebrations worked to 'naturalize' what is ultimately a profoundly political document [the constitution] and event [ratification]. Just what was lost in all of this celebratory deification of these historical documents was, ironically, their profoundly historical (therefore interpretable) nature. The Reagan administration, as a producer of political rhetoric (and political self-awareness) ran much the same dangerous course in Wolin's estimation. The Reagan administration constantly appealed to the 'nation's past' but, for Wolin, this was being done through "the de-historicizing tendencies of contract theory" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 144) and as such, produced an uncritical narrative that seemed to resist conflicting interpretations as well forge citizen's self-understanding in such a way that the political imperative to interpret was diminished. Ultimately, for Wolin, the crisis in collective citizenship and democratic potential that he was working to diagnose in *The Presence of the Past* can now be refashioned as a crisis in both the application of and (lack of) engagement with historical memory.

Firstly, Wolin observed that the political symbols and official interpretations he analyzed were productive of an historical memory that uncritically celebrated contemporary political arrangements by obfuscating and suppressing precisely those ambiguous and contentious historical moments that Wolin is seeking to (re)present. As such these historical memories were largely un-historical insofar as they resisted the very ambiguity and uncertainty that is part of any historical tradition. Secondly, this ongoing political rhetoric also cast citizens (perhaps objectively but at the very least in terms of their own self-understanding) in this largely un-historical role, complimentary to the

attendant institutions. A political self awareness that lacks a strong understanding of its own (contentious) historical construction is one that lacks the very means to engage in just such interpretative undertakings that can recast (or call to light) those inequalities and injustices that Wolin understands to be the driving impulse of democratic activity. The ahistorical context of citizens is thus productive of this diminished political nature because it denies the very method of political contestation that democratic activity requires: the ability to (re)interpret the past in such a way that it destabilizes settled political arrangements in the name of injustice that is codified (formalized) into those very same arrangements of power and responsibility. If citizens within contemporary democratic regimes now largely understand themselves in this context their diminished political nature and their diminished ability to advance truly democratic activity all stem from a very specific loss: the loss of a deep, complex and fundamentally ambiguous historical legacy that provides both the means (interpretation) and motives (historically felt injustices) for powerful action.

To re-engage, or reclaim, these legacies and these powers, Wolin's twin ideas of 'a citizen who can become an interpreting being' and a 'public hermeneutics' are indispensable. An interpreting being means that one is not simply the recipient of an historical legacy, but one is also the creator of its meaning and application. Of course, this does not mean that in Wolin's estimation, all citizens simply have the power to seamlessly re-imagine the entirely of their political existence. Such an interpretation leaves out massive disparities in power or influence as well as the fact that in this context, multiple (perhaps innumerable) interpretations will be engaging with each other.

However, the important point is that citizens can actively work to shape these legacies, identities and resultant political arrangements. They may not be (both individually and collectively) able to fully re-create the terms of their existence, but neither are they simply the passive result of this legacy. They are both produced and productive.

Although Wolin, in *The Presence of the Past*, only uses the term 'public hermeneutics' on two occasions, and leaves the term largely under-theorized, he makes the beginnings of an important move in recasting the web of political arrangements, documents and legacies that make up the phenomenal word of contemporary citizens as so many parts of this ongoing 'public hermeneutics'. It brings to the fore the very historical nature of these elements of contemporary citizenship, as well as the fact they do not operate in a neutral manner nor are they productive of a neutral political form. It allows citizens to see that, even though these elements are part of our inherited legacy, the inherited manner in which we understand them is not transcendent but has been produced, and as such, the process of interpretation can and should be an ongoing process. It forces citizens to acknowledge that no part of their political inheritance or collective identity should be reified beyond its historical construction and elevated to a place that absolves it from the process of reinterpretation and reengagement. A public hermeneutics allows the conditions of politics, as well as the limits of permissible/impermissible politics, to be refashioned because the political inheritance that structures these boundaries is simply the result of prior historical interpretation and that process is one that needs to continue. For Wolin's crisis of citizenship to be abated, perhaps even remedied, the interpretive capacities of citizens must be re-engaged and

heightened, the birthright, which I want to tie to a public-hermeneutical activity, must be recognized and recovered. To understand contemporary political arrangements within the framework of a public hermeneutics is an indispensable means to achieve this end. In the next chapter, I will investigate some of Wolin's later writings on democracy and try to illustrate how, by losing this hermeneutical impulse, his overall democratic project is weakened. I will also look at one attempt to construct a full and robust conception of a public hermeneutic, and through that engagement, set the course for the rest of the dissertation to follow.

Chapter Two

I.   Introduction

In the first chapter, I offered a detailed analysis of Sheldon Wolin's work as a theorist of democracy, primarily through his writings in *The Presence of the Past.* In that collection of essays, Wolin is primarily concerned with a weakening of democratic impulses and energy in the politics of the modern state, and how those energies can somehow be revitalized and a more robust conception of democratic citizenship can be theorized and fought for. While arguing that Wolin's work is a very important contribution to the field of democratic theory, I believe that what is so paradoxical about his theorization is that the most important *potential* contribution his work makes to democratic thinking is the aspect that he, as well as other commentaries on Wolin's work, leaves the most under-theorized. While many analyses focus on the 'fugitive' or 'eruptive' nature of his understanding of democracy, or on the idea of democracy as a wholly 'transgressive' act, I argue that what is most important to Wolin's project is the idea that a 'public hermeneutic' should be seen as an essential part of the process of democracy. I would argue that as Wolin's own work moved more toward an elaboration of democracy as 'fugitive' or 'momentary', his earlier, more hermeneutic theorizations began to fade further from view, but remained, in a largely unspoken way, essential. That is, to understand how democracy can be a momentary, or an eruptive force, we need to see it arising from a hermeneutical engagement with the conditions of politics.

Indeed, I believe that it is only by recasting his entire theory of democracy and democratic action under the gaze of a more systematic understanding of this 'public

hermeneutic' that we can truly make sense of Wolin's insistence on seeing democracy as a 'transgressive' and 'fleeting' momentary eruption of activity. In fact, it is my assertion that all of Wolin's concerns that he lays out in *The Presence of the Past* make sense when this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' is made explicit. In the first chapter, I attempted to show just how important this idea is to all of Wolin's more systematic concerns with democracy and citizenship.

As important as it appears this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' is within the dynamics of his theory, Wolin himself makes very little mention of it. In *The Presence of the Past*, he only uses the term once, and the term is not elaborated upon, nor is it ever returned to. Because he focuses such little attention to how this 'public hermeneutic' functions in relation to his other, more immediately democratic concerns, I believe that it functions as something akin to a 'spectral presence' within his work: important, but largely unrecognized. While he himself does not devote time and energy to theorizing a full understanding of this idea, it has been my contention that his theorization makes use of the *dynamics* of the 'public hermeneutic' through his extended discussion of the power of the 'mythistorical' in modern politics, his insistence on seeing the Constitution, as a 'hermeneutic moment', and his notion of the democratic 'birthright' of modern citizens, among other important democratic conversations he has in *The Presence of the Past*. So while this idea of a 'public hermeneutic' is not theorized, it plays an important part within his overall work. The first chapter tries to elaborate on just how we can understand these dynamics in a way that does justice to the under-theorized idea of the 'public hermeneutic'.

Although this chapter continues my discussion of both Wolin's continuing work on democracy and the idea of a 'public hermeneutic', now I am focusing not on how these two things come together, but on how they have diverged, and to what extent it hinders his work on democracy. It is my contention that Wolin's later writings suffer because, while he continues to focus his concern on modern citizenship, the power of the contemporary state and his sense of a lack of democratic energies, his fragile connection of those concerns with this idea of the 'public hermeneutic' is severed completely. What was merely a 'spectral presence' in his earlier work, is now not present at all in his later contributions to democratic theory, and because this 'spectral presence' has now disappeared completely, his work loses an important critical edge and robustness. This chapter, however, does not attempt to 'bury' Wolin, but, in a circuitous way, to continue to praise his work, but to praise it as a project that requires recovery. What I hope to do in this chapter is to demonstrate that, to the extent that the loss of the idea of a 'public hermeneutic' weakens his overall concerns with democracy, if we can re-integrate Wolin's democratic theory into a more robust understanding of both the hermeneutic nature of politics, and the idea of a 'public hermeneutic' more generally, we can present a strong and important contribution to democratic theory. After analyzing the ways in which this loss of the 'public hermeneutic' is a misstep for Wolin's work, I consider one attempt to theorize democracy as a hermeneutic project, by analyzing the work of Roberto Alejandro's work *Hermeneutics, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*. While I note that Alejandro's insistence on the hermeneutic nature of democracy and democratic citizenship overcomes some of the shortcomings of Wolin's later political theory, it

moves away from some of the concrete theorizations of power that were so key to Wolin's early theory. I believe that while focusing on the 'hermeneutic' side of 'politics' he moves away from the 'political' side of the equation in a way that is problematic. Ultimately, I argue that the most successful way to theorize a properly political and democratic theory of a 'public hermeneutics' is to re-integrate the work of Sheldon Wolin with the hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur. This chapter will end with a preliminary introduction to Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutics, which will be developed more throughout the following chapters, culminating with a synthesis of Wolin and Ricoeur in Chapter six.

II.   Losing the Hermeneutical Project

If the crisis of citizenship is outlined in *The Presence of the Past*, it receives its culminating description (eulogy) in *Democracy Inc*. In this, Wolin's most recent work, he attempts to systematically theorize what he now sees as a fully matured crisis in American citizenship. The new terminological constructions that emerge in this book: 'managed democracy' and 'inverted totalitarianism', are deployed to chart this further development. As Wolin writes in the instruction, 'inverted totalitarianism…represents the political coming of age of corporate power and the political demobilization of the citizenry" (S. S. Wolin 2008, x). 'Managed democracy,' meanwhile, is a concept that Wolin deploys, largely to answer the query, "what causes a democracy to change into some non- or anti-democratic system, and what kind of system is democracy likely to change into?" (S. S. Wolin 2008, x). His understanding of democracy retains similar themes and continues to privilege the idea of democracy as activity in common, asserting

that "democracy's idea is based on a culture that encourages members to join in common endeavors…as the means of taking care of a specific and concrete part of the world and its life-forms" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 288). Nonetheless, Wolin downplays the absolute idea of 'new beginnings' by trying to situate democratic creativity with the context of historically recovered and re-engaged material. Ultimately, this idea of democracy as common activity that stresses care and self-(and other-) improvement, of democracy as being "about the conditions that make it possible for ordinary people to better their lives by becoming political beings, and by making power responsive to their hopes and needs…managing together those powers that immediate and significantly affect the lives and circumstances of others and one's self" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 260) retains the phenomenological hue that is in keeping with his earlier definition of democracy, as well as the idea of *birthright*, developed in *The Presence of the Past*.

Further, Wolin continues to draw the close connections that he sees between democracy and transgression. These connections are given their most starkly drawn description in *Democracy Inc*. when Wolin writes that "Democracy, in this early meaning, stood for a politics of redress, for common action to alleviate the sharp inequalities of wealth and power…it was, of necessity, a fugitive democracy, given to moments of frustration, rage and violence" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 227). Here, we see Wolin continuing with motifs familiar to his previous contributions to democratic theory: democracy as an episodic activity that is, by necessity, diminished when it is housed in a constitutional form, which forms are universally concerned with controlling the surplus

energies of democracy: energies that (episodically) engage in "challenging the structure of power" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 278) in a fleeting manner.

Most important for our purposes is Wolin's continued concern with the impulse toward 'originalism' or, as he also terms it in *Democracy Inc.*, 'archaism'. "Originalism is the doctrine that exhorts politicians to be guided by the wisdom of the Founding Fathers, the Constitution of 1789, and the Bible…the quest for a privileged moment when a transcendent truth was revealed" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 276).[15] The terminological move from 'originalism' to 'archaism' is a conscious move by Wolin to account for and theorize "the remarkable commingling of politics and religion that has occurred in recent years and gives every indication of increasing in the future" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 115). Although a certain weakness in this formulation is Wolin's silence on the details of what he means by 'recent years' and much of the specifics of this trend are left aside, his primary concern is to show how a certain type of religious influence in politics is not only complimentary to a doctrine of originalism, but can add to its power and reach. In tracing out these parallels, Wolin writes, "The archaist, whether political or religious, has a fondness for singling out privileged moments in the past where a transcendent truth was revealed, typically through an inspired leader" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 117), and just as in its purely religious form Wolin notes a belief in "the inerrancy of Scripture and the unchanging nature of its truths" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 115), we are led to see that "in the

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[15] Though Wolin continues to equate 'originalism' with 'Biblicism', in Democracy Inc we see Wolin much more consciously positing the bible as part of the doctrine of 'originalism'. It could be that, in his estimation, 'originalism' now to a very large degree encompasses the latter term or he is trying to chart the growing influence of biblical rhetoric into political language and sees this as a rhetorical effect of the growing political reliance on a strategy of 'originalism'. Either way, Wolin is much more explicit in bring a non-metaphorical religious element to this political-rhetorical strategy.

narrative of the political archaist the United States was blessed with a once-and-for-all-time, fixed ideal form, an original constitution of government created by the Founding Fathers in 1787…the political counterpart to the Bible…inerrant, unchanging – not 'interpreted'" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 120). What is important for Wolin in both of these conceptions is the fundamental denial of the interpretability of these documents, and hence the unchanging nature of the political or religious forms and structures that such unapproachable documents forward and legitimize.

As a result, both of these positions seem largely (if not wholly) resistant to the type of democratic activity, and democratic concerns, that Wolin goes to great length to theorize. Writing on the consequences of a specifically political archaism, Wolin notes that "The vision of an idealized original constitution rarely, if ever, includes the kind of participatory democracy that Tocqueville celebrated" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 121) and that one of its primary effects is to de-legitimize any democratic power or energies that would challenge existing political and social arrangements. This is due to the fact that archaism is not simply an exercise in nostalgia; this non-interpretable interpretation of certain fundamental documents is not an atavistic remnant. Rather, "An archaic belief is one that flourished in the past and carries identifiable marks of that past, but unlike a relic, it is operative, employed rather than simply preserved" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 118). Just as in his discussion of originalism, constitutions remain here a prominent aspect of Wolin's discussion and their overtly political nature is reasserted: "a constitution, or rather its authoritative interpretation, may be made to legitimate powers originating elsewhere" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 98). If archaism is indeed an ascendant political-rhetorical reality, it is

not simply indicative of a nostalgic polity but, of necessity, a less energetic and creative one. A polity largely under the influence of political archaism is one wherein existing structures, and the power relations they engender are largely seen as beyond political contest because the 'authoritative interpretation' that legitimates them is simultaneously triumphed as doctrine and obfuscated as interpretation. The resulting 'naturalization' privileges these forms of power and suppresses the legitimacy of democratic responses.

Noting the danger of such a politics of archaism, Wolin tries to make a very fine move when he writes that contemporary democratic practice must largely be a process of "relearning some hard earned lessons" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 274), and he is very conscious of how he positions democracy as a form of retrieval. Though he tries to distinguish a more democratic attempt to revive what has been lost from one that an originalist view might contend is necessary. Attempting to side step the mistake of simply positing a democratic archaic dynamic, Wolin contends that "Going back for democracy differs from originalism. It is not the quest for a privileged moment when a transcendent truth was revealed. Rather it is the attempt to remind ourselves what democracy is about by becoming acquainted with forms of democratic experience, their possibilities and limitations – not with imitating" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 276). In keeping with Wolin's assertion that democratic activity needs to resist the reduction to a single form, it seems that he is not searching for an historical essence to democratic activity to be copied and maintained but using historical material as a type of political inspiration or imagination: by 'recovering' the ways in which democratic activity has engaged politically in the past, we might be able to envision new modes of activity that, while keeping with the spirit of

democratic activity resists the archaist tendency to elevate a particular 'interpretation' of democratic activity to an unchanging essence. It becomes a means to retrieve a type of democratic spirit or motivation that is both protean and translatable.

What Wolin wants contemporary citizens to take from these various historical examples fits very neatly into the conception elaborated above. "In the historical 'moments'…democratization was associated with a conscious effort to throw off the past and to challenge the present with a vision of a future for which there was no precedent…attuned to popular needs and grievances and to the needs to the everyday" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 276). The ability to, in various ways, address previously unaddressed injustices, and the largely episodic ways in which underrepresented people and ideas were able to assert themselves serves as a sort of 'motivational template' by which contemporary democratic activity can draw inspiration. Thus, we see once again the claim that democracy is the vehicle with which the political moment is 'recreated'. Challenging present configurations of politics by opening up the space for new cultural and political patterns to emerge and gain credibility and allowing previously unaddressed inequalities the space to be heard and examined seems to be quite consistent with Wolin's earlier theorizations of the process of democratic activity.

However, a certain tension emerges throughout *Democracy Inc*. that poses some difficulties for this most recent theorization of democratic activity. While this process of retrieval seems to be very much concerned with the means and methods for opening up space for new cultural and political ideas to emerge, the relationship between this retrieval of the past and a democratic concern for the future seems much more fraught.

Within his discussion of democracy that closes the book, there seems to emerge a certain

hesitance in Wolin's formulation concerning the balance of retrieval versus creation. At

the very end of the book Wolin, in encapsulating the task for modern democratic activity

writes that "This contemporary version of the old struggle between 'enclosure' and the

'commons,' between exploitation and commonality, pretty much sums up the stakes: not

what new powers we can bring into the world, but what hard-won practices we can

prevent from disappearing" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 292). Within the scope of *Democracy

Inc*., one can see why Wolin shows a seemingly idiosyncratic reluctance toward this idea

of 'new powers'. The driving force of novelty in the contemporary world, in Wolin's

theorization, is corporate capitalism, which Wolin sees as being at odds with democratic

activity and experience[16]. "Superpower is the union of state and corporation…as these

have become integral, so the citizenry has become marginal and democracy more

manageable" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 131). Given the growth of capitalism within the

contemporary political landscape (privatization of goods and services, media monopolies)

it would seem reasonable for Wolin to resist describing democracy in the same terms or

with the same purpose as contemporary capitalism.

However, this leaves us with Wolin attempting to give democratic activity two

distinct tasks that, in this most recent theorization he can only elaborate one at a time, and

often to the detriment of the other task itself; whereas in *The Presence of the Past*, he was

able to articulate a theory of democratic activity that could simultaneously incorporate

both tasks into the same framework. For Wolin to talk about the democratic process of

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[16] In fact, the reduction of democratic activity to the requirements of capitalism (docility, periodic voting
and significant demobilization) is one of the major contributors to the extreme de-politicization of the
contemporary citizen.

retrieval, engaging with those historical moments of democratic importance, he must go to great lengths to distance his retrieval from a retrieval based on originalist principles, and he can only accomplish this by focusing on the creative power that is to be drawn from these examples. Thus, in order to fashion a democratic form of retrieval, he must focus entirely on how this retrieval is a strategic means of opening up new political energies and is productive of an immense political creativity. However, when he later talks about the task of contemporary democratic activity, the idea of new political energies or the production of new cultural patterns that had been commonplace in Wolin's earlier discussion of democratic activity immediately drops away. Whereas earlier, political creativity was used as a means to distance democracy from archaism, here political creativity is downplayed to strategically distance democracy from the dynamics of capitalism. Rather than the 'creation of new powers', which sounds very similar to the dynamic of endless creation that is endemic to capitalism, now the task of democracy becomes one of preventing the disappearance of hard won, presumably democratic, practices. This produces a democratic theory that seems to have abandoned the democratic tension of simultaneous 'recreation' and 'renewal' that was an integral part of Wolin's earlier democratic theory. Where is the idea of democracy as a term held between revolution (new forms) and constitution (stable practices)?

The sudden diremption of democratic activity into either an activity of creation or one of protection adds an additional difficulty to Wolin's overall project, further diminishing its power. If the task of democracy is now one that must engage in the prevention of loss, one immediately needs to ask, what just what 'hard won practices' we

need to protect and what others can be consigned to the dust bin of history? Although

Wolin does not offer a comprehensive list, he does offer many examples of just what it is

that he believes needs democratic protection. Some of these gains are almost too large to

be workable. While lying in politics and culture more generally may in fact be disruptive

or have destructive effects, exactly how does one 'rescue' truth telling? And how can we

be sure that we have achieved a 'more authentic' form of politics?[17] It may be more

productive to think about what more specific requirements might help to produce a

political culture that is more concerned with truth-telling in politics as a good. Again,

Wolin does not clearly elaborate these connections but we can see that, in large part,

Wolin seems to be calling for the rolling back of the privatization of public functions,

"notably education, welfare programs, administration of prisons, military operations,

postal services, even space travel" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 284). Additionally, Wolin calls for

"public ownership of the airwaves and encouragement of noncommercial broadcasting"

(S. S. Wolin 2008, 292) as well as, "affirming the primacy of Congress, curbing the

growth of presidential power, disentangling the stranglehold of lobbyists, democratizing

the party system by eliminating the barriers to third parties, and enforcing an austere

system of campaign finance" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 258). What we seem to end up with,

despite Wolin's best rhetorical efforts to the contrary, is a type of political nostalgia for

the New Deal-era United States. This interpretation is given additional credibility with

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[17] Language like 'authenticity' lends a certain feel of trading in absolutes to many of the passages in
Democracy Inc. that are largely absent in earlier writings.

Wolin's repeated descriptions of "New Deal experiments in participatory democracy"[18] (S. S. Wolin 2008, 39) and the underdeveloped but present narrative arc that equates every move away from New Deal politics as a move away from democratic activity and toward the twin terrors of 'inverted totalitarianism' and 'managed democracy'. Because Wolin's new theoretical framework separates creativity from retrieval, the whole retrieval aspect of democratic activity takes on (to use Wolin's own phrase) a slightly 'archaic' tone and purpose. Furthermore, it complicates the theoretical applicability of this work. Is Wolin, by succumbing to this type of retrieval-as-archaism producing a type of American exceptionalism or a political concern that cannot escape the confines of the nation? While his major focus in *Democracy Inc* is undoubtedly the contemporary political culture of the United States, he makes no assertion that the dynamics of capitalism and imperial state power are unique to the United States; and that if the United States is his exemplary case study, it is largely to be used as a diagnostic tool extending beyond the United States itself. Even beyond that, however, lies a more specific question. Even if we are simply to take the book as a diagnosis of American democracy, given all the constraints and antidemocratic tendencies that Wolin heaps upon anarchism, how satisfactory of a democratic solution can an exercise in retrieval be that seems, at very important moments, seems to succumb to that very same temptation? Not only does Wolin seem to be confined within the immediate context with which he is working (the United States), but even within that context, his proposals seem to fall back upon some of the very elements that he is critiquing. If part of the contemporary democratic task is to

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[18] This is not to deny that New Deal politics engaged in quite meaningful participatory politics, or at least made moves toward a culture that could have been productive of strong democratic energies, but the place that Wolin gives it in his narrative arc is more problematic than his description.

critically engage with the *megastate*, might we be able to draw on energies and impulses that do not have as their immediate context the raw historical data of that same state? This is not to say that Wolin needs to be theorizing a wholly cosmopolitan democratic agency, but might we be able to expand the definition of 'historical material' or 'inheritance' to include elements outside the state itself. By defining 'inheritance' within the narrow definition of the state, what type of counter-productive exclusions are being enacted?

What has lead to these changes in Wolin's work that seem to render it much more problematic than earlier theorizations? Why do we find his democratic theory now seemingly divided between tasks of creation and recovery that are not only irreconcilable but almost contradictory in goals and expectations? How has his idea of recovery seemed to slip into the very idea of archaism that he roundly criticizes, leaving his account suffering for a nostalgia that makes the work even further self-contradictory? How can democratic activity find its apparent motivation in an underlying idea of American exceptionalism, when that very exceptionalismis what Wolin criticized in the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan and theories of constitutional originalism? Clearly these are not Wolin's intentions: his work does not deliberately depict a 'golden age' of democratic politics to be restored, be it ancient Athens or mid-century United States. In my estimation, the theoretical and political problems that Wolin faces in *Democracy Inc*. are not fundamental to his overall theoretical project, but are the result of a certain terminological loss.

What is not held onto in *Democracy Inc.* from Wolin's earlier writings on democracy and democratic activity are the twin ideas of a public hermeneutics and a citizen as an interpreting being, and this terminological neglect leads to the abovementioned theoretical deficiencies; the diagnosis he offers in *Democracy Inc.* is incomplete because he departs from the historical-hermeneutical theorization that he began to develop in *The Presence of the Past*. By rendering the connection between historical memory and present political forms more explicit, as Wolin does in *The Presence of the Past*, interpretation can serve as a middle term, connecting recovery and creation within one single process, where the creation of 'new cultural forms' can be analytically separated from the "unending quest for markets, new products, new discoveries" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 124) that is the hallmark of contemporary capitalism. By situating creation within the process of interpretation of the past, creation is embedded within the 'cultural inheritance' that was emblematic of the idea of *birthright*, but absent from *Democracy Inc*, and it allows democratic creativity to find its impulse in historically felt injustice that, for Wolin, are an indispensable part of democratic activity generally: it is creativity, but not a creativity devoid of an immediate political context.

This would allow us to avoid the bonds of nostalgia that seem to resolve into an unwitting case of American exceptionalism. A method of political (or theoretical) recovery that focuses not on an isolated act of recovery but rather on the re-interpretation of the 'recovered material' means that what is important about historical material is its contestable nature, that the political identity or form is the very thing that is contestable and what is being recovered is the language, means, or space to contest the bounds of

politics, the very ability to 'throw off the past' – even if that process remains always partial and incomplete.   This is also a very important point: because the process of interpretation is, as Wolin asserts in *The Presence of the Past*, always an incomplete (and ongoing) project, we cannot conceptualize politics in terms like 'authenticity' that are present in *Democracy Inc.*, and at times lend the work a sense of theorizing in a language of absolutes – much the same way that a politics of archaism justifies and defines its own purview.   In this sense, there is very little difference between speaking of a political culture in terms of authenticity and inauthenticity and Wolin's critical assertion that "The archaist is convinced that his core beliefs are superior to rival beliefs and are true because unchanging" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 119).   In both cases, the language used to describe a political ideal or concept is one that places the concept in such a privileged position that it very easily can be reified beyond the realm of contestation and political engagement – the very consequences that Wolin criticizes in the politics of originalism and archaism. Additionally, because this recovery can avoid reification by privileging the recovery of contestable material, this allows for multiple interpretations to be forwarded concerning the same historical material, which is "more reflective of the pluralistic character of reality," (S. S. Wolin 2008, 278), further allowing us to avoid a certain privileging of a particular historical interpretation that can result in an unproductive homogenization of democratic discourse and activity. Lastly, this distancing of recovery from the historical form of the material in question allows a certain political space to emerge wherein democratic activity is separated from nostalgia for a form **as such** and democratic

recovery takes the shape of contestation rather than restoration: recovery that is (like democratic creativity) contextualized but also not determined by pre-existing forms.

Ultimately, Wolin's diagnosis brings to light several important trends in contemporary political discourse that need to be engaged. The transformative effects of capitalism, an increasingly centralized and distanced governing elite and the continued depoliticization of contemporary citizens are all in need of sustained investigation. Additionally, his definition of democratic activity as a creative process wherein citizens influence at least partial control over common concerns and engage in political creation as well as a unique type of self-production and realization of a certain type of human potential is a great addition to democratic theory, as is Wolin's insistence on a process of creation that is predicated on the transgression of inherited forms of political arrangements. I have tried to show that all of these concerns, as well as his innovative contributions to democratic theory can be traced back to his connection of historical memory and dominant interpretations of historical material to a structuring of permissible/impermissible politics. However, Wolin's overall project suffers in its latest application because what he seems to drop from the conversation is the very thing that supports the advances he has made previously. His inability to fully theorize the idea of public hermeneutics and to define a citizen as an interpreting being in *The Presence of the Past*, and his subsequent removal of that very language from *Democracy Inc* renders the overall project more incomplete than it could be. What is needed, then, to address this lack is a democratic theory that forwards many of the democratic insights that Wolin

develops with an explicitly hermeneutic understanding of citizenship and political life more generally.

III.   Hermeneutic Recovery

One promising attempt at developing a hermeneutic conception of citizenship and democracy is Roberto Alejandro's *Hermeneutics, Citizenship and the Public Sphere*. Drawing primarily on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer wherein, "nothing that is can remain outside the realm of interpretation and intelligibility in which we have our common being" (Gadamer 1985, 279). Alejandro sees "understanding and interpretation as the fundamental elements defining the human condition. With this framework as a starting point, Alejandro contends that the citizen "ought to be constructed as an individual who deliberates and decides" (Alejandro 1993, 39) and citizenship is "a terrain of struggles, memories, interpretation, critique, transformation; namely, citizenship as a dimension where the interpretive tasks of our human condition are unfolded" (Alejandro 1993, 39). Much like Wolin's insistence on citizens that can become interpreting beings that are immersed in their inherited histories, Alejandro's hermeneutics casts citizens as "interpreters who filter and revise that intricate background of beliefs, traditions, and practices which is history" (Alejandro 1993, 69).

This elaboration of a hermeneutic understanding of citizenship elaborates the very principles that Wolin was attempting to theorize in *The Presence of the Past*: citizens firmly rooted in an historical and cultural context, with multiple received traditions and inheritances, but who, through the act of interpretation are able to engage in acts of political (democratic) creativity. for both authors, citizens as bearers and inheritors of

history is not "a journey in nostalgia, and much less a museum where the curators-citizens guard and preserve a mummified past" (Alejandro 1993, 97), but rather it is a means by which citizens are presented with the material from which they can create new political and social possibilities.

To elaborate this position, Alejandro theorizes a *Hermeneutic-Historical Consciousness*, which is advanced largely to combat "the effacement of the past that seems to characterize advanced liberal societies" (Alejandro 1993, 96). Alejandro is offering an alternative to the depoliticizing (and dehistoricizing) idea of citizenship that has accompanied the growth of the modern *megastate*[19]: "The megastate needs masses, not citizens; obedience to state's prescriptions, not critique; a 'memory-less' public, not citizens willing to examine the discourses and practices of government" (Alejandro 1993, 222). Alejandro recasts the political as "a terrain where interpreters construct meanings and, in so doing, carry out the interplay between them and their surrounding circumstances" (Alejandro 1993, 72).

This close and sustained development of a hermeneutic conception of citizenship allows us to avoid one of the shortcomings of Wolin's later work in *Democracy Inc.*: the easy slippage into the narrow confines of the nation state itself. For Alejandro, the collective memory of a political community "does not refer only to the history of a particular community. Rather, this memory takes into account the history of other societies, alien and familiar, in an effort to learn from both their achievements and failures" (Alejandro 1993, 99). By recognizing not only the legitimacy but potential power of 'other societies' Alejandro's formulation seems to open the space for an

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[19] Here is he explicitly referring to Wolin's own work on democracy.

increased legitimacy of those democratic actors who may have past experiences different from those historical moments that are firmly part of any particular nation state. This provides political credibility for, among others, immigrant groups that may have an historical inheritance that is perhaps only tangentially related to that 'dominant' inheritance of the nation state. It also allows for the possibility of an historical consciousness that, even if rooted firmly within the nation state itself, recognizes that the ambiguous historical material itself has a much more far reach (perhaps global) connection. By bringing into the hermeneutic conversation material from other societies we can in fact be augmenting, expanding and complicating some of the historical issues of the nation state itself (military foreign policy, capitalist practices) that have a truly global reach.

However useful Alejandro's elaboration of a hermeneutic citizenship is in clarifying some of Wolin's own conceptions, and avoiding one of the more prevalent shortcomings of his later work, there is much in Alejandro's own theorization that needs to be overcome. The first is related to his understanding of *collective memory*, which is an important part of his hermeneutic-historical consciousness. For Alejandro, the collective memory is "a permanent act of remembrance as well as a dialogical encounter with the past and the present" (Alejandro 1993, 98). The idea of a collectivity is extremely important for understanding any type of hermeneutic citizenship, where memories and historical material is never simply individualistic, but spills into collectivities, groups and societies. Yet what is not adequately theorized is the relationship between communities (plural) and collective memory (a singular

conception). While Alejandro attempts to elaborate a conception of collective memory that is constantly undergoing change, addition and reconceptualization, the way in which his categories are presented leave these dynamics quite under-analyzed. In his discussion of community, this lacuna is made evident. Alejandro writes:

> A communitarian historical consciousness assumed this variety of voices and appears as the collective memory of values, virtues, vides, and sufferings that form the heritage of the community. The community is never a passive recipient of those common assets, though. The community, at any moment, can give meaning to old values, erase old vices from its present practices, and construct other arrangements to write off past sufferings…the heritage is not fixed, but, like a text, it is subject to interpretation (Alejandro 1993, 99).

How exactly does this community change these values 'at any moment' and still retain its collective and plural identity. How easy is it for us to even define a collectivity if it is to be understood as a 'variety of voices'? That is to say, what is it exactly that singularizes the collectivity of plural voices into a 'community'?

This becomes all the more important when we see Alejandro rejecting the political realm and public sphere as simply two neutral sites of open and free dialogue: for Alejandro, the acceptance of a hermeneutic-historical consciousness means the acceptance of, at the very least, "a minimalist conception of the good life as a course of norms guiding both society and the individual's goals" (Alejandro 1993, 97). In rejecting this principle of political neutrality, while simultaneously defending a hermeneutic version of the liberal 'marketplace of ideas', Alejandro forwards what he deems a 'fluid' version of the good which he recasts as akin to a process rather than a 'a fixed destination'. The good "is meant to be a never ending process of education about shared goods and self-knowledge" (Alejandro 1993, 106).   This principle of the good is then meant to be seen as a largely political rather than as a metaphysical idea of the good. But the question still goes unanswered: how is this 'provisional' idea of the good arrived at or

produced? Alejandro seems to offer something of an answer when he writes that "a shared conception of the good could be worked out from a repository of moral values that are part of the vocabularies of a democratic society" (Alejandro 1993, 106), but even here we see some problematic moves that go unchallenged (or under theorized). Given that Alejandro is attempting to formulate a highly political conception of citizenship, and a re-politicization of the public realm against what he sees as the de-politicization of many contemporary conceptions of citizenship, it seems odd that Alejandro would simply move the question of 'the good' to the realm of morals rather than, say, political principles. We seem to be able to arrive at a conception of the good that is based on moral principles, even though this seems to be the very ground of disagreement that Alejandro is focusing on in his hermeneutic conception. Furthermore, it seems as if arriving at (or maintaining) this conception of the good, however provisional it may (or may not) be, is spoken of without reference to ideology, power or other forms of inequality that are not only present in the political realm, but might in fact help to structure conceptions of the good themselves.

This leads us directly to the largest problem in Alejandro's theorization, which can in large part explain these other related issues. When it comes to the very workings of this citizenship, it is theorized in a highly depoliticized manner that seems to take very little account of the issues of power that were so prevalent in Wolin's work. Even though Alejandro offers a very reasoned critique of Habermas' communicative theory as highly depoliticizing and his idea of 'undistorted speech' as unhelpful for understanding speech within a highly politicized context, in putting forth his idea of a hermeneutic public

sphere, Alejandro seems to fall prey to the same temptation that he criticizes. In defining this public realm, he writes that "a hermeneutic construction of the public realm is thus a dimension of citizens who do not relinquish their judgment to any minority and who engage in dialogue and argumentation without being subject to structures of domination and repression" (Alejandro 1993, 226). Given that Alejandro wants to hold onto the presence of "ideology, domination, or hidden prejudices" (Alejandro 1993, 191), that he criticized Habermas for attempting to provide an exit from, this seems to be a very odd definition. If political arrangements, as Wolin points out, are expressions of power and inequality[20] how can we conceive of citizenship as an activity that happens outside of structures of domination. It is conceivable that his 'public sphere' exists in a place outside of the 'political realm', which he admits is "characterized, in many instances, by the power of money and technological discourses attempting to erode judgment" (Alejandro 1993, 226). A 'pure' public realm distinct from the 'distortions' of the political realm is a tenuous assertion to make, and one that does not adequately address the reach of these structure of power that domination that characterize the realm of politics. This conceptualization of public sphere/political sphere seems especially crippling for Alejandro when one notes that, earlier in the work, he writes that "many citizens in democratic societies do not see themselves as detachable compartments – the private, the public; the religious, the political language; a comprehensive doctrine, a political conceptions" (Alejandro 1993, 20). Given that Alejandro's entire hermeneutical project is one that seeks to create a citizen that is not compartmentalized, but where all

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[20] Given how adamantly Alejandro asserts the political non-neutrality of liberal principles, it seems that he would have much the same interpretation of existing political structures.

aspects of a citizen's existence comes into play in the political realm itself, is the final recourse to a public sphere that is both distinct from the political realm and free of structures of domination a fatal oversight?

IV: Conclusion

Ultimately, his failure to theorize a conception of hermeneutical citizenship within the structures of domination that were so present in Wolin's nascent theorization is Alejandro's biggest shortcoming.   A properly political conception of hermeneutic citizenship is one that must take this interpretative task as happening alongside, in Wolin's assertions 'various authorities' that work to shape collective understandings. If we acknowledge that interpretations of historical events can, and often to, work to support regimes and structures of power, those very structures must be taken into account when we are theorizing the hermeneutical activities of citizenship. Moreover, a properly hermeneutical theorization of citizenship is one that can actively theorize the very power relations that Wolin is so keenly aware of, and that Alejandro seems, in the end, to retreat from. Paul Ricoeur asserts this task when he writes, "Only, it seems to me, a hermeneutic of communication could assume the task of including the critique of ideologies in self-comprehension" (Ricoeur 1975, 92). The necessity of a continued critique of ideology due largely to the fact that, for Ricoeur, "prejudice is a fundamental structure of communication in its institutional forms" and that "hermeneutics could reveal the necessity of a critique of ideologies, even if this critique could never be total" (Ricoeur 1975, 92). Rather than assuming a position that seems to place the hermeneutic process outside of the bonds of ideology and domination, or envisioning a hermeneutical

process that has, as its end, the final overcoming of ideology, a hermeneutical conception of citizenship must constantly wrestle with the limits of ideology and power in two distinct ways. First, the continued presence of structures of power will always make the hermeneutic process a complicated undertaking. Second, the very hermeneutical process of interpretation cannot view itself as outside of ideology altogether. Hermeneutic interpretation might be able to resist some of the effects of ideology by offering critique (for Ricoeur this is the important of the idea of 'distantiation'), but as Ricoeur makes clear, that will never be a totally critique, that is to say, interpretation will always run up against a limit in the recognition of the unavoidable nature of ideology. Thus, for a hermeneutic citizenship, ideology serves as both the internal limit of the process, and the ever present external force muddying the picture.

While Alejandro's approach demonstrates the importance of using history to recover new possibilities and destabilizing that which has been handed down to us, we cannot be tempted into the idea that, given the 'play' of hermeneutics, politics is simply a blanket matter of reinterpretation. Power dynamics work to reify certain elements that make them harder to re-interpret, reevaluate or change. Placing this process within structures of power would produce a hermeneutics that "consists in keeping 'open' our access to our contemporaries, predecessors, and successors even when many of our projects, norms and institutions are already reified to such an extent that they have become incapable of recovery" (Ricoeur 1976, 690). Even if one would want to qualify Ricoeur's assertion about institutions being completely incapable of recovery, he points out the important fact that historical material will vary in its social and political openness

to re-interpretation. This variability makes the hermeneutic process much more difficult to theorize, and will produce a much more complicated understanding of the hermeneutic citizen. But, to the extent that could be a helpful tool in understanding the possibilities of contemporary citizenship, it is absolutely necessary. While Alejandro's work is instrumental in positing just what goes into the process of interpretation itself, and his elaboration of that understanding of citizenship is helpful in clarifying some of the oversights in Wolin's own work, the fact that Alejandro ultimately theorizes his citizen as interpreting being largely outside the very conditions of political power makes its ultimate usefulness somewhat circumscribed and truncated. A more successful understanding of hermeneutic citizenship is one that retains Wolin's eye for citizenship's relationship to structures of power as well as Paul Ricoeur's linking of a hermeneutic process to "a critique of ideologies. These begin by setting language, which hermeneutics seems to enclose itself within, into a much broader constellation, which also includes labor and domination. Under the gaze of the materialist critique…the practice of language is revealed to be the place of those systematic distortions" (Ricoeur 1988, 225). A hermeneutics of citizenship must emerge from, and concern itself intimately with the very conditions that citizenship itself is located in, even if the hope is to re-interpret, and thus reimagine and reinvent those same conditions.

Chapter Three

The imaginary is constitutive of our relation to the world
- Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*

If we are to theorize a hermeneutic conception of citizenship, much less a hermeneutic conception of politics more generally, we first must endeavor to show a meaningful, relationship between two ideas or activities that are often held at great distance from one another: politics and interpretation. If we are to hold to the idea that, "politics is the pragmatic domain *par excellence*, the site, enactment, and conflict of real and concrete interests, needs, and power" (W. Adams 1988, 51), how are we able to include within that domain the philosophical activity of interpretation? Even Sheldon Wolin who, as I attempted to show in the first chapter, seems to leave significant room for a dynamic relationship between interpretation, citizenship, and politics, defines the primary purpose of political institutions as such: "through the decisions taken and enforced by public officials, scattered activities are brought together, endowed with a new coherence, and their future course shaped according to "public" considerations" (S. S. Wolin 2004, 8). In both of these characterizations, politics appears at first blush to be a realm of decidedly un-interpretive activity. How then, can we fashion a definition that would allow us to fashion meaningful links between it as a realm of human experience and interpretation as an activity? In order to produce an understanding of politics, it may be helpful to begin from the other side of the equation, and attempt to offer an account of hermeneutics that seems to lend itself to an expressly political dimension.

I.   **The Hermeneutics of the New Historians**

As Adams points out, textual hermeneutics as a methodology was given serious consideration by the 'new historians' such as Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, specifically (though not exclusively) with regard to how historians and philosophers approached texts within the history of political thought. Concerned that, "in too many instances…texts were subjected to fiercely a-historical, even anti-historical forms of analysis" (W. Adams 1988, 47), they proposed to treat the text, as well as the writer's context in a hermeneutical manner. As such, for Skinner and the new historians, any understanding that abandons the attempt to situate the work and instead only focuses, "on the texts themselves…must necessarily remain a wholly inadequate methodology for the conduct of the history of ideas," (Skinner 1969, 31). This approach to context meant a radical reshaping of exactly what the history of ideas would in fact look like. If the text *itself* were insufficiently understood outside of the confines of context, than the ideas under discussion must, by necessity, become tethered to the same context. Just as abstracting texts does a disservice to understanding their meaning, abstracting the *ideas* under discussion posed a similar problem. As Skinner explains, "there *is* no determinate idea of which various writers contributed, but only a variety of statements made with words by a variety of different agents…there *is* no history of ideas to be written, but only a history necessarily focused on the various agents who used the idea, and on their varying situations and intentions in using it" (Skinner 1969, 38). For Skinner, in order to understand with any accuracy the meaning of the words and ideas under discussion we must pay attention to their specific use. However, Skinner proposes a hermeneutical understanding, and a definition of context that goes simply beyond word usage. While

placing these texts within the specific context of language, "if we wish to understand a given idea, even within a given culture and at a given time, we cannot simply concentrate…on studying the forms of words involved" (Skinner 1969, 36). Instead, any application of context must engage as well in social conventions and mentalities in order to fashion a responsible and thorough textual hermeneutics.

Going beyond the text means two very important things for Skinner. The first is to "focus not just on the text to be interpreted, but on the prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issues of themes with which the text is concerned" (Skinner 1972, 406). These conventions are important when we realize that authors are not simply trying to convey information or ideas, but are trying to do so with in a particular linguistic and cultural setting. If the author wishes to be understood and if their arguments are to be recognized, those arguments must be deployed within, and make use of, those conventions. Thus, if we are to understand the true meaning within these texts, we can only do so by trying to understand the context within which the work is created. The second rule of Skinner's hermeneutical method is to, "focus on the writer's mental world, the world of his empirical beliefs. This rule derives from the logical connection between our capacity to ascribe particular intentions to agents and our knowledge of their empirical beliefs" (Skinner 1972, 407)[21]. Both of these hermeneutical operations follow from Skinner's understanding of, "the text as an object linked to its creator, and thus on

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[21] Although this seems to give some credibility to the criticism that Skinner's interpretive aim is to somehow get inside the writer's head, I am in agreement with Adams that this does not capture the true intent behind Skinner's hermeneutics. The idea of the writer's 'mental world' is simply an interpretive means to avoid the otherwise overwhelming force of context. Not only does it allow us to assign agency to the author (albeit within context and conventions) but allows us to separate context from the 'utterance' (or written words) themselves.

to the discussion of what its creator may have been doing in creating it" (Skinner 1972, 408), and it is only by paying explicit attention to the cultural conventions and the mental world of the author that we can begin to understand this link, and the true meaning contained within these texts.

One of the important advances of this method is elaborating a connection between the history of political thought and larger social ideas. In this regard, "we can hardly claim to be concerned with the history of political theory unless we are prepared to write it as…the record of an actual activity, and in particular as the history of ideologies" (Skinner 1974, 280). However, just as the new historians reject the notion of the text as a completely self-sufficient entity, they also believed that, "to imagine context as a rigid and exhaustive explanatory framework is to abandon the text" (W. Adams 1988, 48). Thus, while the text is correctly understood as being situated within a context, the emphasis on the 'mental world' of the writer is an admission that an author can do things with a work even if it is embedded in a cultural setting. Though undeniably a creature of a context, an author can have the intention of challenging a context, or challenging an idea, or even transforming the very language within which the author is working.[22] Thus, the hermeneutics of the new historians is a complex methodology that seeks to encourage what Adams calls a 'strong form of interpretation' that tries to forge a middle path between an a-historical and timeless abstraction of ideas and authors on the one hand, and the domination of texts by a rigid contextual framework on the other. The ultimate goal of this hermeneutic method is one that attempts to reassert the complexity not only of the process of interpretation but the object being interpreted.

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[22] See J.G.A. *Pocock, Virtue, Commerce and History*.

However much the charge for interpretation has been renewed by the new historians, there is an ironic consequence to this method, especially when it comes to the relationship between this interpretation of the history of political thought and politics more generally. This consequence is captured by Adams when he notes that, "the interpretive manifesto set forth by the new historians has undoubtedly altered prevailing notions of textual interpretation. But it has also…made the purposes of studying the history of political thought less apparent" (W. Adams 1988, 50). If this hermeneutics is one that is tied to cultural conventions and the mental world of the writer, does that necessarily, and irreversibly, sever the connection between the meanings and ideas of these texts, and 'contemporary life and practice'? Does this hermeneutics force us to choose between historical understanding and contemporary engagement? To put the issue more clearly, "does the demand for interpretive integrity and rigor force us to choose between two forms of political theory, one which is faithful to the past because it is detached from the present and thus apolitical, and a second which is concerned with the present, critical and, precisely because of those commitments, anti-historical?" (W. Adams 1988, 50).

To some degree, this seems to be exactly what the new historians are advocating with their textual hermeneutics. As Skinner notes, "it will be found that what *counts* as an answer will usually look, in a different culture of period, so different in itself that it can hardly be in the least useful even to go on thinking of the relevant question as being "the same" in the required sense after all. More crudely: we must learn to do our own thinking for ourselves" (Skinner 1969, 52). In one sense, this is an understandable conclusion: if

there are no eternal ideas than the call for a renewed sense of 'doing our own thinking' is a necessary and welcome assertion. However, this does not quite explain the choice that Adams believes the new historians lay before us: an apolitical hermeneutics or an ahistorical political theory. In developing a rigorous hermeneutical *method*, the new historians have confined the idea of hermeneutics simply to a matter of *methodology*. Politics, the act of thinking for ourselves, seems to be entirely divorced from the activity of hermeneutics and the purity and rigor of hermeneutic interpretation is achieved only by sacrificing (or denying) its potential relation to politics itself: historical thinking and political thinking, if done properly, are distinct activities.

II.   Hermeneutics as Ontology
Adams wants to challenge the methodological limit that the new historians have placed upon their interpretative enterprise. In doing so, Adams hopes to take the activity of hermeneutics and expand it beyond process of textual interpretation and include within it the very act of 'thinking for ourselves'. Rather than opting for an approach to political theory that is concerned solely with the historical specificity of texts and ideas and thus one that cannot turn its focus upon contemporary politics without altering its methodological commitments, Adams opts for a political theory that is hermeneutic, and interpretive, precisely because of its political commitments. He is interested in a political that is concerned with, "questioning the immediate, contemporary and familiar world of political life might be understood and carried out as an interpretive enterprise" (W. Adams 1988, 51)[23]. This, however, does not completely divorce Adams from the work of

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[23] Adams is not making the case that ALL political theory should, or must, be interpretive. Adam's suggestion of a hermeneutical political theory is, in his estimation, only one possible model or type of

the new historians. Pocock's strong insistence that writers work *on* a language as much as *in* it can be seen as an acknowledgement that the history of political theory (and the work of political theorists) engages in this type of questioning and challenging. Furthermore:

> One of the things that powerful and memorable political theorists have commonly done, and done well, is to intercept and describe the meanings embedded in, and constitutive of, the political practices around them…political theory thus conceived, is a hermeneutical form of criticism; it is the exposure…of the meaning-foundations of a particular range of collective activities (W. Adams 1988, 51).

For Adams, the issue is not with the method of the new historians, but rather with an understanding of the method that, "does not take context far enough" (W. Adams 1988, 64). To rescue a truly interpretive political theory, Adams believes that it is wholly sufficient to take the basic methodological premises of the new historian's hermeneutics while not being content to "restrict the scope of hermeneutical reflection to the elucidation of the texts" (W. Adams 1988, 50). For Adams, it is not a methodological failing that is the cause of this seeming split between historical interpretation on the one hand and contemporary political analysis on the other. It is simply a refusal of the theorist to not take the hermeneutical project to its conclusion.

While I believe Adams points to a very important issue with this understanding of hermeneutics, and his desire to link political theory, hermeneutics, and political critique is a compelling project, what is left wanting is the way in which he conceives of his expanded hermeneutics. While he points out a certain lack of political engagement with the method of the new historians, in his rush to re-link hermeneutics with political critique, does he overlook a fundamental issue with that very method? While wanting to

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political theory among many others, but it is his intention to make explicit what he believes is an underutilized strain of political theory.

avoid the popular critique of Skinner referenced above, that he is interested in understanding the subjective world of the author or to produce a hermeneutics that allows us to inhabit the original head space of the author in question, I would like to forward the idea that an expansion of the hermeneutical method that Adams desires, which would effectively link the two 'worlds' he is interested in, can only be done by significantly altering the method itself. For this I want to briefly turn to Gadamer and Ricoeur, specifically to elucidate an understanding of hermeneutics that is not simply a methodology, but more importantly, is an ontology. Only in this sense can the hermeneutic understanding truly have the reach that Adams believes it should have, and that will be instrumental for developing a hermeneutic theory of citizenship and politics.

In his essay "The Task of Hermeneutics", Paul Ricoeur defines hermeneutics as "the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts" (Ricoeur 1981, 43), which does not seem very far removed from the general working theory of textual work espoused by Skinner. However what is immediately present in Ricoeur's project are two qualifying remarks that alter the scope of his understanding of hermeneutics. Ricoeur is adamant that part of hermeneutical reflection is the "realization of discourse as a text; and the elaboration of the categories of the text" (Ricoeur 1981, 43), which seems to transform hermeneutics itself into a slightly different (and more expanded) undertaking. This decisive transformation in Ricoeur's account of the history of hermeneutics comes with the advent of Heidegger and Gadamer, and is only possible when the status of hermeneutics as simply a methodological commitment is questioned. As Ricoeur himself writes, "the decisive step was not to perfect the

epistemology of the human sciences but to question its fundamental postulated…that these sciences can compete with the sciences of nature by means of a methodology which would be their own" (Ricoeur 1981, 53). Rather than forwarding hermeneutics as solely a methodology or one type of theory of knowledge, the essential move made by Gadamer's hermeneutics is to alter the basic level upon which hermeneutics is seen to operate. According to Ricoeur, "the presupposition of hermeneutics construed as epistemology is precisely what Heidegger and Gadamer place in question…it must be seen as an attempt to dig beneath the epistemological enterprise itself, in order to uncover its properly ontological conditions" (Ricoeur 1981, 53). This change, from a concern with epistemology and methodology to ontology means that the undertaking of hermeneutics poses an entirely different question. As formulated by Ricoeur, the change can be seen thusly, "instead of asking 'how do we know?' it will be asked 'what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding?'" (Ricoeur 1981, 54). As ontology, hermeneutics is no longer simply a reflection on a type of knowledge, or an entry into the realm of scientific methodology. Instead, is constitutes the very ground upon which scientific and political understanding can take place.

Only if hermeneutics is taken as ontology can Gadamer can assert that, "language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it" (Gadamer 2006, 440). `This expansive understanding of hermeneutics is not a rejection of the textual hermeneutics of the type advocated by Skinner and the new historians, but it is one that sets that textual

hermeneutical investigation within an understanding of our very 'being-in-the-world' that is itself fundamentally linguistic. The practice of textual interpretation thus becomes hermeneutic in two specific ways. First, we are engaged in an interpretation of the work in question, but second, and more important for Gadamer, that act of interpretation itself takes place through and in language, and thus becomes part of a larger or more encompassing ongoing hermeneutical process. This does not mean that the process of textual interpretation becomes impossible or groundless, but it does point to the impossibility of definitively separating the 'act' of interpretation from other, non-interpretative 'acts'. Gadamer stresses this essential inability to separate out this methodological process when he confronts the issue of 'beginnings' with regard to specific acts of interpretation. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer asserts that, "it is true that interpretation has to start somewhere, but it does not start just anywhere. It is not really a beginning…the hermeneutical experience always includes the fact that the text to be understood speaks into a situation that is determined by previous opinions" (Gadamer 2006, 467). Here, Gadamer is building his hermeneutical understanding at the expense of the methodological neatness that is the goal of the hermeneutical process espoused by the new historians. While the 'turn to history' that is fundamental to Skinner's interpretive work and epistemological claims (focusing on prevailing conventions and understanding the writers mental world) serves to mark the works being interpreted as distinct products of a definable historical period, Gadamer's recasting of the 'beginnings' of interpretive acts as always already situated within a linguistic context and hermeneutic world means that these interpretations as methods or means of understanding texts of events cannot

maintain such purity of beginnings, borders and completeness without denying some of the fundamental characteristics of the world itself.

These characteristics, for Gadamer, are not simply philosophical speculations or pleas to embark on a new methodology, but are indispensable for understanding not simply the complicated process of textual interpretation but for understanding how that interpretation is related to other acts of interpretation, how the context of the 'text' is fundamentally connected to other contexts, and how interpretation is related to our very existence in the world. But how does Gadamer's method effectively demonstrate these connections and interrelated processes? How can we best begin to understand what Gadamer's expanded sense of hermeneutics means with regard to both the interpretation of texts as well as the relationship between interpretation and political life (the major aim of this chapter)? What does hermeneutics as ontology mean for the relationship between hermeneutics and politics? I believe that we can begin to understand the full implications of this transition in the history of hermeneutics if we look Gadamer's use of the slightly polemical, and often debated term tradition.

Of all the terms that Gadamer embraces in his discussion of general hermeneutics, tradition maybe one of the most vexing for commentators as well as one of the most seized upon. For many commentators, Gadamer's use of the term tradition is not only fundamental to his entire hermeneutic enterprise, but shows that his project is one that is fundamentally conservative and, as such, renders it blind to certain possibilities and philosophical positions. Paul Ricoeur, a rather sympathetic critic notes that, "Gadamer inevitably turned hermeneutic philosophy towards the rehabilitation of prejudice and the

defense of tradition and authority, placing this philosophy in a conflictual relation to any

critique of ideology" (Ricoeur 1981, 66). The link that Gadamer maintains between the

terms, especially authority and tradition, and his deliberate use of hermeneutics to counter

some of the methodological claims and positions of the enlightenment movement, which

he saw as systematically distorting both the effects and characteristics of both tradition

and authority.

Gadamer's own work, when read selectively, does seem to confirm these

suspicions. Gadamer's magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, can easily be seen as a brilliant

philosophical defense of the power of both authority and tradition, potentially mirroring

some of the same ideas found in Hooker and English conservative thought more

generally. Regarding the relationship between the individual actor and this notion of

tradition, Gadamer writes, "the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of

a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the

tradition" (Gadamer 2006, 293). If tradition is to be understood as something that

functions at the expense of subjectivity, what does this say about the acting individual as

such? Exactly how does tradition infringe upon subjectivity? What tradition seems to

enable, at first glance, is the existence of a continuous presence of both authority and

what Gadamer refers to as prejudices. It is only in relation to these ideas of tradition

(authority) and prejudice that Gadamer sees the activity of interpretation playing out. As

Gadamer writes, "thus the meaning of "belonging" – i.e. the element of tradition in our

historical hermeneutical activity – is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental,

enabling principles" (Gadamer 2006, 295). Again, for those who see in Gadamer a

fundamentally conservative approach not only to interpretation but, through an extension of his work, politics more generally, draw from these acknowledgements of tradition that Gadamer places at a very crucial juncture in his hermeneutic theory. What needs to be determined is how this idea of tradition plays itself out in relation to the act of interpretation itself. If tradition plays such a powerful role, how plausible is it to talk about a critical form of hermeneutics?

While this is not the place to engage in an analysis of all facets of Gadamer's supposed conservatism, what is important for our purposes is to establish a more robust understanding of his use of the idea of tradition. While not denying the possibility that there may be some elements to his understanding of tradition that (may) lend themselves to a certain conservative reading, it is important for our purposes to connect his use of the term tradition with the 'ontological' condition of hermeneutics that he establishes. The first important element to understand is that, in Gadamer's reading, tradition is essentially a dynamic process. Tradition, understood hermeneutically, may in fact constitute a common ground of understanding, but "this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves." (Gadamer 2006, 293). The 'precondition' of tradition, which was brought to our attention by Ricoeur, forms only a part of the total concept of tradition. Rather than it being a permanently established precondition, one that always serves as the background for our experiences (hermeneutical, political, and otherwise) it is something that we produce through participating in it. Through the

ongoing process of understanding and engaging with this precondition of tradition, specifically through hermeneutic practice that, we could speculate, is the most complete way we interact with tradition, we alter and determine it, and hence change the very preconditions of our interpretive activity. While this is certainly not an exercise in complete interpretive freedom – after all, we begin to interpret against a background of preconditions – the interpretive process results in a certain amount of freedom that impacts and alters those very preconditions themselves. In addition to tradition being a fundamentally dynamic process, there is, for our purposes, another very important component to it that is necessary if we are to take hermeneutics out of the narrowly methodological context and assert its ontological role.

When Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, notes that our relation to tradition is essentially a linguistic one, he is forcing us to understand that not only is tradition something all encompassing (although constantly being produced) but hermeneutics itself is an all encompassing *activity*. Here he is moving from hermeneutics as a methodological activity to hermeneutics as the very ontological ground upon which methodologies can be enacted. In his essay, "On the Scope and Function of Reflection", Gadamer writes, "language is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world" (Gadamer 2008, 29). What this analysis of tradition forces us to understand is that there is a necessary link between the "very general recognition of the linguistic character of experience and the more technical definition of hermeneutics in terms of textual interpretation" (Ricoeur 2007, 17). What this means is that we cannot understand the

technical method of hermeneutics without acknowledging the fact that it takes place through a linguistic medium and through beings that have a fundamentally linguistic existence, hence the very conditions for hermeneutic activity (in the technical sense) are themselves inescapably hermeneutic (in the ontological sense). David Linge makes this relationship readily apparent when he writes, "the role of the past cannot be restricted meanly to supplying the texts or events that make up the "objects" of interpretation. As prejudice and tradition, the past also defines the ground the interpreter himself occupies when he understands" (Gadamer 2008, xv). That is to say, we cannot successfully understand hermeneutics as any kind of social scientific method without understanding how that very method is also a means of moving us from the narrow hermeneutical relationship between the interpreter and the object being interpreted to the larger hermeneutic relationship, that being the one between the interpreter and the very word in which the interpreter lives and which makes the very act of interpretation possible. It is not coincidental that, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer ends his reflections by speaking about 'universal aspect of hermeneutics' but *begins* the work discussing the question of hermeneutics and aesthetics and the experience of art. The way in which he presents the evolution of his ideas in the work is an illustration of one of the major points of the book, and his understanding of hermeneutics more generally: the object of hermeneutical investigation is at once both an object of study as well as a means to help us understand the hermeneutical relation between ourselves and the world at large.

This expansion of the idea of hermeneutics[24] allows us to address once again the question posed by William Adams: "Does the demand for interpretive integrity and rigor force us to choose between two forms of political theory, one which is faithful to the past because it is detached from the present and thus apolitical, and a second which is concerned with the present, critical and/ precisely because of those commitments, anti-historical?" (W. Adams 1988, 50). Taking Gadamer's hermeneutics as a starting point, the answer is, resoundingly, that we do not. Political theory can offer us both a method that is fully hermeneutical while at the same time is, in Adams' words, 'concerned with the present'. Using Gadamer's understanding of tradition allows us to see how both of these operations are, or can be, interrelated. Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics does agree with part of Skinner's contention that there are no 'timeless' questions in the history of political thought. However, what Gadamer does offer (contra Skinner) is a way of tying together Skinner's assertion that 'we must to our own thinking for ourselves' with an engagement with historical texts and ideas. Whereas Skinner's methodological hermeneutics offered such a precise encapsulation of the object within its own historical orbit (which can be interpreted but not appropriated via the hermeneutic method), an ontological understanding of hermeneutics allows us to see how the interpretation of those objects becomes part of the engagement that alters the historical 'tradition' within which hermeneutic beings find themselves. It is not simply a matter of choosing between understanding an historical text and engaging with present politics, as if the two inhabited

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[24] Ricoeur refers to this process as 'deregionalization': the gradual consolidation of hermeneutics from multiple fields of study (religious hermeneutics, legal hermeneutics etc…) into one larger conception of hermeneutics and its relationship to the world. The final move from methodology to ontology signifies, for Ricoeur, that final moment of 'deregionalization'.

completely distinct and unrelated dimensions. Instead, we see in an ontological hermeneutics a bringing together of the interpretation of the object with the understanding of our linguistic being. Although we can (and must) assert historical difference and specificity (Gadamer's method is not one that levels historical fact or specificity) understanding historical meaning and understanding politics (or, for Adams, contemporary politics) are complimentary, and interrelated activities.

III. Hermeneutics and the Imaginary

If an ontological hermeneutics allows us to combine interpretation with our being in the world, if the processes of interpretation and critical engagement with politics are not separate activities, exactly what does this activity entail? What this means, for Adams, is that a critical engagement in politics must be one that looks to interpret the meaning of political structures and the world of politics more generally. This means, "questioning the immediate, contemporary, and familiar world of political life might be understood and carried out as an interpretive enterprise, precisely to the degree that a writer is committed to articulating the meanings of political arrangements" (W. Adams 1988, 51). Rather than understanding politics as merely a 'pragmatic domain', of means and ends, a hermeneutic approach reminds us that "the political is also an imagined world, a world constructed around and in terms of specific meanings" (W. Adams 1988, 51). Rather than focusing simply on political practices, our investigations must be concerned with the meanings of those practices, they must help us to understand the 'imaginary' realm of politics as an indispensable part of this 'practical' realm, as well as the relations that hold between the two and the ways in which they both, together, impact our self-understandings of citizenship, obligation and responsibility. We are interested in

understanding the way in which meaning is found within practice and the way in which political practice is also a process of "how in fact we go about defining ourselves…how we say who we are in the midst of everyday thought and action" (W. Adams 1988, 53). What needs to be investigated now is the way in which we can conceive of this imaginary level of politics and its relationship to the more 'everyday' understanding of political activity that is buttressed and legitimated by it.

One philosopher who offers a complex and rewarding take on the relationship between the functional organization of society and its 'imaginary' component is Cornelius Castoriadis. Castoriadis theorized that for us to understand society, we must first understand that a given society as historically 'instituted'; that is, each society is produced and made meaningful through the emergence and interaction of specific institutions, all of which contain within them 'imaginary significations'. As he writes, "the institutions, and the imaginary significations borne by it and animating it, create a world. This is the world of the particular society" (Castoriadis 1991, 146). Although Castoriadis is ultimately interested in understanding a world of meaningful human action we will be able to discuss such a world, and put forward a worthwhile conception of meaningful action, only if we interrogate the relationship between society, individuals, and the presence of these various 'institutions' and 'social imaginaries'.

In his seminal work, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, he further develops the notion of 'the social imaginary', this "*creative core* of the social-historical and psychic worlds…the element that creates *ex nihilo* the figures and forms rendering "this world" and "what is" possible" (Thompson 1982, 674). The idea of the imaginary is developed in

large part because Castoriadis felt that we needed to deepen our understanding of politics and society beyond the merely technical or rational and "he did not consider the goal-oriented, planned moment as the primary component of action because it constitutes only the technical moment of an activity that requires the setting of conditions goals, and means" (Joas 1989, 1188). Rather than focusing on the means/end side of politics and society, he wanted to understand the 'setting of conditions' that makes such goal-oriented activity even possible. In this regard, the imaginary is indispensable, as it is, for Castoriadis, the component of the social/political world that "accounts for the orientation of social institutions, for the constitution of motives and needs" (Thompson 1982, 664). According to John B. Thompson, Castoriadis' idea of the 'social imaginary' is not simply a philosophical addendum to politics or society, but instead it is something that "renders possible any relation of object and image…without which there could be no reflection of anything" (Thompson 1982, 664). The shape that the political world takes in the realm of the 'imaginary' becomes one of the primary grounds upon which the 'practical' realm of politics gets established, it is what makes possible certain rationalities that enable the functioning of one political regime or another.

More specifically, the social imaginary, once instituted, serves as this ground upon which the specific political and social institutions of society can be founded because the imaginary is what allows us to understand ourselves *as* individuals within a given society. For Castoriadis, it is not enough to understand that we are individuals, but we must understand that we are *social* and *historical* individuals; that is, individuals who are inseparable from our relations to other (historical) concepts, objects, and ideas.

Therefore, the 'social imaginary institutions' carry out two essential functions. First, the presence of these social institutions 'creates' the social individual. According to Castoriadis, "the social fabrication of the individual is the historical process by means of which the psyche is coerced…into investing (cathecting) socially instituted objects, rules, and the world…the social individual is thus constituted by means of the internalization of the world and the imaginary significations created by society" (Castoriadis 1991, 148-9). If we truly accept, as Castoriadis would have us, the notion that we are social and historical individuals, then the process of becoming a social individual is a process which must rely on, our bring profoundly shaped by the historical and social institutions within which we exist.

The second function is intertwined with the first: in addition to creating the social individual, the social institutions are that which allow individuals to search for, and find, meaningful actions and beliefs within a given society. In order for the social institutions to fabricate the social individual, "the institution must offer to the psyche meaning *for its waking life*" (Castoriadis 1991, 144. Italics are in the original.). That is to say, it is not enough for institutions to 'create' us as social individuals, these institutions must also provide individuals with certain relations to other social institutions, from family relations, to law, to political structures. As Castoriadis notes, "Society must define its 'identity', its articulation, the world, its relation to the world and to the objects is contains, its needs and its desires. Without the 'answer' to these 'questions, without these 'definitions', there can be no human world, no society, no culture…the role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions" (Castoriadis 1998, 147). This

leads Castoriadis to the idea that the social world exists, fundamentally, as a 'system of significations' and that these significations are brought into being as a way for us to understand, not just ourselves, but our relations to the world around us.

All of this leads us to Castoriadis' major assertion about society and the relationships that hold between a given society and the individuals within it. Each individual society, as a particular social and historical construction (or what Castoriadis terms the socio-historical) is an 'instituted' society: any society is an historical creation that is held in place and made livable and open to human understanding and experience due to the presence of social institutions. For Castoriadis, an institution "is a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations" (Castoriadis 1998, 132). It is the presence of these institutions, with their combination of the functional and the imaginary, or more presicely, the functional that is predicated upon the imaginary, that both create the social individual, and provide the social individual with purpose and an understanding of social relations, and answers to social questions concerning purpose and desires.

In addition to providing answers to these questions, another invaluable function that the social imaginary institution is involved in is the production of the relations between people in society. "Relations between individuals and groups, behavior, motivations are not simply incomprehensible for us, they are impossible in themselves outside of this imaginary" (Castoriadis 1998, 161). Why is it then, that the imaginary is so important to the literal production of all of these relationships and ideas? It is due to

the fact that the imaginary resolves a fundamental element of arbitrariness that accompanies all networks of social relations, and thus produces a certain amount of social stability. To understand the essential nature of the social imaginary institution, we must understand that "the institution of society attempt to cover over that chaos, at creating a world *for* society" (Castoriadis 2007, 80) Castoriadis notes this arbitrary element when he writes, "the articulation of society into technique, economy, law, politics, religion, art etc. which seems self-evident to us, is only one mode of social institution, particular to a series of societies to which our own belongs" (Castoriadis 1998, 181). What these imaginary institutions provide is a social answer, or a resolution to that idea of arbitrariness. While it does not eliminate the issue that "there is not articulation of social life that is given once and for all…this articulation…is at every instance the creation of the society in question" (Castoriadis 1998, 180), what it does offer, in the form of social answers to social and political questions, is a self understanding that allows an individual, or a society, to avoid the issue (fear) of arbitrariness by providing an instituted social framework upon which people and groups can understand the social and political institutions as meaningful and purposeful; as part of a society that "operates as if it always were" (Naranch 2002, 69). This connection is indispensable for understanding one of Castoriadis' major contentions: not just that the political world is 'rational' as well as 'symbolic' but that the very 'rationality' of any given political world is predicated upon a shared and understood 'symbolic' nature. Or as Castoriadis himself writes, "society can exist concretely only through the fragmentary and complementary

incarnation and incorporation of its institution and its imaginary significations in the living, talking, and active individuals of that society" (Castoriadis 1991, 145).

In Castoriadis' estimation, the imaginary institutions that work to 'produce' the instituted society in question allow individuals to not only understand themselves 'within' that society, but to understand the relations, ideas, and norms that govern it, and that further allow individuals to engage in socially meaningful action: only by 'understanding' society can you act within it. Additionally, these institutions (and the imaginary that underpins them) lessen the sense of arbitrariness that Castoriadis sees fundamental to every instituted society. As John Thompson notes, the social imaginary provides for "the projection of an "imaginary community" by means of which "real" distinctions are portrayed as "natural," the particular is disguised in the universal" (Thompson 1982, 666). This naturalization of norms, laws, and beliefs is crucial; the imaginary is important, if not fundamental, in this regard simply because those answers provide the very means with which the questions of arbitrariness can be skirted and the questions of purpose can be answered.

What ultimately, and intimately, ties the social imaginary to hermeneutics, and why it is helpful in developing our hermeneutic project can be found in the connection that Castoriadis makes between the imaginary and language. Regarding this intimate association, he writes, "a large part of the significations of a society – those that are, or can be made, explicit – are also instituted, directly or indirectly, through its language" (Castoriadis 1998, 238). Although elsewhere Castoriadis refers to language as a 'second

order institution',[25] he asserts that "these second-order institutions…woven together, produce the concrete texture of society" (Castoriadis 2007, 100) If the imaginary is the means by which social institutions solidify themselves, language is the most prominent way in which that framework and its symbolic representation is constructed and dissipated through society. For Castoriadis, the social institutions of a society cannot be effective if they lack the ability to become internalized. Further, the 'naturalization' of each set of social institutions is impossible without this internalization, and language, as that which can connect these ideas with individual thought, provides the most effective means of allowing the social imaginary to become an internalized element of individual, and social, life. Or, as Dilip Gaonkar notes, "Each society derives its unity and identity by representing itself in symbols, myths, legends, and other collectively shared significations. Language is the medium par excellence in which these social imaginary significations become manifest and do their constitutive work" (Gaonkar 2002, 7). Therefore, if we are to concern ourselves with the creation and maintenance of a 'social imaginary' as part of our understanding of politics and citizenship, we must pay further attention to the relationship between the use of language and the deployment of this social imaginary.

Castoriadis work allows us to understand that within, or perhaps beneath whatever practical purposes we attach to various social and political practices, there lies a more

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[25] Here, Castoriadis' terminology is slightly misleading. 'Second order institutions' are contrasted with what Castoriadis calls the 'primal institution of society which is nothing more than the brute facts that all societies use specific 'social imaginary significations' to 'create' themselves. Hence, for Castoriadis, 'second order institutions' are in fact quite important, and include language, an understanding of the individual, an understanding of the family, and business enterprises. Essentially, 'second order institutions' are institutions specific to each society to implement (in its own historically specific way) the 'primal institution of society'.

fundamental one: the production and re-production of the 'social imaginary'. In order to understand this dual function of political practices – being at once both 'pragmatic' and 'imaginary' – I would like to offer an interpretation of Pericles' funeral oration, with specific focus on how we can see this speech not only serving a certain 'pragmatic' political function but also serving to create, and re-create a specific set of social imaginary institutions that I, borrowing a term from Nicole Loraux, will refer to as the 'Athenian imaginary'.

IV.   The Funeral Oration

Pericles' Funeral Oration, from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, is the second of three major speeches given by Pericles and 'recorded'[26] by Thucydides, and is perhaps one of the most famous passages from the entire work; with historians and philosophers alike attributing significant importance to it in terms of understanding Athenian political and social life of the period. Typical of this type of importance, Castoriadis asserts that, "the attitude of the classical Greek *polis* in relation to culture is best expressed in an extraordinary text, the "Funeral Speech of Pericles" in the Second book of Thucydides' History" (Castoriadis 1991, 235). However, just what about the speech is truly important, and what it tells us about Athenian politics, and Athenian life more generally, can be a major point of contention. As a preliminary means of comparison, I would like to assert that many of the prominent interpretations of Pericles' Funeral Oration can be understood most easily by looking the primary context in which

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[26] I qualify the idea of recording the speeches because, as Thucydides himself notes, "my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said" (Thucydides 1982, 13). Although his method can be confounding when it comes to establishing the truth of individual speeches, we should acknowledge from the outset that the funeral oration, as both a ceremony and rhetorical practice, is one that had a long tradition in Athens (See Loraux, 2006), so even if the exact speech attributed to Pericles by Thucydides is inaccurate to some degree, Pericles was largely constrained by tradition and expectation.

the author locates the oration itself. Two of the most common contexts are either the immediate political context of Athens at the time of the speech, or the place the oration occupies within Thucydides' larger work as a whole. As a way of building off of these contexts, and the insights that they provide, many of which are quite helpful and thought provoking, I would like to offer a further option. I wish to assert that some of the dominant interpretations of the speech, and the relations between the speech and Athens, understate, or leave out entirely, a key dimension, which can be clarified if we situate this speech, following Loraux (2006), within the context of the tradition of the funeral oration itself, as well but within the context of Castoriadis' 'imagined institutions' and 'social imaginary'.

In her discussion of the Funeral Oration, Lorna Hardwick states the case for interpreting Pericles' Funeral Oration through its immediate political context when she writes, "much recent work inspired by concepts drawn from anthropology has diverted attention from detailed study of historical context. This discussion seeks in a small way to redress that balance" (Hardwick 1993, 149). That is to say, if we are to understand not only what he said, but more importantly, *why* it was said, and for *what reasons*, we must understand that this speech took place at a particular moment when, "the war was official and that it was affecting Attica itself. The countryside of Attica had been evacuated and Thucydides refers to overcrowding in Athens" (Hardwick 1993, 150). If we take seriously the explicit political and social context as the motivation for the Funeral Oration, the speech it is seen largely as a brilliant bit of rhetorical/political strategy, tactically designed to placate the worries and concerns of the Athenian citizens, and

serves as an illustration of the power that Pericles has over the Athenian demos. In this interpretation, Hardwick is interested in explaining the particular language that Pericles employs, why it seems that this speech differs from other examples of the oration. Again, the immediate context provides answers to those questions if we remember that leading up to the Funeral Oration, "there was anxiety about the ravaging of the countryside" (Hardwick 1993, 151), that was resulting from Pericles' war strategy, which was leading to certain political discontents within certain segments of the Athenian polis, most notably that, "it was likely that the rich and the citizens of the countryside took the view that, whether or not they had wanted war in the first place, they nevertheless wanted their land to be defended" (Hardwick 1993, 151). It is also claimed that the Athenian cavalry, an aristocratic institution, was used as 'Pericles' main defensive weapon' against the Spartans, and that at least some of the dead were "from prosperous families and perhaps young" (Hardwick 1993, 152). Hardwick uses this context in order to understand the purpose and goals of the speech itself. These goals can only be understood if we focus on the Athenian anxiety over the ravaging of Athenian land, the political and economic discontent that must have been spreading particularly throughout the well to do of Athens due to the loss of life in the ranks of the aristocratic Athenian cavalry, but also, likely throughout the rest of Athens due to a general anxiety over the efficacy of current military tactics and further loss of life.[27]

If we focus our attention upon these given political realities that, understandably, Pericles would need to respond to, we see the Funeral Oration primarily as a speech of

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[27] Hardwick notes that the Athenians sued the Spartans for peace in 430, which suggests to her that there was, from the beginning, at least an unease over Pericles' policies and military strategy. Again, this is the context within which we must situate the oration.

strategy. The particulars of the speech stem from the immediate political needs of the situation, and Pericles the orator is supplemented by the image of Pericles the political strategist, using the speech to respond to, and hopefully reassure, the elements of Athenian society that threatened his position at that moment. For Hardwick, this means that we should see the speech (and the larger funeral itself) as:

> Highlight[ing] both the discontents over his policy and the bereavement caused by the action he had taken. The ordinary citizens might be placated by the public honors, but the upper class…had yet to be convinced that the democracy did not operate against their interests. Thus the speech had as far as possible to placade those whose loss of exclusivity and elite status was exposed by the nature of the ritual, yet at the same time civic unity and balance had to be preserved (Hardwick 1993, 160).

Given these constraints and political concerns that form the context of the speech, it is no surprise that Hardwick reads the speech as a means of strategically defending his position of leadership within Athens from challenges by politically discontent forces, as well as a means to attempt to unify the city once again behind his military strategy. As Hardwick notes, "Pericles was neither the first nor the last politician in history to wrap political convenience in the cloak of an appeal to honour" (Hardwick 1993, 160). It is a funeral speech, yes, but it is a political speech even more, and Pericles there is a politician above all.

The second contextual school of thought for the Funeral Oration builds off of the interpretation of the oration as political strategy, but this interpretation often has far reaching consequences not just for the Funeral Oration itself, but also for the whole of Thucydides' work, as it is the whole of The Peloponnesian War that serves as the primary context here. Here, it is not just that we need to see Pericles as a political strategist, but rather, we need to pay attention to "Pericles' ability to contain the 'passions' of the crowds" (Bedford and Workman 2001, 56) as a general, yet important, characteristic. In

this case, the Funeral Oration simply plays a specific, albeit important, role in illuminating Pericles' general ability, not just as a political *strategist*, but instead as a political *leader* and shaper of opinions, or as John Zumbrunnen notes, "it must be part of the speakers' attempts to shape how the audience understands the situation" (Zumbrunnen 2008, 82). Whether Pericles accomplishes this more through overt manipulative appeals (as Hardwick seems to suggest) or through "a skill in interacting with, rather than managing, the demos" (Zumbrunnen 2008, 98), we see the speech as an example of shaping opinion.

In this contextual setting, rather than seeing Pericles as simply responding to political needs through oratory, the very oration itself, and whatever qualities or traits Pericles displays, illuminates what I would refer to as a 'Periclean moment' in the trajectory of Athens within the whole of The Peloponnesian War, which helps us make sense of the work as a whole. This type of contextual understanding is quite common and leads to many provocative interpretations of Pericles, the speech itself, and The Peloponnesian War as a work of history, philosophy, and politics. Bedford and Workman see Thucydides' characterization of the Periclean control of Athenian passions as explicitly contrasted with Cleon's "propensity to inflame the crowd" (Bedford and Workman 2001, 56). They further develop this into a theme that tracks the arc of The Peloponnesian War: the contrast between reason and passion, and that as passion (Cleon) takes the place of passion (Pericles), human conduct escapes the bounds of moderation and restraint. Thus, this transition draws our attention to "the deterioration of the Athenian polis…symbolized by the succession of increasingly impassioned post-

Periclean leaders" (Bedford and Workman 2001, 58). Here we see a perfect example of an interpretation based on that shift in context: from the immediate political context, to the entirety of Thucydides' work.

If we understand Pericles' speech as a shining example of reason and logos in democratic Athens, James Boyd White offers a similar type of interpretation. White is concerned with the existence of such speeches within the context of a Hellenic world (and work) full of specific episodes where words lose their meaning (Athens during the plague for example), as well as the political and social consequences of that loss of meaning. As White himself states, "when Thucydides wishes to explore his sense of the internal chaos brought upon the cities of Greece by the civil wars that arose during the time of the Peloponnesian war, he tells us, among other things, that words themselves lost their meaning" (White 1984, 3). Here, Pericles' speech becomes one example of how language serves as a means to create a type of identity and stability for a political society. As White notes, "the speeches define the conditions imposed on the actors by the language that constitutes their community.[28] This language defines a culture…of which it is Thucydides' object to tell the history" (White 1984, 67). The relationship between language, community, and culture is paired with examples where a language, and hence a community, breaks down. Thus we can interpret Pericles' Funeral Oration as an example not only of how language can define a culture, or create a community, but also by paring it specifically with examples of 'meaninglessness' it serves as an example of how fragile that construction truly is.

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[28] For White, the relationship between speaker and language is mutually constitutive. He notes in the preface to the book that language is 'remade by its speakers' while simultaneously, the speakers are 'themselves remade' in and through what they say.

This type of interpretation, through contextual paring within Thucydides' work is fruitful, and quite logical givcn Thucydides' propensity to himself pair speeches throughout his work.[29] Simon Stow gives us perhaps the most nuanced and original of this type of interpretation: by analyzing Thucydides' method and (what Stow sees as) the very deliberate pairing of the Oration with the plague, Thucydides provides us with two distinct Pericles: one *in* the history and one *of* the history. This interpretation allows him to simultaneous offer a critical evaluation of the Periclean speech itself, while using the speech in context to offer an insightful account of Thucydides' design and purpose. While the first is an example of what Stow calls an uncritical patriotism, the second example is a theoretical/pedagogical one specifically deployed by Thucydides where, "the virtues of Athens are thrown into sharp relief and problematized by the context in which they are presented" (Stow 2007, 200). Stow's contention is that while the Funeral Oration itself is designed "solely to blind the citizens to the city in a way that dulls their critical faculties…offers an idealized view of Athens and demands little of its audience" (Stow 2007, 197, 200), Thucydides himself subverts the uncritical patriotic spectacle of the speech with the plague, where, "the very virtues of which he (Pericles) boasts are undercut by the actions of her citizens in a time of crisis" (Stow 2007, 200); and Thucydides is teaching his audience what Pericles of the Oration was unable to teach his audience: the need for a critical form of patriotism that about "the dangers of failing to engage in critical reflection themselves" (Stow 2007, 201). Ultimately, Stow's contextual reading of the Oration leaves us with a Thucydides who refashions the 'Periclean

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[29] Of course, in this regard, Pericles is an odd figure, because he is the one speaker whose speeches are not directly paired with another. This leaves quite a bit of room for interpretation of the critical element: just 'what' or 'who' are we supposed to pair Pericles with?

moment' into a tragic moment, or one important moment in a larger tragedy, and uses it to appeal, "over the head of his character to his readers, teaching them a lesson that this Pericles could never learn" (Stow 2007, 201). Stow, while not denying the plausibility of the first mode of interpretation, leaves us with the firm understanding that to truly comprehend the meaning of the Funeral Oration, we must read it as 'Thucydides' oration, and to keep in mind that, "as the long agony wore on, as crime led to crime and madness to ruin, it was only from a distance that the artist who was no longer an actor could discern the large outlines shaping all that misery and suffering into the thing of beauty and awe which we call Tragedy" (Cornford 1907, 200). Here, what is important is not simply (or even primarily) the place of the oration within the politics of Athens, but the place of the oration in flow of events and ideas recorded by Thucydides.

I believe that our understanding of the Funeral Oration is doubtlessly enhanced through both types of interpretations. Through the first, we can begin to understand just what Pericles was responding to, and how he needed to incorporate immediate political concerns within his civic responsibility. From the second mode of interpretation, we can see how the oration itself can help point to long terms changes within Athens or Hellas more generally, whether it be the effect of civil war, the relation between reason and passion, or the difficulty of upholding civic ideals. However, I believe that both of these types of interpretations leave out an important issue: they both tend to be primarily concerned with the relationship between the meaning of the speech and the intent of the author. For advocates of the first mode of interpretation, to understand the purpose of the speech we need to be fully cognizant of Pericles' political needs, and we need to see the

speech as, primarily, a piece or oratory deliberately constructed to respond to those immediate concerns. For us to accept the second mode of interpretation, we need to look more closely at Thucydides' own intention: for us to understand the oration, we need to see how Thucydides shaped the oration in both structure and relation to other elements in order to fit it into his tragic (Cornford) or critical patriotic (Stow) historical narrative-form. What is missing to a larger degree is a sustained analysis of the oration as an iteration of a specific genre of public display and political speech, that, as a genre, carries with it fundamental social and political importance. Stow does make mention the oration as institutional tradition when he notes that, "For the Greeks, the annual wintertime funeral and oration for the war dead was an inextricable political affair…the Athenian funeral oration was then an occasion for the glorification of the city. It sought to reaffirm social ties, community values, and an established political identity" (Stow 2007, 196, 197), however, his further analysis is predicated on a continued distancing of the oration within Thucydides' work from the institutional oration itself; that is, the more we focus on the institution, the more difficult it becomes to see the full important of this specific oration.

I believe that by drawing further attention to the institutional and historical elements of the oration, our analysis can accomplish several important things. Firstly, it allows us to look at a specific oration as a unique and individual speech while at the same time drawing connections between the individual speech and the institution of the speech. This allows us to comment with more care upon just what roles these speeches played in Athenian life. Whether the speech is, as Stow asserts, an example of uncritical patriotism,

or whether, following Orwin, it is an example of "that noblest of all visions of political life" (Orwin 1988, 844) is a debate that will most likely never be settled, and is well beyond the scope of this investigation. What is important for our purposes, however, is that by addressing the oration as an institution, it allows us to interpret the effects that the speech has on a level that goes beyond mere description of 'political life' or 'patriotism'. Rather, it allows us to see how the funeral oration, "functioned as one of the privileged voices of the city's imaginary" (Loraux 2006, 28) and to assert ways in which the oration itself is a part of the ongoing constitution of Athens, the Athenian people, and the political and civic world that they were inhabiting.

V.   **The Funeral Oration and the Athenian Imaginary**

Approaching the oration in this way is not to obviate or preclude the interpretative schemes laid out above. In fact, I would contend that they are each valuable parts of any attempt to understand the place of the funeral oration as a part of Athenian politics as well as Thucydidean philosophy. As such, it is not incorrect for us to see the Funeral Oration as an example of an Athenian orator addressing (at least in part) the Athenian demos.[30] However, for us to capture the true measure of the place and importance of the oration, we would do well to keep in mind, as Victoria Wohl writes, "I take 'demos' not as a transcendental subject, but as a discursive formation, a compendium of things the Athenians said (and did not say) about themselves as citizens" (Wohl 2002, IX). That is to say we need to think of the Athenian 'demos' (and by extension, any political

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[30] Of course, not every member of the demos was present, and in addition, foreigners, metics and other individuals mostly likely were also in attendance, but that does not alter the fundamental premise of the 'imaginary'. For the questions that the 'imaginary' poses and answers are important to those people 'within' a given society, but also have a function to serve regarding those people who are, to one degree or another, 'external' to that society.

collectivity – democratic or not) as a constructed object. In this regard, the funeral oration that Pericles delivers is not only an address *to* the assembled Athenians (and foreigners) but is also, simultaneously, a construction of the demos itself: a reiteration of the imaginary institution of Athenian society. Victoria Wohl offers a succinct description of the constructive nature of the oration when she writes that, "the audience arrives at the funeral as individuals; it leaves as the Athenian demos" (Wohl 2002, 39). Although this may be a slightly over-simplified explanation of the dynamics inherent in the oration (and the institution of the public funeral more generally), it does capture an important element of the civic proceedings. As a civic institution, "the funeral oration has its place in Athenian paideia, that vast educative complex comprising institutions and cultural models that from childhood to death took charge of the citizen, molding him by constantly reminding him of his civic values" (Loraux 2006, 204-05). More than a strategic speech or political oratory during a time of individual and collective mourning, the funeral oration is simultaneously honorific, educative, and creative.

To substantiate this interpretation we need to move away from the notion of the Funeral Oration of Pericles as simply a stand-alone strategic speech, and focus more on the idea of the oration as a tradition and a practice. While it is useful to compare the unique aspects of his speech to the particular political context in which it is delivered, we would do well to remember that despite whatever exigencies Pericles may be facing, "the funeral oration was an *institution* – an institution of speech in which the symbolic constantly encroached in the functional" (Loraux 2006, 27). Thus, we first need to look at what the funeral oration as a civic institution was designed to do, and just how the

symbolic nature of the speech fit within the fabric of Athenian life. In the civic funeral oration genre, to borrow from Nicole Loraux, "the orators have a double aim: to instruct the young and to console the adults" (Loraux 2006, 84). The pragmatic aim of the oration, to provide comfort to the bereaved and to inspire the city in a time of defeat, is, at almost every turn, shot through with the second aim, to 'instruct the young'. Thus, in the end, the oration becomes "at once a eulogy of working men, an honor accorded the dead, and a stock of instructive examples, the funeral oration is…a lesson in civic morality intended for the living" (Loraux 2006, 145). Furthermore, the oration discusses seemingly mundane things such as laws and public obligations, but is does so in such a way that, in Philip Manville's words, "it portrays laws not as purely negative preventions but as guidelines with moral purpose that ultimately reflect and define shared values of the members of the political community" (Manville 1994, 25). Thus, the discussion within the oration is not simply one of description, but one that describes and disseminates a specific moral, social and cultural identity and shared identification. This allows for the production of the 'Athenian imaginary', and throughout the speech we see the continual linguistic 'construction' of Athens. Again pointing to one of the social consequences of the oration, Wohl writes that, "the fantasies and desires that emerge within this text belong not only to its author but also to the Athenian psyche" (Wohl 2002, 32). For our purposes, Wohl's use of the word 'psyche' is quite important. If, as Castoriadis contends, one of the most important roles of the imaginary institution is to offer meaning to the psyche in order to create a social individual (an individual as a member of a specific social/historical manifestation), can we see the elements of the

funeral oration fulfilling that very purpose? Is the funeral oration a manifestation of the imaginary institution?   Does it, and Pericles, offer to the assembled individuals not simply a rhetorical display, or words of consolation and encouragement, but more fundamentally, does it offer a construction of Athens as an imaginary institution designed to create the world of the Athenians, and the Athenians themselves?

Although the funeral oration was traditionally designated as a panegyric for those soldiers who have fallen in battle, at the very outset Pericles states that his speech will take a specific (strategic) detour: "but by what road we reached our position, under what form of government our greatness grew, out of what national habits it sprang – these are subjects which I may pursue before I proceed to my panegyric upon these men" (Thucydides 1982, 108). These subjects inform Pericles' tension-ridden attempt to understand Athenian citizenship within the context of the city and in doing so, begins to build our first Athenian imaginary.   This tension is most evident in the context of Pericles' contention that "we trust less in system and policy than in the native spirit of our citizens" (Thucydides 1982, 109).   However, this trust in the 'native spirit' of the Athenians is far from a prefigured nature and spirit, but is the result of robust tendencies asserting themselves within the demos.   For this claim to native spirit is made immediately after he explicitly tempers the spirit of private relations (which he praises as being robust and ubiquitous) with recourse to 'system and policy'.   In this, Pericles notes, "but all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens.   Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws…whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which,

although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace." (Thucydides 1982, 108)   Thus, the power of private relations and individuality (freedom from government and ability to do what one likes), which Pericles sees as fundamental to the health of Athens is tempered by law and government, in order that they do not become 'lawless as citizens'.

Pericles' Athenian imaginary is one with which he attempts to fuse the seemingly dirempted person (and by extension Athens) by allowing the citizen (political relations) and the individual (private relations) come together, and in doing so also bringing together into a coherent whole the relations between the citizen and the city. Clifford Orwin makes note of this dynamic when he writes:

> Pericles sketches a society in which the fullest development of the citizens is compatible with the greatest devotion to the city…Pericles may have succeeded in harmonizing (at least in speech) the happiness of the individual with the good of the society, by showing how the citizen comes fully into his own only in this most demanding and fulfilling of cities." (Orwin, The Humanity of Thucydides 1994, 16-18).

I would argue, however, that the ultimate aim of the oration is even grander than what Orwin asserts. It is instead an attempt not to assert that individual development and Athenian development are *compatible*, but that they are *inseparable*. That is to say, Pericles is re-presenting this 'Athenian imaginary' to assert a complete identification of one with the other. Castoriadis makes a similar claim with regard to the oration when he writes that.

> In the funeral speech, Pericles implicitly shows the futility of the false dilemmas that plague modern political philosophy and the modern mentality in general: the 'individual' versus 'society,' or 'civil society' versus 'the State'. The object of the institution of the polis is for him the creation of a human being, the Athenian citizen, who exists and lives in and through the unity of these three. (Castoriadis 1991, 123)

Leaving aside for the moment Castoriadis' own concerns about philosophy and the modern world[31], we see him making an important point about the oration itself. Its large goal (one might say the 'primal institution') is the creation of the social-historical individual known as the Athenian citizen, but its secondary goal (or 'secondary institution') is to prove the Athenian institution with an understanding of itself in relation to the larger society: a self who exists in and through the flowering and power of the city of Athens more generally. A question remains, however. In what ways does the funeral oration enforce this understanding (or self-understanding) of Athenian citizenship?

For Pericles, Athens the city is a direct result of its heroes: "the Athens that I have celebrated is only what the heroism of these and their like have made her" (Thucydides 1982, 111), and the manner in which the idea of heroes functions in the construction of this imaginary institution is important in two respects. The first is that heroism is a means to cloak the 'shortcomings' of individuality. According to Pericles, "there is justice in the claim that steadfastness in his country's battles should be as a cloak to cover a man's other imperfections; for the good action has blotted out the bad, and his merit as a citizen more that outweighed his demerits as an individual" (Thucydides 1982, 111). The heroism that Pericles demands as being constitutive of the idealist Athens brings citizenship in concert with individuality, ostensibly using the heroism of citizenship to cure the ills of individuality but it is important to remember that Pericles never renounces individuality, but instead it remains an important part of the Athenian character. It is simply to be understood that heroic service for Athens brings them both together in a complimentary manner.

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[31] Again, this will enter into the discussion with a look at Castoriadis' understanding of democracy.

The second way in which heroism enters into this Athenian imaginary can best be understood by examining a seeming paradox that emerges toward the end of the funeral oration. Regarding the burial of the dead, Pericles notes that their resting places will be "the noblest of shrines wherein their glory is to be laid up to be eternally remembered upon every occasion on which deed or story shall call for its commemoration." (Thucydides 1982, 112) However, shortly after Pericles' claim about the fallen, he seems to make a strange rhetorical move when "in addressing the bereaved parents Pericles urged them to have more children" (Hardwick 1993, 152). Moreover, this urging is not done for any immediately strategic reasons but instead he seems to offer the hope of new children as some type of palliative with the claim that, "you who are still of an age to beget children must bear up in the hope of having others in their stead*; not only will they help you to forget those whom you have lost*, but will be to the state at once a reinforcement and a security; for never can a fair or just policy be expected of a citizen who does not, like his fellows, bring to the decision the interests and apprehensions of a father" (Thucydides 1982, 113). This passage raises several important issues; the first is the explicit connection of citizenship to individuality in the sense that the just policy of a citizen requires the interests of 'a father'. Thus, true heroic action as a citizen requires and draws upon individuality to be effective; a good citizen will be able to contribute to 'fair and just policy' only if he embraces his own individual concerns and subjective qualities (his 'interests and apprehensions') that define his unique standpoint as an individual citizen. The second important issue involves the relationship between that individuality and the needs of the city itself, and this can best be understood through an

analysis of this process of remembering and forgetting that, I believe, works to secure the Athenian 'imagined institution'.

If the birth of new citizens (and new individuals) is to be a means to forget those who have died, in what sense will they be 'eternally remembered'? I believe that we can resolve this dual remembrance/forgetting that emerges in this speech only if we understand that what the funeral oration is primarily doing is constituting (or re-constituting) an 'Athenian' imaginary institution. In this sense, we can claim that they will be remembered as a strategic part of the Athenian imaginary, as 'constructed' Athenians (much the same way that the city itself is constructed within the speech). Their sacrifice and citizen action will become part of the inter-generational historical remembrance that Pericles uses to begin the oration, and, "everything is in place for the dead to become merely a link on the endless chain of the Athenian generations" (Loraux 2006, 179). Here, it is useful to illustrate exactly how the war-dead are remembered in this public funeral procession. As Thucydides explains, the dead are 'privately mourned' by family for two days, after which point "the dead become public property" (Stow 2007, 196), and the public funeral begins, at which point the individual soldiers begin to transform into something more public, and more symbolically and politically 'Athenian'. During the funeral procession, "cypress coffins are borne on wagons, one for each tribe, the bones of the deceased being placed in the coffin of their tribe" until, "the dead are laid in the public sepulcher in the most beautiful suburb of the city" (Thucydides 1982, 106). This single tomb for all of the war dead of that year listed the names of the individuals, divided by tribe, but given no other marker other than "*hoi enthade keimenoi*

(those who rest here)" (Loraux 2006, 51). Furthermore, the listing of the names adds an even greater element of strategic anonymity. According to Loraux, "Freed from everyday attachments to social life, the dead man was now simply an Athenian. Thus the lists of the dead mention neither patronymic nor demotic: freed forever from the bonds to father or family, the warrior was in effect entrusted with an official mission" (Loraux 2006, 52). The fallen soldiers, while being honored through a beautiful burial and public mourning are rendered slightly more anonymous, or at the very least are stripped away of the markers that differentiate themselves from one another, and they become identified simply as war heroes related only to the city itself. What mission is it that they are now entrusted with: to serve as a constant reminder of the essential and irreplaceable connection between citizen and city.

There are two important ways in which the presence of this 'anonymous dead' informs Athenian ideas of citizenship, and fits into the larger idea of Athens as an 'imagined institution'? The first is that the praise of the anonymous dead mixes with the discussion of the 'Athenian' character until the two become two facets of the same ideal. As Loraux notes, "in the funeral oration, the Athenians, interchangeable and anonymous, are so many replicas of a single, implicit model, that of the hoplite, whose constricting ethic they observe" (Loraux 2006, 349). While I take some issue with how Loraux simply and universally attributes 'a single ethic' to the whole of Athens, the general point is essential. If the funeral oration is, in large part, a story that Athens is telling itself (or hearing about itself), then the way in which these newly anonymous war dead (and the ethic they are said to embody) serve as something of a guide-post for an

understanding of Athenian citizenship cannot really be overstated. Again, while I argue

that Pericles, in the oration, does point to the necessity of some level of individuality, the

heroism that is demonstrated, mourned and then rendered anonymous, and therefore,

becomes universally Athenian in its lack of specificity, serves as a filter or a prism

through which Athenian individuality is seen, manufactured and shaped. Secondly, the

relative anonymity of the war dead is a process by which Athens attempts, "to absorb

multiplicity in unity" (Loraux 2006, 350). While Loraux notes that the anonymity of the

war dead, or the lack of differentiation, is in one sense democratic (erasing class status

for example), there is a way in which the suppression of difference might be seen as

serving to temper the (potential) democratic energies of Athenian citizens. Loraux

elsewhere claims that, "the symbolic satisfaction that they derive from the evocation of

the city saves the Athenians from actually having to think of the city as a community or

even as a collection of heterogeneous human groups" (Loraux 2006, 347) and further,

that we can in one sense see "the denial of conflict as the law of politics and the life of

the city. Anything is preferable to recognizing that in the city power rests in the hands of

one group" (Loraux 2006, 70). Taken together, this allows us to see the way in which the

elaboration of an Athenian ethic or Athenian identity that is (largely) independent of any

identifications other than the one between the citizen and the city, serves not only as a

'universality' that tempers individuality within the city, but serves as an identity that

conceals and suppresses difference, conflict and (potentially) the political realities of

injustice, inequality and disagreement. All of those elements are smoothed over through

the operation of the imaginary institution of Athens, which is produced and promulgated through civic institutions including the funeral oration.

Thus the dead, as part of this heroic Athenian imaginary form, I would claim, a large part of that 'unwritten code that cannot be broken without disgrace' that prevents people from becoming 'lawless citizens'. It serves as both primary identifier of citizen identity as well as an active suppression of conflict and disunity. Furthermore, by setting forth this ideal as a civic and patriotic measure of citizenship, it produces a standard of judgment and commitment by which Athenian citizens are supposed to conduct their lives and see themselves through. This means that this heroic imagery and identity that flourishes within the funeral oration is not just an ideal, but it is (for Athenian citizens) an inheritance). Pericles' Funeral Oration uses the glory of the dead, and the glory of the departed as a means to bind the Athenians to a standard and path that has been laid out already, one that the oration itself makes clear to all in attendance. It is as if, by the end of the oration, "Pericles invited the living to confirm the glorious present by their future actions, so that the city may survive in all its brilliance" (Loraux 2006, 176). It is true that in this sense, Pericles seems to be elevating the present generation, but it is not an elevation without a strong historical attachment: all of this political possibility that is open to the present generation is only understandable if we see "the ancestors as having handed down the land of Attica to Pericles's contemporaries" (Loraux 2006, 175) As Pericles notes in his first (strategy) speech, "We must not fall behind them" (Thucydides 1982, 86), 'them' referring to the ancestors of the Athenians. Thus we see the full measure of exactly how the construction of idealized citizens and heroic generations, as

part of the Athenian imaginary, serves as instructive devices and guideposts for the individual citizens of the present generation of Athenians.

Ultimately, the power and heroism that is/constructs Athens finds its ultimate expression, within the funeral oration, in powerful erotic love, or as Orwin notes, "the speech culminates in the astonishing injunction that the Athenians become lovers (erastai) of their city" (Orwin 1994, 23). In one of the most impassioned sections of the speech, Pericles implores Athenians to "realize the power of Athens, and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honour in action that men were enabled to win all this" (Thucydides 1982, 112). This is Pericles' ultimate attempt to bond citizenship with individuality: a folding of erotic individual love into a collective entity requiring collective action; a display of citizenship as emotional engagement. Wohl makes note of this transformation when she writes that, "in the Funeral Oration, Pericles constructs an idealized Athenian subject as lover of the city" (Wohl 2002, 30) Here we see the Athenian imaginary at its fullest conception: Athens as an erotic love of individuals, dependent upon and created by heroic actions that must be informed by individual 'interests and apprehensions' but filtered through a collective **understanding** of individuality that is tempered and made lawful through the unwritten but ever-present guideposts of the deceased who are forgotten in one sense as they are 'replaced' by new individuals, but are eternally remembered as the citizen imaginary, the unwritten code

that serves as the chief safeguard in the bonding together, albeit imperfectly, of individual and citizen.

There is one last important element to help us understand the funeral oration as constructive of the imaginary institution of Athens, and this gets us back to one of Castoriadis's major points about the imaginary institution: that it naturalizes the particular. Again quoting John Thompson, the social imaginary provides for "the projection of an "imaginary community" by means of which "real" distinctions are portrayed as "natural," the particular is disguised in the universal" (Thompson 1982, 666). In what way does the Athenian imaginary not only suppress difference within the city, or create a model identification for Athenian citizens, but also work to present that identification or (lack) of differentiation as natural and unassailable. This is accomplished through the Athenian practices of *autochthony*, which, in addition to being a major civic component of Athenian life (and much of the Hellenic world more generally), forms a component of the funeral oration genre and finishes off the picture of the Athenian imaginary institution.

According to Loraux, "When it concerns a people, autochthony characterizes the strict relationship which, from the beginning and uninterruptedly, attaches them to their land" (Loraux 2000, 15), and this claim of 'uninterruptedness' is just as important to the Athenian identity as the 'universalizing' ideal of the heroic citizen. From the very beginning of the funeral oration, Pericles makes reference to this idea, and uses it to structure all that follows. When he begins to speak of 'our ancestors' he claims that "They dwelt in the country without break in succession from generation to generation,

and handed it down free to the present time by their valour" (Thucydides 1982, 107). This claim of Athenian autochthony, is important in understanding the full political and social ambition of the funeral oration. The Athenian myth of autochthony allowed for "the ability to glorify in all serenity the enduring stability of Athens, and its vitality continuously renewed from generation to generation" (Loraux 2000, 17). Moreover, this uninterrupted historical connection between and among Athenians, "extended to the community as a whole, cementing internal cohesion" (Loraux 2006, 349). Just as the Athenian people sprang, fully formed, from the soil of Athens, so to, the character of the Athenian polis and its citizens was similarly fully formed and "Athenians can forget…that their democratic regime is a historically dated conquest" (Loraux 2000, 23), which takes issues of contingency out of the master narrative of the Athenian imaginary. Thus we see the full reach of the imagined institution. It not only provides the Athenian citizens with an identity that situates their relations to one another, to the city more generally, and to aspect of political life such as law, but it sets itself within a narrative form that, owning to the claim of autochthony, presents these relations as universal, consistent, unchanging and essential.

VI.   Democracy, The Imaginary, Hermeneutics

This extended elaboration of the Athenian imaginary institution, and the role it plays in creating, and normalizing a conception of politics and political self-identity seems to leave untouched important questions: what is the relationship between these imagined institutions and hermeneutics as a (potentially) democratic practice? If, within the institutions of society, the psyche is coerced into a certain mode, and our standards

are created for us, what type of 'self-creation' or 'self-institution' is even possible? If the 'imaginary institution' seems to provide answers to questions for us and make choices about identity and political relations for us, what room is left for us to 'judge and choose' as Castoriadis hopes? These questions bring us back full circle to our discussions of democracy and the relationship between interpretation and politics. Castoriadis argues that, for us to truly comprehend the meaning of democracy, and the scope of democratic potential, we must first understand that, "beneath the established social imaginary, the flow of the radical imaginary continues steadily" (Castoriadis 1991, 153), and it is this 'radical imagination' (or imaginary) that he wants to invest with democratic potential. However, for Castoriadis, both his strengths as well as his one glaring weakness come from his understanding of this relationship, one that I believe can be overcome by bringing the goals that he has for the 'radical imagination' into a hermeneutic project.

For Castoriadis, the strength of the imagined institution is most prevalent in what he calls 'heteronomous societies'. A society that is 'heteronomous' is one that involves, "the creation of true to form individuals, whose thought and life are dominated by repetition…whose radical imagination is bridled to the utmost degree possible" (Castoriadis 1991, 163). In these societies, the norms of the institutions already created are a powerful deterrent to creative activity carried out in part by citizens of that society. This is largely based on the extra-social authority that is given over to social institutions in a heteronomous society. As Jeff Klooger writes, in heteronomous societies, "we find, institutionally established and sanctioned, the representation of a source of the instituting of society that only can be found outside of this society: among the gods, in God, among

the ancestors, in the laws of nature, in the laws of Reason, in the laws of History"
(Klooger 2004, 11). In this sense, it helps to think of the Athenian example of 'ancestor
heroes' and the 'autochthonous' understanding of society as two such external sources of
legitimacy and power.

Democracy, on the other hand, is for Castoriadis the emergence of a project in
which "explicit and unlimited interrogation explodes on the scene – an interrogation that
has bearing not on 'facts' but on the social imaginary signification and their possible
grounding" (Castoriadis 1991, 163). He refers to this as the emergence of a system of
radical 'autonomy' and this interrogation is due to the displacement of legitimacy from
existing outside of the society itself to a situation where all sources of legitimacy for all
social institutions is brought within society itself. Society is then seen as truly self-
creating when, "autonomy…is the unlimited self-questioning about the law and its
foundations as well as the capacity, in light of this interrogation, *to make*, *to do*, and *to
institute*" (Castoriadis 1991, 164). The autonomous person that accompanies this society
it is one that is not a 'pure and passive' product of preexisting institutions but through the
formation of what Castoriadis calls a 'true subjectivity' "frees the radical
imagination…as source of creation and alteration and allows this being to attain an
effective freedom" (Castoriadis 1991, 165). This radical imagination, as the core of
individual and social creativity, is at the heart of his understanding of democracy: a
regime that, "explicitly, continually, institutes itself" (Castoriadis 2007, 123) and only
accepts limits that it imposes upon itself. That is, a democratic, fully autonomous society
is one that reinvents itself in accordance only with the limits (law, rights etc…) that it sets

for itself. A democratic society is self-creating, self-justifying, and self-limiting. What is important to our investigation is the notion of democracy as a project, as well as linking democracy to an idea of self-creation. There are, however, two limitations that hinder Castoriadis' project that I would like to illuminate, for they point, I believe, to the necessity of a more explicitly hermeneutical conception.

The first of these issues is the too easy classification of societies into either a heteronomous or autonomous society. In fact, this type of binary language pervades much of Castoriadis' own writing, and is often times less helpful than a more nuanced treatment could be. Again, according to Klooger, "to speak…in the context of an autonomous society merely in terms of the starkly opposed categories of 'closure' and 'opening' as Castoriadis has a tendency to do, seems rather too simplistic" (Klooger 2004, 30-31). Although in places Castoriadis does talk about heteronomous and autonomous elements, the way he posits autonomy and heteronomy as essential opposites can be less than helpful at understanding how a democratic project might operate within a given society or how the dynamics of democratic movements themselves operate. After all, if a society simply 'is' autonomous, there doesn't seem to be, by definition, much of a need to think through the specifics of democratic movements. In addition, this form of thinking runs the risk of a periodization of autonomy/heteronomy that, I believe, can be very dangerous for a clear understanding of the inherent fragility of democratic politics. This fragility is inherent to Sheldon Wolin's conception of 'fugitive democracy' as "a mode of being…doomed to succeed only temporarily" (S. S. Wolin 1996, 43), but also appears, at times, to be an element of Castoriadis' own conception of democracy as a

movement that he claims must be 'restarted' or otherwise protected from encroachment. This forces us to see democracy not as coterminous with society (we have 'a' democratic society or 'a' non-democratic society), but instead we need to see how democracy and anti-democracy are forces 'within' societies. However, his categories of analysis interfere with his ability to capture the nature of his democratic project. By setting up these categories as alternatives, it would seem that the cultural 'switch' from heteronomy to autonomy simply produces a culture in which democracy and democratic concerns are enacted and preserved.

Lastly, and this is where I think hermeneutics offers us much more insight into the dynamics of a democratic project, we need to look at the nature of creation itself, for on this point, Castoriadis is quite insistent. Radical imagination, and democratic creation is nothing more (and nothing less) than "this coming to be out of nothing, and from nowhere…essentially creation means that there is no coming from our out of in any of the accepted senses of the term" (Klooger 2004, 39), and this poses a question: where does creation 'come from'? The hermeneutic conception that I will develop throughout this project asserts that creation, understood as a democratic engagement with inherited conditions is the very material that generates creative responses. For Castoriadis, that type of relationship is, at least in many of his writings, too deterministic for him. The radical imagination, to truly be a creative act of imagination must emerge *ex nihilo*, as not dependent upon any prior institutions, or, more importantly for this project, separate from past experience. Suzi Adams elaborates this questions very concisely when she writes, "Castoriadis, moreover, curtails the creative aspect of interpretation, such that it becomes

creation of the world, *ex nihilo*, for interpretation as such is possible only with experience…and inclusion of the experiential aspect of the world as the transcultural and external horizon of meaning is absent" (S. Adams 2011, 113). Thus, Castoriadis seems to erect an unbridgeable divide between creation on one hand, and experience on the other, which I would argue sits in contradistinction to Wolin's idea of democracy as "a mode of being conditioned by bitter experience" (S. S. Wolin 1996), that seems to rely *entirely* on the joining together of creation *with* experience. While I would like to maintain Castoriadis' insistence on the linking together of the democratic project with the basic idea of creation, I would like to assert that a critical (democratic) hermeneutics is one that would need to link creativity to the act of (re)interpretation rather than simply products of a creative imagination divorced from experience. To help illuminate the welding together of these dual facets (innovation and interpretation) I would like to first turn to the political thought of Niccolo Macciavelli who helps us surmount what I would consider the double autochthony of the preceding analysis, the historical autochthony of the Athenian imaginary, and the political autochthony of Castioradis' imaginary institutions.

Chapter Four

The Republic is considered here as a mnemonic structure, a type of regime erected up on an injunction: remember
- Bruce James Smith, *Politics and Remembrance*

In the preceding chapter, I argued that politics could be understood hermeneutically. To illustrate this, I analyzed Pericles' Funeral Oration as an example of political speech that produces what I, following Nicole Loraux, call an Athenian Imaginary, which "establishes an official history that confirms that community in the direction that it has chosen" (Loraux 2006, 187). The Imaginary produces a narrative that the community chooses to tell itself *about* itself. I believe that we can place Sheldon Wolin's analysis of politics very near to this orbit, and much of contemporary politics more generally. Writing about the American Bicentennial, he notes, "Bicentennials are by nature civic rather than scholarly events. They are rituals organized to promote a mythic history…A bicentennial might be thought of as an official story that narrates a past to support an image of collective identity that confirms a certain conception of the present" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 2-3). It is this notion of politics as the settling *on* and telling *of* stories, this 'mythistorical' component, that allows us to see politics as a directly hermeneutical activity. But what are the consequences for our conceptions of politics and political activity? Within a world of politics comprised of 'imaginaries' and 'mythistorically' created and perpetuated identities, how are we to 'imagine' political activity, never mind engage in it?

The last chapter concluded with a promising inroad into this type of political activity through the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, who provides us with a theory the importance of these 'imaginary' elements of politics.

> Society must define its 'identity', its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires. Without the 'answer' to these 'questions', without these 'definitions', there can be no human world, no society, no culture…The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions (Castoriadis 1998, 147).

These answers are, for Castoriadis, the very 'imaginary institutions' that, once instituted within society, produce and re-produce society and politics for us, and within us. These institutions "provide the psyche with meaning…the social individual is thus constituted by means of the internalization of the world and the imaginary significations created by society" (Castoriadis 1991, 149). They structure society, our relationship to it, our relations with others, and our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as collectivities. We become individuals, only to the degree that we become individuals within a certain social/historical setting and by internalizing the institutions particular to it. Parameshwar Gaonkar notes that these social imaginaries serve as, "ways of understanding the social that become social entities themselves, mediating collective life…first person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings and underlie and make possible common practices" (Gaonkar 2002, 4). It would seem then, that these institutions fully determine the individual. If the social individual is fully constructed by these institutions, and the individual can only re-create the society and institutions that first produced the individual, does this negate to possibility of change? If these institutions, or 'imaginaries', answer all of these questions for us, what type of political possibilities does that leave us with?

For Castoriadis, the solution is what he calls the 'radical imaginary, which he contrasts to the 'imagined' or the 'instituted'. He writes, "The radical imaginary emerges as otherness and as the perpetual orientation of otherness, which figures and figures itself, exists in figuring and in figuring itself" (Castoriadis 1998, 369). By positing the 'radical imaginary' as being in direct contrast with the 'imagined', or perhaps in a more easily digestible paring, the *instituting* society with the *instituted* society, Castoriadis stakes his claim on what he sees as the democratic potential of creation or political imagination. For Castoriadis, a democratic regime is one of 'self-institution', which can only happen when a democratic society, "explicitly, continuously, institutes itself" (Castoriadis 2007, 123). This ability to 're-imagine' the answers that society tells itself about itself is, for Castoriadis, the very essence of social autonomy, and to the very existence of democracy.

However promising this radical imagination, it presents us with some difficulties. Most notably, what is the *source* of the radical imaginary? Here Castoriadis entirely divorces the radical imaginary from the already instituted imaginary. The radical imaginary is the 'perpetual otherness' which seems to indicate some relationship, but Castoriadis seems insistent on a complete separation, For if the radical did in fact come from the instituted, could that really meet the standard of autonomy that Castoriadis sets forth? I argue that Castoriadis, in this insistence on separation between the imaginary and the imagined inadvertently reintroduces an Athenian problem into his analysis: the thorny issue of autochthony. Whereas the Athenians were limited by the idea of an historical autochthony, Castoriadis leaves us with a matter of political autochthony, which produces different, but equally difficult problems to overcome. To resolve the issue of political

autochthony while remaining within the orbit of Castoriadis' insistence on autonomy, self-creation, and self-limitation, I want to turn to the work of Niccolò Machiavelli, whose political writings I believe help us navigate the tricky waters of history and political autochthony.

I.   Historical and Political Autochthony

In *Born of the Earth*, Nicole Loraux describes the Greek idea of autochthony as one in which the origins of a city, and its people, are distinctly non-human in origin, where cities "put forward an autochthonous hero, born from the earth itself which he civilized…the Athenians [had] Erichthonios, born from the soil of Attica" (Loraux 2000, 14). In the Greek sense, this means that the city is literally from nowhere, their origin is perfect, unconnected to any other people. This unspoiled line of decent, "was basically political, proclaiming for internal Athenian use the original singularity of the polis…Athens instantly became a part of history, civilized from the start" (Loraux 2000, 44). But of course, this means that Athens becomes a part of history precisely by residing *outside* of history. Not only does an unbridgeable gulf exist between Athens and other (non-autochthonous) cities, but one also exists between Athens and any non-Athenian history. If the Athenians 'emerged' as civilized, they emerged as 'citizens', they needed to go through no period of growth, change or maturity. For its identity, Athens is in debt to no people but only the unbroken line of Athenians who replicate the 'virgin birth' of the city[32]. This also means that this pure, uninterrupted line of descent, also produces a

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[32] According to Loraux, the idea of a 'virgin birth' here is remarkable prescient. In Greek mythology, Erichthonios (the first Athenian) was born of the earth when Hephaistos (the craftsman god) pursued Athena and managed to spill his semen on Athena's leg. She wiped it off with some wool, which she threw

pure, uninterrupted Athenian identity. Again, Loraux notes, "the essential gain from the elaboration of autochthony was the ability to glorify in all serenity the enduring stability of Athens, and its vitality continuously renewed from generation to generation…through the celebration of autochthony, time is annulled in a perpetual recreation of origin" (Loraux 2000, 17). Taken outside of time and history, Athenian identity is similarly no longer subject to the vagaries of time and the messy unfolding of history. The idea of being 'born of the earth' demonstrated, "the desire to rescue both origin and the present from the passage of time, through the timeless renewal of generations of autochthonies" (Loraux 2000, 17). The notion of a pure origin contributed to the idea of a pure identity, one that nothing could complicate or dilute. For our purposes here, the most important element of the Athenian belief in historical autochthony had to do with its relationship to idea of the other *within* the Athenian polis.

Simply put, the myth of autochthony works to suppress if not erase internal otherness and difference. "In the funeral oration the Athenian community unconsciously abandons the collective democratic initiative that gave it its originality" (Loraux 2006, 347). For Loraux, that democratic initiative involves seeing the political community as "a collection of heterogeneous human groups" (Loraux 2006, 347), that is, rather than seeing Athenians, it sees, and perpetuates a repetition of 'the' Athenian: the idealized image of the Athenian (male) citizen, and the resulting image of Athens as populated by this man produces a city devoid of internal difference. As a myth, autochthony serves a precisely ideological function, "to conceal the internal divisions of a society…the funeral

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to the ground, which fertilized the spot where Erichthonios emerged from. So the first Athenian is literally the product of the earth and the semen of a god that was cast off of Athena, the virgin goddess.

oration is trying to deny the existence of any division within the city" (Loraux 2006, 410-11). Thus, the role of the myth of autochthony, not just the glorification of the past, but the *repetition* of it, produced an ideological image and an ideological identity, not just of Athens writ large, but of homogenized *Athenians*, and their relationship to the city and to each other.

It is precisely this type of homogenization, this denial of difference, of *internal* conflict, that Castoriadis is concerned with in his extended discussion of the 'instituted society'. For Castoriadis, a society whose imaginary institutions are already in place is a society wherein difference and otherness are not considered, but are suppressed through those very social institutions. This would seem to be the primary reason why Castoriadis develops such a strong definition of the 'radical imaginary' as the 'perpetual orientation of otherness'. Moreover, otherness as a concept, identity, and as a potential force for political and social change, needs to be able to recognize and assert itself within the confines of the society in question. As Castoriadis writes, "the denial of time and otherness (which, in actual fact, is unceasingly translated into the continuous self-destruction of creativity in society and in human beings themselves) is itself an institution, a dimension and a mode of the institution of society as it had existed up to now" (Castoriadis 1998, 214). It is worth noting the fact that Castoriadis repeatedly links together of the denial of *time* with the denial of *otherness*. "The denial of time displays a necessity inherent in the institution as such…the institution in the profound sense of the term can exist only by posing itself outside of time, by refusing to be altered by time, by posing the norm of its immutable identity, and by posing itself as this norm of immutable

identity" (Castoriadis 1998, 214). The denial of its historicity is a denial of the created, or historical nature of society, of institutions, and of the meanings those institutions impart; precisely one of the elements that Wolin takes issue with in his discussion of the 'misplaced biblicism' or 'archaism' of originalism. Instead, for Castoriadis, linking creativity and otherness is key to developing the idea of the radical imaginary: the denial of otherness by a strongly *instituted* society is a denial of the possibility of human creativity, a creativity that would form the basis of an autonomous (democratic) society, or as Gaonkar notes, "Castoriadis' account of the social imaginary as the matrix of innovation and change is linked to his central political project of promoting autonomy" (Gaonkar 2002, 8). For Castoriadis, the possibility of change, the possibility of democracy is absolutely dependent upon the encouragement of creativity and otherness.

It is not without a bit of irony that Castoriadis claims that it is in ancient Greece that we see for the first time, "a collective activity whose object is the institution of society as such. In Greece we have the first instance of a community explicitly deliberating about its laws and changing those laws" (Castoriadis 1991, 102). For as much as Castoriadis is offering us a way to traverse a world of politics as hermeneutics, I believe that his idea of the 'radical imaginary' manages to smuggle back into his analysis the very thing that Nicole Loraux says was instrumental in the ability of the funeral oration genre to function so well as an ideological instrument (an instituted imaginary, to use Castoriadis' terminology): the notion of autochthony. This time, however, the autochthony in question emphasizes the political rather than the historical.

In putting forward the theory of the radical imaginary, "Castoriadis sought to identify the creative force in the making of social-historical worlds" (Gaonkar 2002, 1). While Castoriadis is insistent that the 'already instituted' shapes individuals, and that the 'social fabrication' of the individual, in which "the psyche is coerced…into investing (cathecting) socially instituted objects, rules, and the world" (Castoriadis 1991, 148), is a powerful process, it is not all-embracing. In contradistinction to the force of the already instituted, Castoriadis proposes what Gaonkar calls an 'ontology of creation', which leads Castoriadis to posit the 'radical imaginary' as that process which allows difference, otherness, and creativity to become active parts of society. "It is only insofar as the radical imagination of the psyche seeps through the successive layers of the social armor, which cover and penetrate it up to an unfathomable limit-point, and which constitute the individual, that the singular human being can have, in return, an independent action on society" (Castoriadis 1991, 146). Here, Castoriatis seems, through the concept of the radical imaginary, to negate his earlier assertion that the social individual can only reproduce the existing society. According to Anthony Elliott, "Castoriadis's theory of the social imaginary suggests that the interplay between subjectivity and social regulation is far more heterogeneous than he has allowed in the foregoing speculations, which treat cultural productions as derivative from degraded social conditions" (Elliot 2002, 161). The radical imaginary allows us to see the world as not completely determined by the existing conditions, but allowing for change and otherness to emerge as forces within society. What is most important for our analysis that rather than bring trapped within a symbolically instituted society that is completely consuming, the radical imaginary posits

a symbolic society that, "can be reflexively interrogated and hermeneutically reappropriated" (Gaonkar 2002, 8). Thus, the radical imaginary emerges as a key concept for Castoriadis, and potentially for us, in our attempt to understand politics as a hermeneutical activity. The radical imaginary seems to allow for political and social change through a process whereby society as it is received is open to the intrusion of otherness and difference. But this forces us to ask an important question: What is the source of this radical imaginary, and how is this creative process nourished? The answer that Castoriadis gives is beset by serious limitations. What he gives us, in a sense, is an autochthony of political creativity.

In the same way that Loraux explains the historical notion of autochthony in the Greek sense, Castoriadis provides us with an understanding of the radical imaginary as similarly 'born of the earth'. The moment of creation inspired by the radical imaginary is radically disconnected from the society within which it emerges. "A social-historical world is created ex nihilo in a burst of imaginative praxis…by anonymous masses who constitute themselves as a people in the very act of founding" (Gaonkar 2002, 6). Pointing to the emergence of democracy and philosophy in ancient Greece, Castoriadis asserts that it "cannot be explained in terms of the antecedent conditions. It was a rupture, a break in historical time" (Gaonkar 2002, 6), and understandable only as "the emergence of radical otherness, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty" (Castoriadis 1998, 184). But what, exactly, does he mean by 'imminent creation'?

For Castoriadis, "what is essential to creation is not 'discovery' but constitution the new: art does not discover, it constitutions; and the relation between what it

constitutes and the 'real'…is not a relation of verification…the emergence of new institutions and of new ways of living is not a discovery either but an active constitution" (Castoriadis 1998, 133). Thus, we get a clear sense of what the radical imaginary is: it is a complete break. Just as the social individual is constructed (up to a limit point) by the instituted society, the radical imaginary is that thing that escapes the 'limit point' of the instituted society and thus is in no way shaped by it. Because it escapes any type of determination, by the already instituted, it emerges from nothing. The radical imaginary itself is non-historical. This, however, leads to some fundamental weaknesses in his theory that warrant exploration.

The first is that this process seems to force Castoriadis to see the world of societies in a binary manner. For Castoriadis, the autochthony of the radical imaginary places a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between societies wherein political creativity has emerged and societies where it has not. "It leads Castoriadis to dichotomize societies as if they could be subsumed under the ideal types of *heteronomous* and *autonomous* instead of recognizing that all social formations, at least the modern ones, differentially incorporate aspects of both" (Gaonkar 2002, 9). This dynamic is captured by Castoriadis himself when he writes, "things are different in the rare case of societies where the bursting of complete heteronomy makes a true *individuation of the individual* possible and thus allows the radical imagination…to contribute perceptibly to the self-alteration of the social world" (Castoriadis 1991, 146). While there are instances where he talks about the conflict between autonomy and heteronomy, this type of analysis is much more often than not eschewed for extended discussions of 'the autonomous society' or 'the

heteronomous society'. Likewise, his discussions of democracy are similarly totalizing. Rather than thinking of democracy (or politics, or autonomy) as specific moments *within* society, as Sheldon Wolin's notion of 'fugitive democracy' allows us to do, democracy, autonomy (as well as its opposite, heteronomy) is seen as society *itself*.

This also means that Castoriadis "skirts issues concerned with institutions, ideology, and power" (Elliot 2002, 145) that might contribute to a more nuanced analysis of autonomous and heteronomous elements within society. In constructing such a detailed, and all consuming, psychological theory, he distances himself from meaningful political applications of it. Without being able to discuss clearly the interplay between autonomous forces and heteronomous forces at work *in the same* social realm, "his reflections on cultural conformity and homogeneity seem to contradict the social-theoretical emphasis on human creation elsewhere in his writings" (Elliot 2002, 160). This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for his consistent political motivations (a critique of contemporary conditions and their enforced homogeneity) and his theoretical writings (emphasizing the radical imagination and creativity) to find a meaningful dialogue. While the interplay between forces of autonomy and forces of heteronomy within a society would be a fruitful exploration, Castoriadis is left with very poor resources for doing so. He strives for a sort of theoretical elaboration of human creativity as entirely a matter of human imagination, ideas, and novelty. However, this theoretical purity seems to come at the expense of political purchase and, "at the cost of displacing ideology and politics" (Elliot 2002, 166).

Rather than pursing a project where whole societies are seen as either autonomous or heteronomous, it would be much more advantageous to see those as specific dynamics at work within a society and to analyze how those dynamics struggle with each other. One way in which I think this more nuanced project can be advanced is not by assigning the radical imaginary to the realm of autochthony, but to investigate how the unfolding of autonomy, and self-creation emerges out of the historical nature of society itself. Rather than thinking that self-creation is somehow sullied or lessened by linking it to the already instituted, place self-creation within the very instituted and historical realm in which the events of self-creation emerge?

To begin this section of the investigation, I want to turn to the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli. I am not making the assertion that Machiavelli is either a democrat or a hermeneutist. Rather, I turn to Machiavelli because he, unlike Castoriadis, is vigorously concerned with an analysis of institutions, ideology, and power. Additionally, I believe that Machiavelli avoids the trap of autochthony that was discussed above, both politically and historically. Even though Machiavelli is also interested in discussions of origins and *original* institutions, I argue that in his writings, we can see a theorization of politics that brings history and self-creation together in a fruitful manner.

II.   A Politics and History of Decay

There is a certain trope that catches, perhaps even commands Machiavelli's attention, and serves as a prism though which he observes and writes about both politics and history. Writing under the influence of the idea of *Fortuna*[33], "a malignant goddess,

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[33] With regard to *Fortuna*, Leo Strauss presents us with a picture of Machiavelli who, as the founder of modern political thought, has moved away from this notion of Fortuna as a force in the life of politics,

or at least a goddess indifferent to human well-being" (Parel 1992, 65), Machiavelli's writing are insistent on the idea of the natural decay of the political body and the withering away of earthly vitality. At the beginning of Book III of *The Discourses on Livy*, he writes, "it is very true that all the things of this world have a limited existence, but those which go through the entire cycle of life ordained for them by heaven are generally those which do not allow their bodies to fall into disorder but maintain them in an orderly way" (Machiavelli 2008, 246). And though Machiavelli is insistent, in *The Prince*, that fortune only controls half of our actions, and that humans are not completely at the whim and mercy of the destructive force of Fortuna, "it follows that we cannot explain human destiny solely in terms of human autonomy" (Parel 1992, 63). Though wise rulers and headstrong actors may force her to submit, and may also take 'precautions to resist her[34], Fortuna, "determines the limiting conditions of achieving success…the times of birth and death, the humour and the temperament with which one is both, and the quality of the times through which one's life passes" (Parel 1992, 66). The unceasing presence and power of Fortuna forces Machiavelli to confront what he sees as one of the fundamental truths about human societies (Principalities and Republics both): the inevitability of decline. Especially in *The Discourses*, his frequent invocation of the decline of cities and states, including his exemplar of a city of virtù, the Roman Republic, makes it clear that political and social decline is as inescapable a force as any

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cities, and men. Strauss' Machiavelli uses Fortuna, as Parel notes, 'for the benefit of the vulgar'. However, both Parel and de Grazia offer convincing interpretations of Machiavelli that situate him well with the more tradition notion of Fortuna, as well as emphasize its importance in his work.

[34] See chapter 25 of The Prince. In describing Fortuna as a river, Machiavelli notes that prudent rulers can build banks and barriers to redirect the onrush of Fortuna. This doesn't mean that you can stop the river from running (he makes no mention of dams) but you can be strategic about the direction.

other found in nature. Though *The Discourses* does seem to avoid the type of mechanical, immediate decay that Anthony Parel sees, the phenomenon of political decay is one that commands much of Machiavelli's attention and theoretical elaboration.

I believe that there is another, equally strong force that compels Machiavelli to grapple with the reality and complexity of decay, as well as his attributing a 'life cycle' to politics more generally: Machiavelli is theorizing political communities (principalities, republics, cities) as entities that are thoroughly and resolutely *historical*. They cannot be understood outside of their coming into to the world historically. Robert Orr notes this connection when he claims that, "man, as Machiavelli sees him, is pulled neither by Fortune, nor by himself, but by time" (Orr 1972, 188) While, as we shall discuss below, Machiavelli is largely a theorist of *origins* and all that come with them (founders, institutions, laws, etc…), it could be argued that his theorization of origins stems from a concomitant concern for endings. That is, if all societies come into being historically, it stands to reason that they will also come to an ending historically. J.G.A. Pocock sums this up when he writes, "to assert the particularity of the republic to this extent was to assert that it existed in time, not eternity, and was therefore transitory and doomed to impermanence, for this was the condition of particular being…the one thing most clearly known about republics, was that they came to an end in time" (Pocock 2003, 53). This Machiavellian vision centered on these two specific aspects, historicity and decay, force Machiavelli to plunge headlong into his varied discussions of origins, founding, and original institutions. His concern with looking backward, not simply as an historian, but importantly as a political thinker and (potentially) political advisor, stems from what he

believes looking forward forces one to contend with: the withering and degrading of all forms of political association. If autochthony is concerned with 'obscuring origins' by placing them in an impenetrable mythic past, Machiavelli's theoretical outlook that places society immediately within the course of history, creates a political vision that is not able to obscure origins, but rather, is forced to contend with origins. This vision "must both offer an account of how that beginning had been possible and acknowledge that, since it must in theory have an end, its maintenance was no less problematic than its foundation" (Pocock 2003, 185). Our question, however, is: what specific dynamic(s) suddenly becomes so important within this new field of political vision that draws so much of Machiavelli's attention to the issue of origins?

For Machiavelli, it is not just the society itself that is an historical creation, but citizenship itself, as an achievement of the people is also historical. It is created, and it 'comes into being' in time. Thus, by concentrating so highly on the notion of social and political origins, "it looks as if Machiavelli was in search of social means whereby men's natures might be transformed to the point where they became capable of citizenship" (Pocock 2003, 192). It is something that is produced in a body of people that transforms them into a civilization, into a community of citizens. In order to understand how that happens, Machiavelli looks not simply at the founding origins of a society, but the types of institutions that are similarly founded.

III. Decay and Institutions

It is in this context that I would like to explore his interest in Roman religion. Among the numerous qualities Machiavelli assigns it[35], there is one that stands out, and it has to do with this idea of citizenship as a means to produce citizens who see themselves as actors. Writing about Numa Pompilius, the 'founder' of Roman religion, Machiavelli claims that, "having found a very fierce people and wishing to bring them to civil obedience with the arts of piece, he turned to religion as something absolutely necessary for maintaining a civilized society" (Machiavelli 2008, 50). The idea that Machiavelli is putting forward here, that religion helped to render people obedient and civil has led to a widespread interpretation that "presents Machiavelli's religion as a belief system whose value is determined by its functional utility to the state" (Fontana 1999, 639). This type of interpretation is developed most succinctly and notably by D.E.S. Muir who writes, "to Machiavelli, religion was of most importance in reinforcing the political power of authority" (Muir 1936, 159), but I believe it would seem a rather simple reading of such a complex thinker to make the claim that religion simply serves to buttress authority. This is not to say that Machiavelli does not address this issue. His insistence that religion will keep soldiers from deserting because of their fear of violating a religious oath, as well as his assertion that, "it was necessary for Numa, who pretended to have a close relationship with a nymph who advised him about how he should advise the people…because Numa wanted to establish new and unusual institutions in the city, and he doubted that his own authority was sufficient" (Machiavelli 2008, 51-52), point in this direction. However, that

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[35] Notably, that it produced bravery, and make people more interested in worldly glory.

does not seem to capture the entirety of Machiavelli's understanding of the purposes and goals of religion, nor the functioning of political institutions more generally.

Instead, I would like to temper the claim that religion should be seem as simply an instrument of the ruling power and forward the more expansive idea that religion, for Machiavelli, is one of the institutions that work develop and maintain a civic and political spirit that can potentially ward off the ravages of time and decay. Pocock notes that, "by the institutionalization of civic virtue, the republic or polis maintains its own stability in time" (Pocock 2003, 183). Beyond the merely coercive, religion, as a civic institution fulfills quite a few roles for Machiavelli. "For Machiavelli, religion was an institution that educated men" (Hale 1961, 177), and this education, rather than simply servicing an additive function in men's social-psychologies, played a much greater, even constitutive role.

With keen attention being paid to problem of the historical construction of citizenship, Maurizio Viroli writes, "religious worship educates the manners and customs of the people" (Viroli 2010, 22), and it is this attention to 'customs' that I argue is very important for Machiavelli. Without sound customs, as a foundational component of the social make-up of the body of citizens, the entire structure of institutions that make up a political body will be for naught: "Just as good customs require laws in order to be maintained, so laws require good customs in order to be observed" (Machiavelli 2008, 68). It is not that Machiavelli offers us a simple equation along the lines of 'good customs create good laws', his thinking is much too complex for that. Rather, he seems to offer the claim that laws and customs as co-constitutive of each other. Religion is necessary for

a certain culture to emerge among the people of a city that allows them to understand and observe laws, and laws emerge as a means to 'maintain' customs and manners[36]. It is in this context that we can understand Machiavelli's discussion corrupts cities that wish to remain free, from Book I of *The Discourses*. Here, Machiavelli strenuously calls not just for the passage of new laws, but also the creation of new institutions. He notes that, "The institutions and laws established in a republic at the time of its birth, when men were good, are no longer suitable later, once men have become evil…this means that new laws are insufficient, because the institutions that remain in place corrupt them" (Machiavelli 2008, 68). Here, we see several themes that are central to Machiavelli's political philosophy. First, the concern for previously good republics becoming bad brings us back to the seemingly insurmountable problem of political decay. But it is the desire to fight against that decay that leads us to the second theme: the relationship between customs, institutions, and laws.

For Machiavelli, it is not enough to have a certain set of laws, those laws must be reinforced by a certain set of civic and political customs and institutions that exist within a mutually beneficial relationship to one another. Without one, it would be impossible for the others to have any ameliorative effects on the corruption of the city. Laws that are, 'good' will not function as such outside of a set of customs and institutions that are corrupted. Likewise, 'good' customs and institutions will fall pretty to the corruption of time and Fortuna if the laws that govern them are not adequate to the task. In addition to the construction of 'customs' generally speaking, there is one in particular that

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[36] In Viroli's terminology, manners is a much more political and encompassing term. Rather than a term denoting political behavior, manners is much more concerned with how people interact with one another in a public and political way.

Machiavelli is concerned with as a civic goal and one that he sees as having a clear and intimate connection to the role of religion in a political society: the construction and perpetuation of *virtù*.

If half of our actions (more or less) are controlled by *Fortuna*, and the other half are controlled by human effort and activity, what is it about human behavior that will allow us to successfully build the banks and barriers that will divert the raging river of *Fortuna*? For Machiavelli, that human quality is *virtù*. This term denotes a great many specific qualities in Machiavelli's writings: the ability to have foresight, to undertake strong actions, the ability to change actions, "as the character of the times changes" (Machiavelli 1994, 75), prudence, boldness, and great skill. Hannah Arendt give a concise definition of the term when she claims that, "*Virtù* is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation for *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents and offers itself to him" (Arendt 1968, 137). Arendt's definition is helpful not only because it ties virtù directly to fortuna, but because, in referring to virtù as a response, she makes it very clear that virtù is an activity, rather than simply a thing possessed.

The terms itself dominates the pages of *The Prince*, and while the term is more absent in *The Discourses*, the specific qualities that are embodied in the idea of virtù recur throughout. It is important, however, to make note of a very specific change that occurs in *The Discourses* with respect to this term. Unlike in Machiavelli's famous treatise *The Prince*, where virtù is seen embodied in specific rulers (princes, kings, etc…), in *The Discourses* we seem to see a 'democratizing' of the term, and its attendant

qualities. No longer is virtù, or the qualities of virtù simply those of great leaders and individual princes. Instead, these terms can be applied to the entire political body: rulers and citizens alike. So rather than just talking about the virtù of a prince, Machiavelli believes that we can talk about the virtù of a society, and it is in this context that religion again plays an important role.

Religion, as a founding institution of society has, is concerned with, "the development of virtù" (Gilbert 1984, 185), and the health of religion is itself a key barometer to the presence or absence of virtù within the body politic. This connecting between religion as a civic institution and political vitality would seem to contradict Leo Strauss' claim that "In Machiavelli's presentation the Roman polity as the model is characterized by the unqualified supremacy of political authority proper as distinguished from any religious authority" (Strauss 1978, 184). For Machiavelli, such a simple split between the presence of religious authority and political authority is theoretically nonsensical, and as Ronald Beiner notes, "Religion lies at the heart of Machiavellian politics" (Beiner 1993, 622). For Machiavelli, the political well-being of a community cannot be divorced from the civic functions of religion, what Anthony Parel calls "a form of political 'education'" (Parel 1992, 52). Rather than seeing politics as reigning supreme over religion, as Strauss claims, religion is one of the ways in which citizens are educated to become political actors. If religion as a civic institution is one of the major factors in the successful functioning of politics, politics and religion, are much more mutually constitutive and work to buttress one another. In fact, one could argue that the 'health' of the body politic (its ability to fight against historical decay) can be measured by looking

at how strong the assorted founding institutions (religion, law, and customs) are, and that the continued health of religion is dependent upon strong political actors and actions. This multi-faceted (overdetermined?) conception of politics is essential for understanding just how Machiavelli believes politics operates in, especially, a Republican community. Maurizio Viroli reminds us, "The word *politicus* was used to denote…the concrete collective life of the city, the customs, the habits, and the passions of the citizens" (Viroli 1993, 157). The intricate connections that Machiavelli draws between religion (as well as other institutions) and politics forces us to see his conception of politics as something that involves nearly the entire social fabric of a community. It is expressive of, and constituted by, the customs, passions, and habits that are exhibited by the community.

In *The Discourses* we see a very deliberate and clear connection between history, political and cultural institutions, and the health of the political society. Good founding institutions both inspire a type of civic virtù that pervades the polity as well as create the conditions for the emergence of virtuous citizenship. Given that it is only through the presence of this type of citizenship infused with virtù, that a given political society might stave off, even for a time, the ravages of historical decay, it seems self-evident that, for Machiavelli, the primary concern of the political thinker is HOW to ensure that the institutions and culture of the society in question continue to produce these conditions.

If these institutions are themselves historical, and if the defining feature of all historical things are their being subject to decay, would it not stand to reason that those very institutions themselves are also subject to decay, corruption, and collapse? After all, if political communities are universally subject to the ravages of time and decay, as well

as the loss of virtù and virility – the very qualities that are created (and maintained) by these institutions – it would stand to reason that the primary cause of that decay would have to be the decay of those institutions themselves. The case in point, for Machiavelli, would be his extended discussion of Christianity and its role in the corruption of the Italian city states. Here, we see an explicit treatment by Machiavelli of the corruption of founding institutions and how that corruption is immediately and dramatically reflected in the larger corruption of political life.

This theme of a corrupt Italy is one that runs through Machiavelli's entire political corpus, a theme neatly captured by James Atkinson's conception of Machiavelli's, "desperate concern over Italy's suffering and the yearning for a redeemer" (Atkinson 2010, 23). At the end of *The Prince*, when he is exhorting for a political hero to arise and redeem Italy, Machiavelli laments, "For see the conditions to which Italy has been reduced…She is beaten, robbed, wounded, put to fight: She has experienced every sort of injury" (Machiavelli 1994, 77). This redeemer, or 'new ruler', would be one who can "take control of events…while benefiting everyone who lives here" (Machiavelli 1994, 77). Clearly, this new ruler would need to be a person full of virtù to make up for the clear absence of civic virtù anywhere else in Italy. In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli continues on this theme of corruption but here he ties it specifically to the issue of religion.

> In considering, therefore, why all the peoples of ancient times were greater lovers of liberty than those of our own day, I believe this arises from the same cause that today makes men less strong, which I believe lies in the difference between our education and that of antiquity, based upon the difference between our religion and that of antiquity. (Machiavelli 2008, 158)

Now this claim needs to be parsed carefully, for while on the surface of it, it seems as though Machiavelli is making the blanket claim that Christianity is a corrupt religion that has led to the political corruption (or at least weakening) that he is bearing witness to. Or as Strauss writes, "According to Machiavelli Christianity has led the world into weakness and the failure to imitate the ancients properly is due to some extent to Christianity" (Strauss 1978, 177). While Strauss is correct in one respect, that there is an important connection between Christianity and corruption, the simple claim that Christianity itself is somehow essentially corrupted (or corrupting of people), is misleading. The reality of Machiavelli's claim is more nuanced than that.

Almost immediately after making this comparison between the 'religion of antiquity' and religion of his own time, Machiavelli asserts that, "while our religion has shown us *truth and the true path*, it also makes us place a lower value on worldly honour, whereas the pagans, who greatly valued honor and considered it their highest good, were more ferocious in their actions" (Machiavelli 2008, 158-159. My italics). This would seem to demonstrate that, for Machiavelli, there is not necessarily a connection between the theological soundness of Christianity (whether it is the 'true' religion or not) and the impact that it can or does have on the political community (whether it promotes virtù or not). This leads Sebastian de Grazia to note that rather than Christianity as the target of Machiavelli's critique, we see that "*The Prince* and *Discourses* criticize the Church for its corrupting of Italians and its foreign policy" (deGrazia 1994, 89). This distinction between Christianity and The Church is important because it places the corrupting influence on a specific *manifestation* of Christianity that has emerged historically.

While Machiavelli does continue to contrast Christianity with the Roman religion of 'the pagans' he fails to locate that corruption at the heart of some essence of Christianity. Instead, there almost seems to be the distinct possibility that, for Machiavelli, "rightly interpreted, Christianity teaches that it is permitted to 'exalt and defend the fatherland'" (Beiner 1993, 623), and in fact, a Christianity 'properly interpreted' would be able to embrace the very qualities of worldly glory, love of liberty, and strength, that Machiavelli admires about the Roman pagan religion. For our purposes, this means that whether we see Machiavelli as a Christian[37], or as a strategic rhetorician, is largely irrelevant. The important issue concerning religion is how the institution itself has been interpreted, how it has evolved historically; the way in which the institution has been interpreted historically is thrust into the spotlight and takes precedence over the 'true' nature of the institution itself. We see this most clearly when Machiavelli argues that the softness of the modern (Christian) world as comes, "more from the cowardice of when who have *interpreted* our religion according to an ideal of freedom from earthly toil and not according to one of exception ability…these *false interpretations* that explain why we no longer find…as much love of liberty among the peoples as there was then" (Machiavelli 2008, 159. My italics). Because religion is practiced, carried out, and therefore interpreted by humans, who are flawed and imperfect creatures, there is a distinct possibility that the institution of religion, like any other institution overseen by humans, can, over time, become corrupt and be subject to the ravages of decay and decline.

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[37] As De Grazia does, for example.

So if, for Machiavelli, the historical nature of these institutions (religion included) is a key component to understanding his larger political concerns over the seemingly unending conflict between vitality and decay, we have to ask a simple question: what forces does Machiavelli feel can be marshalled against this fear of degeneration? That is to say, if history is the process of decay and corruption, is there anything that can be done to thwart what seems like an inevitable and universal process. The answer, it turns out, is to look in the very same place that we find the cause of the decay. History itself is both the source of this concern and the potential source of its remedy.

IV.   Life-Giving Origins

John Najemy argues that Machiavelli stresses, "The need for societies to renew contact with their life-giving origins and first principles" (Najemy 2012, 9). If time corrupts institutions, then it would seem that, for Machiavelli, returning to their origin, or returning them to their original state restores them, and allows society to fight off the ravages of decay. As Machiavelli writes, "the beginnings of religions, republics, and kingdoms must always contain in themselves some goodness through which they may regain their earthly prestige and their early expansion" (Machiavelli 2008, 246). To fight off decay, Machiavelli seems to be insisting that by returning to one's beginnings can allow an institution to reclaim what was 'good' at its beginning as a means to resist the corruption imparted through historical development and age.

This dynamic accounts for the use of the specific vocabulary that Machiavelli employs when he describes the nature of (actual or potential) powerful and beneficial political action. In these cases, Machiavelli writes of his longing for the 'redemption' of

corrupt and enslaved Italy,[38] the revival of corrupt institutions, and the 'rebirth' of a powerful city. What does this language mean? For Machiavelli, it seems quite straightforward, "Rebirth comes only from returning to the beginnings and rediscovering – at the cost of great effort – one's own true nature" (Viroli 2010, 38). Thus, the fact that institutions are historical in nature, and subject to decay and corruption does not, for Machiavelli, only cause despair. Rather, because these institutions can be located in history, it stands to reason that their origins can be understood and returned to as a means of redeeming and restoring these now corrupted institutions and political communities.

The strongest manifestation of this dynamic in Machiavelli's work can be found at the beginning of Book III of *The Discourses*. In the first chapter, Machiavelli brings together the strands that we have been analyzing: the threat of decay and disorder, and the restoration of civic virtù through a return to historical origins of institutions. In order for institutions to be maintained, "In an orderly way…changes which bring such bodies back to their beginnings are healthy. The ones that have the best organization and the longest lives are, however, those that can renew[39] themselves often through their own institutions" (Machiavelli 2008, 246). For Machiavelli, this means that a society will be most successful at warding off decay if it contains within it, "some law, which obliges the men who belong to that body to examining their affairs with some frequency, or, indeed, from one good man who is born among them and who, by his exemplary deeds and his exceptional works, produces the same effect as the regulation" (Machiavelli 2008, 247). Whether relying on the presence of laws or the emergence of a singular 'great man', the

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[38] In the last chapter of *The Prince*, he uses the word 'redeem' or 'redeemer' 4 times.
[39] Immediately after this statement, he reminds us that 'renewal means 'to bring them back to their beginnings'.

purpose seems to be the same: a society can extend its healthy life if it regularly examines itself for signs of corruption and it repairs itself back to its beginnings to rejuvenate those institutions.

It may seem paradoxical that Machiavelli is calling for the construction of institutions that force re-examination. How can you institutionalize that type of dynamic? For an answer to that, we may again turn to the specific institution of religion. Remembering that Machiavelli held the Roman pagan religion in such high regard, it might be worth asking whether or not we can see how that institution was able to 'institutionalize' such a dynamic. Although most commentary typically focuses on Machiavelli's insistence on pagan religion as creating a strong love of liberty, and how it exalted worldly glory more than the Christianity that he was criticizing, there is perhaps another key aspect to the Roman religion that speaks to the concern over re-evaluation. Again turning to Arendt, Roman paganism, "literally meant *re-ligare*: to be tied back, obligated to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity. To be religious meant to be tied to the past" (Arendt 1968, 121). While this is the key to Arendt's understanding of the Roman religion, it goes far beyond that, and becomes also a political and social consideration. For Arendt, this conception of religion is itself a direct expression of what she sees as the 'heart of Roman politics', which is nothing less than, "The conviction of the sacredness of foundations…to be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the founding of the city of Rome" (Arendt 1968, 120). If Roman political life is truly about the 'return to foundations', religion serves as the purest form of a political and

social institution that allows for that type of politics to emerge and sustain itself: a politics that renews itself by returning to its origins, its founding, and its beginnings.

Although Machiavelli does not specify exactly how these self-returning institutions work, he repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the importance of such a procedure, either by, "the exceptional ability of a single man or through the special excellence of a single regulation" (Machiavelli 2008, 247). Regarding 'single regulations' Machiavelli refers to "the tribunes of the plebeians, the censors, and all the other laws that were passed against the ambition and insolence of men" (Machiavelli 2008, 247-48). In Machiavelli's estimation, these regulations all, in their own ways, "made men move back toward their proper limits" (Machiavelli 2008, 248), and when those regulations stopped being observed with regularity, it allowed citizens to become corrupt and dangerous. Without that regular return to the beginnings, corruption and decay become unavoidable tendencies within the community. Because of this, Machiavelli insists that, "Not more than ten years should pass between one of these applications of the law and another, because after such a period of time has passed, men begin to change their habits and break the laws" (Machiavelli 2008, 248). Thus, Machiavelli seems to give us a clear example of what he thinks constitutes the core of a strong and successful community:[40] the ability, whether through law or the actions of a single political actor, for the community to constantly have recourse to its origins, to the beginnings of its institutions, in order to revive the community, and to prevent decay.

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[40] At this specific place in *The Discourses* he brings together religions, kingdoms, and republics under the same heading of communities, or communal life.

Thus, we come back to the assertion made above. History is the source of concern for Machiavelli as well as the remedy of this concern. It is a cause of decay, but within history itself we find the very practices and ideals that can re-energize communal life, promote virtù, and ward off the degeneration that is inherent in the nature of historical communities. Because the threat of decay is always an ever-present possibility, this process of revitalization through a return to origins, is something that Machiavelli believes has to happen over and over again. It is a process that must itself be institutionalized, as the threat of political decay can never be permanently 'won', it can only be held at bay.

In *Fortune is a Woman*, Hannah Pitkin writes, "The renovation of a state or religion that has become corrupted, the restoration of right order and virtù, also seems to be a kind of founding" (Pitkin 1999, 53). While she clearly connects the issue of reviving a corrupted state with the idea of origins, her use of the term 'founding' forces us to raise some important issues surrounding the nature of what Machiavelli sees as effective political action. If what this 'return to origins' truly is a process of 're-founding' a community, it would seem to imply a fair amount of political sovereignty on the part of the agents engaged in this process. Pitkin notes this herself when she writes, "unlimited trust is to be placed in the great founder. But the price of that trust is something like solipsism: the founder is the only person, the only free agent among objects…autonomy becomes singularity" (Pitkin 1999, 63). Yet, elsewhere, Pitkin notes that, "the Citizen is Machiavelli's most profound and promising vision…for the Citizen, by contrast, virtù is sharing in a collective autonomy" (Pitkin 1999, 80-81). How can we resolve these

seemingly contradictory ideas of political sovereignty? How do the Citizen and the Founder co-exist? For Pitkin, the conflict resolves itself through a process of emergence: the act of founding paves the way for the emergence of a community wherein the Citizen can emerge and partake in autonomy. She writes, "The founder himself is only a means to Machiavelli's real goal: the new uncorrupted society to be created. The vision of that society provides yet a third model of true manhood...Call it the image of the fraternal Citizen" (Pitkin 1999, 80). In this schema, the work of the founder produces a (uncorrupted) society wherein Citizens are able to share in virtù and autonomy.

However, if, as we have seen above, the process of corruption is ever present due to the historical nature of all communal existence, can a Founder actually produce an uncorrupted society? This leads to the second, more substantive issue. If citizenship flourishes in the absence of corruption, which I believe both Pitkin and Machiavelli would agree on, but corruption is an ever present possibility then we must have recourse to a process to ward off corruption[41]. This process, as we have already seen, involves a return to origins. Thus, it would seem to imply a continual 're-founding' as we must continually return to our origins in order to stave off political decay. If Pitkin is right that 'founding' is a process that abrogates autonomy to the singular founder, what does that say about the political autonomy of Citizens who, in order to escape corruption, must constantly be engaged in this process of returning? Is the result of this a process where citizens, by constantly being reminded of the founding institutions and origins, and by constantly returning to those original political ideals, deprived of political autonomy? According to Maurizio Viroli, "rebirth meant returning to the ideal, pure form" (Viroli

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[41] Rather than rely on the creation of an uncorrupted society.

2010, 76), if this is true, then what kind of true political autonomy do Citizens possess, other than to reassert the 'pure form' of the institutions within which they live? To answer this requires examining exactly what this 'return' signifies, and what exactly is so 'life-giving' about these origins.

V.   Origins as Autonomy

When questions of autonomy, especially the autonomy of citizens are added to the equation, it compels us to look all the more closely at this process of 'returning to our origins' to try and understand just how this process impacts the ability of citizens to be engaged in actions of 'collective autonomy'. If this return to origins, this polis-wide *re-ligare* is a process which 'binds' citizens back to the pure forms of their institutions as they were originally instituted, would that not short circuit any meaningful claim to autonomy? This is especially true if we are to understand autonomy in a way similar to Castoriadis' definition: the ability for the political community to create and re-create the conditions, within which it exists. In addition, if returning to origins is a return to the founding, to the moment when those institutions first took on that 'pure form', does this return to the origins not simply reproduce the autonomy of the founder at the expense of the potential autonomy of the citizen body? It seems that we might be left with a very stark choice: either autonomy (which acts in the present) is accompanied by inevitable decay (by not returning to our origins) or civic rebirth (by returning to our origins) accompanied by a loss of autonomy (a lack of creative potential in the present)? For Machiavelli, is the choice really that stark? Does he simply produce a theoretical project that is designed to radically reduce (if not eliminate) the amount of political autonomy

that should be exercised by a body of citizens? Is a healthy political community one in which political actors are presented with very tightly bound parameters within which they can act? I argue that we should see Machiavelli's theoretical sensitivity to this issue of origins and the historical nature of communities as a means to avoid just such a dichotomy; providing us instead with a relationship to origins that is far more dynamic. His call for a 'return to original institutions', rather than shutting down the potential for autonomy, is actually productive of it. For Machiavelli, the rebirth and revitalization of the community that is associated with this return is primarily the rebirth and revitalization of the possibilities for meaningful political autonomy.

In *Politics and Remembrance*, Bruce Smith initially offers a description of that funnuanced conception of Machiavelli by noting that, "to be a citizen, to act politically, meant quite literally to preserve that which was laid in the beginning…one can read almost any of Machiavelli's works and discover an injunction to imitate the ancients" (Smith 1985, 27-30). This seems to confirm the fears over political autonomy expressed above: politics becomes imitation, autonomy becomes preservation (rather than creation), and the sphere of autonomy for citizens seems diminished. As evidence of this conception of citizenship we can look at the Preface to *The Discourses*. In it, Machiavelli writes that though people today attribute honor to antiquity when it comes to statues and art, and that artists of his day often strive, "with great diligence to represent it in all their works" (Machiavelli 2008, 15), he is amazed and saddened that the generals, lawgivers, and kingdoms of antiquity are "admired rather than imitated" (Machiavelli 2008, 15). Additionally, Machiavelli asserts that one of the reasons why Italy has fallen to such a

state of disarray has to do with the fact that he can find no military or political leader who "has recourse to the examples of the ancients" (Machiavelli 2008, 16). Presumably for Machiavelli, a kingdom or republic that did have recourse to the ancient models to imitate would become a strengthened a vital community. This would seem to lend quite a bit of credibility to the idea that, for Machiavelli, effective political activity is one that imitates the past: action as imitation, autonomy as replication.

Building on this analysis, Jim Grote draws our attention to the importance that Machiavelli places on the imitation of 'great men'. According to Grote, "the reader is urged to imitate the 'paths beaten by great men,' specifically four excellent princes: Moses, the liberator of the Hebrews from Egypt and the founder of Israel; Romulus, the founder of Rome; Cyrus, the liberator of the Persians from the Medes; and Theseus, the founder of Athens…Chapter seven is devoted to the imitation of Cesare Borgia" (Grote 1998, 127). To Grote's analysis of *The Prince*, we could just as easily add his reverence for Numa in *The Discourses* as another example of the 'great man' that Machiavelli would have prudent political actors imitate. However, it would seem that a conflict (Grote calls it a contradiction) arises in this conception of imitation. As Harvey Mansfield states, "when imitating great men, one follows the beaten track, and thus does not truly imitate their innovation" (Mansfield 1981, 297). Mansfield and Grote both seem to offer the same claim about Machiavelli's 'imitation'. They both seem to argue that in encouraging the imitation of 'great men', Machiavelli is simply encouraging the imitation of actions, which, as Mansfield clearly points out, is not what made these historical examples the 'great men' of antiquity. It was not the specific content of the actions that

truly made them great (though the actions may have been, though not necessarily always, successful), but rather, it was that their actions were, properly speaking, innovations. Their actions were the result of creativity, vision, and novelty, any political actor who simply strives to recreate the actions taken by these men are undertaking steps that, by the simple fact of their being imitations, must therefore be devoid of creativity, vision, and novelty. Rather than encouraging autonomy and innovation, is Machiavelli simply interested in the ability of political actors, "to apply ancient history to modern events and to encourage the present day imitation of ancient models" (deGrazia 1994, 197) How is Machiavelli concerned at all with innovation and autonomy if his fundamental premise (imitation of the great men of antiquity) seems to dismiss those very possibilities out of hand? In making that claim, however, Mansfield assumes that what Machiavelli is interested in with regard to history and imitation are in fact the specific actions taken. He is sure that history as 'models' to be imitated is the true measure of Machiavelli's interest and focus. But what if Mansfield's understanding of what Machiavelli sees as the true value of history is pushes him to see a contradiction where one really does not exist?[42]

I believe that the position that Grote and Mansfield both forward, overlooks a key component of Machiavelli's political theory that Smith wants to draw our attention to, and which I believe is essential for understanding Machiavelli on this issue. What we are forced to see is that, "there is another Machiavelli – the brash innovator" (Smith 1985, 31). But how can Machiavelli simultaneously be a theorist of imitation, while also being a theorist of political innovation? The answer to this question rests on just what we understand the idea of 'imitation' to mean. While one reading might suggest that

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[42] Or perhaps, does not exist as starkly as he would suggest.

imitation involves simple replication or the faithful reproduction of certain acts, Smith suggests that, "in teaching what men had done, Machiavellian history sought to teach men what they might do. This history was less a science of correction actin than the origin of action itself" (Smith 1985, 38). This distinction is important. Does Machiavelli offer a conception of 'imitation' that involves more than a return to, or restoration of the 'pure form' of that institution? How and when can imitation, and a return to origins be about the production of political activity and autonomy in the present?

I want to claim that Machiavelli is drawing our attention to the past in order to confront his reader with the political vision and boldness that accompany those political actors and political institutions. After all, the people that Machiavelli is calling forward to restore Italy or the Italian city states are, in his estimation, great men. Viroli makes the claim that, for Machiavelli, "the need to use extraordinary means also arises for the civil man who pursues the goals of the restoration of political life (*vivere politico*) in a corrupt city" (Viroli 1993, 169). If we simply think of political action as imitation, this seems to be almost a contradiction. Why would Machiavelli need 'great men' (like the leader he calls for at the end of *The Prince*), or believe that 'extrordinary means' were necessary to restore political life, if all that is needed is simple imitation. No, the idea of imitation here is much more complicated than that. While for Machiavelli, knowledge of the specific historical actions are important, what is of the utmost importance is that the readers recognize the boldness of action, and the great political innovation that each and every new institution represented at the time of its origin. To support this reading of Machiavelli, we can return again to the preface to *The Discourses*. Shortly after the

passage discussed above, where Machiavelli seems to be lamenting the lack of imitation

of political history in his contemporary world, he notes that his contemporaries lack an

ability to understand the histories that they read. He notes that:

> In reading them, we fail to draw out of them that sense or to taste that flavour they intrinsically possess. As a result, it happens that countless people who read them take pleasure in hearing about the variety of incidents they contain without otherwise thinking about imitating them, since they believe that imitation is not only difficult but impossible, as if the sky, the sun, the elements, or human beings had changed in their motions, order, and power from what they were in antiquity (Machiavelli 2008, 16)

While he does again make use of the idea of imitation again in this passage, the context

within which he places the idea is important. Instead of claiming that an inability to

properly understand histories means that we are not drawing the proper lessons from

them, or that we are not able to extract the correct information, he asserts that readers are

not able to 'taste' what history is, or what it possesses. He does not talk about the lessons

of history, but the 'flavor'. In fact, he notes that reading history in order to simply take

pleasure from hearing about the specific *incidents* of the past is the key element in this

historical *misunderstanding* that he is so concerned about.

The passage from *The Discourses* is important as well not simply because it can

help to refocus what we understand Machiavelli to mean by historical imitation, but

because it draws our attention back to one of Machiavelli's guiding concerns: the lack of

effective and powerful political action in the present. Here Machiavelli asserts that even

though people read (and are amused by) historical accounts, they cannot bring themselves

to think of imitating them. Bruce Smith is making reference to this specific claim when

he writes, "men continue to admire the past, but cannot imagine acting in similar

ways…modern politics appear so different from Ancient politics that imitation is judged

impossible" (Smith 1985, 34). But just as Machiavelli asserts that human beings have not

changed, he seems to be using these many histories in order the assure the readers that there is an essence to politics that hasn't changed and that to imitate the 'flavor' of history is not only possible, but necessary. What would it mean, then, for us to shift our concern to the 'flavour' of history? Or, more directly, what would a political project look like that attempts to 'imitate' the 'flavour' of history?

In order to elaborate what it might mean to imitate the 'flavour' of history it is important to remember that, for Machiavelli, most (though not all) of the 'great men' that he is insistent on utilizing as historical examples are founders of cities or communities. Romulus and Numa are, each in their own way, seen as founders of Rome, Moses is both a liberator and founder. So what is it then, about this notion of 'founding' that interests Machiavelli to such a degree? This is an especially important question to ask when we remember that his earlier concern seemed to be more focused on notions of 'rebirth', 'revitalization', and 'renewal', and nowhere does he make the specific assertion that what is called for is the founding of a 'new' community. Instead, he gives his attention entirely over to the problem of revitalizing an already existing community. What then, is the theoretical relationship that he is trying to establish between 'foundings' and 'revitalizations'? How can attention to the actions of political and religious founders help political actors who are concerned with renewal?

To some degree, it would seem that, by focusing so intently upon the role of the founder in the life of the political community, Machiavelli is in fact setting up the very political divide between the politics of the past and the politics of today that he refers to in the preface to *The Discourses*. As Hannah Pitkin notes, "a founder, as Machiavelli

pictures him, is a male figure of super human or mythical proportions, who introduces among men something new, good, and sufficiently powerful so that it continues beyond his lifetime on the course he has set" (Pitkin 1999, 52). In assigning such massive, almost super human political power and skill to these founders, by 'mythologizing' the role they play in the life of the community, Machiavelli seems to forego any possibility of any political action in the present except for possibly pale imitation. Identifying the founders as 'unmoved movers[43]' who act entirely on their own. Again, Pitkin notes that "the true Founder must not only be a foundling, independent of the past and self made in his origins, but he must also be ruthless toward the future" (Pitkin 1999, 60). This would seem to render political action on the level of the founder impossible. Founders must be, by their nature, independent of history, while all contemporary political actors are members of an historical community, they cannot be independent of their history any more than the community itself can. However, even after seeming to put so much distance between founders and mere citizens, Pitkin argues that, "the Founder must also serve as a model for imitation" (Pitkin 1999, 77).

So if founders must serve as a model for imitation, does that mean that Machiavelli is calling for a process of 're-founding'? Elena Guarani asserts that a basic interpretation of *The Discourses* considers the work, "to be not a theoretical work, but rather a concrete political proposal, a sort of manifesto for refounding the Italian republics in a political situation in which it was not yet clear what the final outcome would be" (Guarani 1993, 17). Leaving aside the problematic division that Guarani

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[43] This term describing founders is used by Pitkin repeatedly to illustrate the epic amount of political will and vitality they possess.

makes between a theoretical work and a political proposal and note that her claim about

The Discourses seems to resonate with Pitkin's claim about the imitation of the founders.

The prolonged focus on the work of the founders serves as a 'call to imitation' and a plea

for a 're-founding' of the Italian city-states. Thus, Machiavelli's preoccupation with

history is directly related to the political needs that he sees as animating the present day.

Importantly though, I would like to stake the claim that a 're-founding' is quite a different

thing in Machiavelli's thought from founding a new community altogether, and this is

linked to his injunction to remember and imitate the original founders that he writes

about. There is something about the connection to the past that must animate this type of

political activity. The type of political activity that Machiavelli is calling for is action that

is connected quite clearly to the past; it is a type of activity that would be ineffective

without that very connection. This brings us back, hopefully with a bit more illumination,

to the question posed above: if political action is about imitation, if political corruption

can only be fought through the process of 're-founding' or 'renewal', what exactly is it

that Machiavelli wants imitated?

When Machiavelli is drawing our attention to the 'great men' and founders of the

past, he is very consciously drawing our attention to the freedom and autonomy that each

of them had and that each of them used, in their own distinctive ways, to act boldly and

create laws, institutions, and practices that benefitted the community that was formed. In

his description of Numa as the founder of the Roman religion he notes that he found 'a

very fierce people' and that he used religion to 'maintain a civilized society' and helped

to establish institutions and practices that improved upon those that were created by

Romulus. The point is that Numa used his political autonomy and skill to create these new institutions, to offer solutions to pressing political issues and problems within the community, and to found a stable and strong political order. It is this that I believe Machiavelli is interested in when he speaks of 'imitating' the ancients and the great founders of history. As Martin Fleischer argues, "a people who have not been corrupted beyond the point of no return can revitalize their political existence and regain control of their fate through acts of political intelligence and energy inspired by bold leadership" (Fleischer 1972, 116). While Fleischer primarily argues that the bold leadership that inspires a people are the present political leaders of the community (a prince or the heads of the republic), I believe that there is a larger sense in which this scheme makes sense for Machiavelli. The bold leadership that can inspire intelligent and intrepid activity are those historic founders that Machiavelli constantly draws us back to. They serve as a reminder that bold political activity is not only possible, but it is perhaps a requirement of any lasting political community.

In this sense, the past is imitated not as a template to be copied. Instead, the past serves as something of a reservoir of energy and inspiration, as, "images that drive [citizens] to take up the burdens of public liberty" (Smith 1985, 264). The past, and the memories of the great founders are ideals, perhaps not of content, but of form, a form of action and autonomy that Machiavelli wants his contemporaries to reconnect to. Again, Fleischer notes that, "[Machiavelli] turned to the past for the practical political purposes of working out the guidelines to action and inspiring his contemporaries to undertake the necessary political acts" (Fleischer 1972, 118). While the term 'guidelines' may bring us

a little too close to the definition of 'imitation' that Mansfield puts forward, I would like to focus here on the idea of turning to the past as a means of inspiration. Thinking of the past as inspiration means that Machiavelli is using the past as a *reminder* of the very possibility of freedom and free political action in the present. So, like Castoriadis, Machiavelli sees autonomous political action as a necessary component to any healthy community, but unlike Castoriadis, who attaches autonomy to free creation *ex nihilo*, unconnected to anything that has come before, Machiavelli ties the very possibility of autonomous political action to a clear reference to the past. The past serves as the very animating force for autonomous political activity in the present, by returning us to those very historical dynamics.

In addition to drawing our attention to the memory of great *men* and *founders*, Machiavelli draws our attention to the potential power and force inherent in the political memory that a community has for *freedom*, specifically the memory that a community has for its own historical freedom. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli claims that one of the most difficult cities to rule is one that is used to living under its own free rule. He writes, "he who becomes the ruler of a city that is used to living under its own laws and does now knock it down, must expect to be knocked down by it. Whenever it rebels, it will find strength in the language of liberty and will seek to restore its ancient constitution" (Machiavelli 1994, 17). In *The Discourses*, his concern with a history and memory of freedom forms the very basis of his entire undertaking. In the first chapter of the first book, Machiavelli claims that, "since these cities do not have free origins, it rarely happens that they make great advances and can be numbered among the chief cities of

kingdoms" (Machiavelli 2008, 20). Why is Machiavelli so immediately despairing toward cities without a free founding? Possibly because, for Machiavelli, a city without a free founding will not have that memory of freedom as a reservoir of inspiration upon which to draw for bold political action.

In Book II of *The Discourses*, he writes that, "nothing made it more difficult for the Romans to overcome the surrounding people and parts of the more distant provinces than the love many peoples in those times had for liberty" (Machiavelli 2008, 156). That is to say, a continuous history of freedom and liberty strengthened these communities and allowed them to defend themselves 'so stubbornly' against the Roman Empire. The presence of institutions that tied communities back to their history of freedom and liberty were communities that engaged in very decisive and powerful political actions and went to great lengths to defend themselves. For Machiavelli, could it be that a lack of strong connection to the past means that the potential reservoir of political strength, that memory of freedom, is to some degree unavailable, and hence will weaken that communities ability to act in its own defense or for its own benefit?

Bringing together two of Machiavelli's major theoretical concerns, the memory of freedom and the memory of the great founders of the past, offers us insight into how Machiavelli wants to navigate the dynamics of history and politics. Rather than calling for a pale imitation of the great founders, we can see, in the image of the founder, another possibility. In the image of the founder resides the memory not of specific laws and institutions that must be returned to, but instead, we see a memory of the political will and vitality that produced those laws and institutions in the first place. It is the memory of

political judgments made and political actions taken to solve the issues and concerns that were immediately present at that time. This is what Machiavelli is interested in 'imitating', and this is the lesson that he is trying to teach through his political writings, that "in the memory of the past lay a spring that would enable men to act for a future" (Smith 1985, 42). Just as the founders of the past were able to create institutions and structures that worked to produce a free community, so Machiavelli wishes for political actors today to undertake the same type of activity: a type of political reevaluation of the conditions of freedom and the search for political innovations that would foster its emergence.

We can now offer a slight re-interpretation of the famous passage from the preface to *The Discourses* wherein Machiavelli laments the existence of the attitude that today, imitation of the great political actors of the past is impossible. Immediately after making this statement, Machiavelli notes that he wants to "extricate men from this error" (Machiavelli 2008, 16), and we can see the entirety of *The Discourses* as an extended engagement in this process of extrication[44]. I would argue that what Machiavelli is lamenting in this passage is not that political actors today are unwilling to copy what the 'ancients' did, but that there has been an emptying out of political energy in the republics that Machiavelli sees around him, this is what he means by a failure to imitate the ancients. It is, instead, a failure to remember that, "in republics there is great energy; that this activity is related to the remembrance of an ancient liberty; and that this memory has a compelling quality which almost forbids citizens to rest" (Smith 1985, 57). The fate to

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[44] In this sense I believe we can see Machiavelli's work as both a theoretical text and a political proposal, thus negating the either/or analysis that Guarani offers.

which Machiavelli sees contemporary politics resigned to is that, as sure as there is a belief that 'the sky, the sun, the elements, or human beings' have fundamentally changed from the way they were in antiquity, that type of political energy and activity, creative and bold, is 'not only difficult but impossible' today. In order to 'extricate men' from this error Machiavelli is trying to draw back our attention to those founders so that we might see what it is that was inherited by the communities of today. What was inherited from those founders were not specific laws, institutions, or customs, but the very energy at the heart of republics that was responsible for such creations in the first place. To extricate his contemporaries is to give them the ability to recapture that energy and political boldness. This is the imitation that Machiavelli is calling for.

VI.   Origins & Autonomy as Hermeneutics

So we can see that, for Machiavelli, the conditions of political autonomy, that is to say, powerful creative political activity in the present, is fueled by these memories, and the past more generally. Memories not just of founders, but memories of freedom, of political potential and power, and those elements are what Machiavelli hopes to see recovered by political actors. Another question needs to be asked in the context of our overall argument, however. If Machiavelli's commitment to the past is about recovering a vital sense of political autonomy, how does the idea of a 'public hermeneutics' play into this conception? While authors like Bruce Smith, John Najemy, and Martin Fleischer all seem interested in recovering this notion of political autonomy, or illustrate how, for Machiavelli, a recourse to the past serves as some type of inspiration for political action in the present, their descriptions of this process remain somewhat vague and suffer for

that lack of clear engagement. Whereas Fleischer seems to tie inspiration to a notion of 'guidelines' for action, thus perhaps recreating to some degree that notion of imitation we see in Mansfield, others, like Smith, settle for vague ideas such as the past as helping political actors to 'recapture the energy' inherent in the community. While I do not want to deny the importance of what Smith and others are saying in this regard, I believe that a question still remains. How exactly is that 'energy' captured or directed? That is, if we assume the first part of this argument, that Machiavelli is interested in re-capturing the vital energy and political possibility inherent in the past (the models of 'great men' and 'founders') how does that translate into political activity in the present? Is there something more to Machiavelli's repeated insistence on the lessons of the past other than it serving as some type of amorphous inspiration? How does the inspiration translate into political judgment and political action?

For someone who is seemingly as enamored with the past as Machiavelli is, the Preface to Book II of *The Discourses* seems a bit odd and out of place. At the beginning of the Preface, he writes, "men always praise ancient times and condemn the present, but not always with good reason, and they are such partisans of the past that they celebrate not only those eras they have come to know…but also those that they…remember having seen in their younger days" (Machiavelli 2008, 149). Given everything we have looked as so far, it seems odd for him to talk so forcefully about how people can misremember the past and assign to it too much glory, "even though, in reality, present affairs may be much more deserving of glory and fame" (Machiavelli 2008, 149). I believe, however,

that this is a very strategic intervention on Machiavelli's part, and it gets back to the question of imitation, and just what, and how, people are to 'imitate' the past.

By distancing, in a sense, his political readers from the past, and from the possibility of a blanket admiration for the past, he is giving us a critical lens through which to evaluate the very material that he is presenting. I believe that this is done to further separate Machiavelli from that facile understanding of imitation that Mansfield proposes. The danger inherent in such overflowing admiration for the past is the possibility that the original institutions, structures, religions, etc., may exert such a strong pull of the political imagination that to deviate from them becomes a dangerous proposition. This warning or distancing serves a similar function as Wolin's claim about the Constitution of 1787 when he writes, "a constitution is not a revelation and the Philadelphia convention was not an epiphanic moment" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). In both cases what you are seeing is a presentation of historical material as important, but not as the 'pure form' that our political allegiances must never deviate from. Wolin refers to this type of allegiance to a specific political form as a 'misplaced biblicism' and I would argue that Machiavelli is drawing our attention to nearly the same potential pitfall that, if left unacknowledged, would actually produce more harm than good for the community.

In order to understand this importance, we need to look at the conditions that surround the finest achievements of Machiavelli's 'great founders' – the institutions and laws that they produce. While Machiavelli heaps great praise upon them there is very important way in which he is qualifying their greatness and present applicability, which has to do with the historical nature of these communities and the degeneration of those

institutions in time. Pocock has an insightful description of this process of degeneration and its consequences. In *The Machiavellian Moment*, he writes, "what happens as corruption develops, we are told, is that the material itself undergoes change, and the reason why old laws lose their efficacy when this happens is that the same form cannot be imposed up, or educed from, different matter" (Pocock 2003, 207). By 'material' here, Pocock is referring to the community itself. While we tend to associate Machiavelli with the idea of an unchanging human nature, there is a difference between human nature and specific human communities: communities which are made up of laws, customs, and habits. Machiavelli himself clearly demonstrates this understanding of decay and the effect that it has on the community when he writes, "institutions and laws established in a republic at the time of its birth, when men were good, are no longer suitable later, once men have become evil…this means that new laws are insufficient, because the institutions that remain in place corrupt them" (Machiavelli 2008, 68). What Machiavelli is imparting to his readers is that decay and corruption change the nature of those institutions, and if one wants to reform a community it needs to be remembered that, "since the institutions of the state, which were no longer good amidst the corruption, remained fixed, those laws, which were renewed were not sufficient to keep men good, but they would have been very useful if, along with the innovations in the laws, the institutions had been changed once again" (Machiavelli 2008, 68). Even if we want to avoid, to some degree, the terms of good and evil, we can say that, for Machiavelli, the passage of time and the effect that it has on a communities' institutions and political structures eventually produces an incompatibility. This eventual incompatibility tells us

something about the nature of refounding, that Machiavelli sees as fundamental to the health of the community.

Machiavelli seems to be claiming that if one wants to revitalize the political health of a community it is not enough to simply return to the 'pure form' of the original institutions, for the corruption that occurs over time makes those institutions, which at one time fit the conditions of the community, no longer compatible with political health. Revitalization here calls for not simply the passage of new laws, but the creation of, or perhaps radical restructuring of, the fundamental institutions that help configure the community. A refounding needs to be a process of ongoing negotiation between institutional structure, the conditions of the community, and the prospects for political freedom. John Najemy describes this dynamic as the recognition that, "founding requires constant revision, evolution and many lawgivers: founding is a long historical process that is never quite complete" (Najemy 2010, 100). While I think this does capture fairly accurately Machiavelli's argument, it does not quite go far enough. Rather than the claim that re-founding requires multiple lawgivers, Machiavelli insists that it is not simply new laws that need to be considered, but the very fundamental institutions of the community need to be reconsidered, revised, or replaced if the need arises.

This helps us to flesh out why, for Machiavelli, this historical material is so important to refounding. Not only is the historical material supposed to serve as a reservoir of inspiration and energy for those acting in the present, but it is also serves as material for political actors to use in formulating their political judgments and goals in the present. By looking at the successful laws and institutions created by the 'founders',

political actors are able to see how those institutions fit with the conditions to produce a healthy and vital political community. This then encourages political actors to confront the present conditions of the community and see how those institutions would need to be changed, replaced, or dropped, in order to best meet the needs of the community as it is presently constituted. As Machiavelli writes in Book III of *The Discourses*, "an individual comes to make fewer mistakes and to enjoy a favorable fortune…when his methods fit the times" (Machiavelli 2008, 281). Simply replicating the institutions of the past is an exercise in futility, because the changed character of the community would be incompatible with them. Instead, this historical material is to be understood and re-interpreted in light of the needs and conditions of the contemporary communities in which the actors are engaged.

Where can we find a clear example of Machiavelli's interpretive innovation in action? For Machiavelli, we actually need to look no further than the Catholic Church itself. While we have seen that Machiavelli seems to be no great fan of Catholicism, as he repeatedly ties it to the degradation of Italy, the lack of a love of freedom among his contemporaries, and a denigration of the pursuit of worldly glory, it does offer a surprisingly illustrative example of this very process of revitalization. In Book III of *The Discourses*, Machiavelli talks about the process of 'revival' that re-energized, at least to some degree, Catholicism as an historical institution. Machiavelli writes:

> These revivals are necessary through the example of our own religion which, had it not been brought back to its beginnings by Saints Francis and Dominic, would have died out completely; for these men, with their poverty and the example of Christ's life, restored religion to the minds of men where it had been extinguished; and their new institutions were powerful enough to prevent the dishonesty of the priests and leaders of this religion from ruining it (Machiavelli 2008, 249).

I believe this encapsulates to a great degree Machiavelli's understanding of revitalization and re-founding. The Catholic faith was simultaneously brought back to its 'beginnings' in the sense that Francis and Dominic took their inspiration from 'the example of Christ's life' but that example was interpreted in a way that allowed them to create new religious institutions that revived the religion and prevented it from dying out. This also allows us to get at the heart of Machiavelli's criticism of the Catholic faith more generally among his contemporaries.

Moreover, Machiavelli insists that the primary reason why Catholicism has had such a negative effect on the power of the Italian city states does not have to do with the truth content of the religion, or something about its essential nature, but rather, in how it has been interpreted. In The Discourses, Machiavelli writes that the negative effects of Catholicism "arises more from the cowardice of men who have interpreted our religion…it is…these false interpretations that explain why we no longer find as many republics in the world as existed in ancient times" (Machiavelli 2008, 159). Setting aside the thorny issue of 'true' and 'false' interpretations, what is most important here is that Machiavelli is making the point that the power (or weakness) of an institution rests primarily in how the institution is interpreted in a contemporary setting. Rather than concerning himself with a debate over the a-historical or theological truth content of Catholicism, "Machiavelli's attention here is concentrated…more on how this 'truth' has been implemented, institutionalized, practiced, and lived" (Najemy 1999, 668).

Thus, for Machiavelli, we can see the process of imitation as one that is inextricably bound not simply to the past or to recreating the past, but one that is

concerned with political autonomy as well as creation through interpretation of the past. That is to say, autonomy for Machiavelli involved bold and powerful political action, but that action is not divorced from the past, but must use the past as its starting point. Bold reinterpretations of the inherited institutions and laws of a community is the primary way in which Machiavelli believes those communities can stave off, if only for a time, the degeneration and corruption that is a necessary corollary of being a community that exists in time, a community that is historical to its very core.

VII. Conclusion

A familiar interpretation of Machiavelli's intention as an author, sees him as a teacher of both politics and history not simply because there is value in *knowing* history, but that history provides one with lessons that can be *imitated,* a thinker who sees "the didactic value of the past" (deGrazia 1994, 27). As Jim Grote observes, "the reader is urged to imitate the 'paths beaten by great men'…history teaches the imitation of great men" (Grote 1998, 127). History, according to this interpretation of Machiavelli, is something of a playbook that we can have access to in order to best align our actions with when our circumstances require. All is we need for this strategy to be successful, is to understand what our current circumstances require and the ability to discern what historical actors have done in similar circumstances, and simply apply the lessons of history to our own situation. Machiavelli seems to offer this general advice when, in *The Discourses*, he writes, "Prudent men are in the habit of saying…that anyone wishing to see what is to be must consider what has been; all the things of this work in every era have their counterparts in ancient times" (Machiavelli 2008, 351). To make this assertion,

that present events have 'counterparts' in past events seems to be moving in the direction of a general claim about history: that it is to a large degree repeatable, or that, in terms of actions to be taken and circumstances in which we might need to act, there is 'nothing new under the sun'.

Reinhart Koselleck clearly ties this conception of history to what he sees as Machiavelli's own goals. In *Futures Past*, Koselleck observes that, "This experience of history, founded as it was on repeatability, bound prospective futures to the past" (Koselleck 2004, 21), and as such, to imitate the examples of history provides us with a continual template of political experience. "Machiavelli's call, not only to admire the ancients but also to imitate them, gave an edge to the resolution that one should continually draw benefit from history because of the unique manner in which it united exemplary and empirical thought" (Koselleck 2004, 29). This understanding of history unites history and praxis (for us specifically, political praxis), because historical knowledge here becomes a collection of examples[45] that can be utilized by political actors in the present. Machiavelli seems to make just such a claim himself in the opening to book II of *The Discourses* when he offers a very clear description of what he himself is attempting to do in this book as well as what he hopes the reader will be able to do with it. He writes, "I shall boldly proclaim in an open way what I understand of ancient times and of our own, so that the minds of the young men who will read these writings of mine can avoid the errors of the present and be prepared to imitate the past whenever fortune provides them with the proper occasion" (Machiavelli 2008, 152). This seems to be a very clear encapsulation of Koselleck's conception of history instructing life. Machiavelli

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[45] This is Koselleck's description of the method.

appears to be offering historical descriptions as well as commentary on the present and offering this historical knowledge as examples to be emulated by actors (Machiavelli's 'young men') in the present, provided that they have enough skill to be able to discern what historical examples truly parallel with the situation they themselves are facing in the present. Given that ability, history then becomes a set of actions to emulate or avoid (if the historical outcome was less than desirable).

In this chapter, I attempted to argue for another conception of Machiavelli, one where Machiavelli's concern with history is much more complicated. To say that, for Machiavelli, history instructs life would be to really broaden what that term means. History is not simply a collection of examples to be followed, or rules to abide by. Instead, history performs two vital functions. First, it is the source of political motivation and inspiration in the present. The repeated analysis of the great founders played a very specific role for Machiavelli. It was designed to show his Italian readers that, "in their Italic hearts the ancient bravery is not yet dead" (deGrazia 1994, 154), and that these historic examples would serve as a reminder that innovation, rather than pale imitation, is the true legacy of historical inheritance. Secondly, and just as important, is the idea that history serves as the material for re-evaluation and reinterpretation. In fact, for Machiavelli, reinterpretation and rebirth are inseparable ideas. Powerful political action must be linked to existing laws, structures, and institutions through the ongoing act of reinterpretation. So just as John Najemy notes that founding is a continual process that is never finished, the act of interpretation of that historical material is similarly one that is always unfinished, but also always necessary. Machiavelli is, as Pitkin insightfully notes,

a theorist of autonomy, but that autonomy receives its motive force in and through the historical material and institutions that political actors must constantly work to revitalize by reinterpreting them and reconfiguring them to meet the needs and changed circumstances of the community as it is currently configured.

Chapter Five

*A political community is a historical phenomenon. It is a cumulative process which
reclaims something of its past and anticipates something of its future*
- Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*

In the last chapter, I argued that Niccolò Machiavelli offers an illuminating theoretical framework within which to combine a concern for history with a desire for political autonomy. This framework culminates in Machiavelli's insistence on the importance of the 'memory of freedom' as a motive force with regard to the active and creative nature of citizens. The seemingly religious regard that he has for historical material, serves as the very material to inspire and ensure autonomous political action in the present. Sara VanderHaagen describes this type of project as one wherein, "memories transmit certain visions of agency that perpetuate new actions" (VanderHaagen 2013, 190). As such, I believe that he is an important additive to the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis, who, while illuminating the *symbolic* nature of politics, so important for any hermeneutic project of politics, divorced his idea of autonomy from history, thus leaving us with a metaphysical project of autonomy that emerges ex nihilo.

The move to Machiavelli, I believe, offers us a way around the difficulties that Castoriadis' theories present, and allows us to forward a rigorous project of political autonomy that utilizes historical memory in a way that draws on the active process of reinterpretation. The interpretive engagement with this material allows a space where citizens do not simply see their position as one of preservation, but as a more active form of engagement. One important aspect, however, that Machiavelli seems to leave under theorized is just what this type of political community might look like? If a healthy

community is to be characterized by political autonomy (or we might say 'autonomous actors') that are acting on present concerns using the past as a hermeneutic and political guide, *who* exactly are these actors? Moreover, it leads us to a question of political judgment and responsibility that for Machiavelli is difficult to resolve. In *The Discourses*, this issue of judgment becomes quite important, because how issues of judgment are theorized will go a long way toward defining the type of responsibility that political actors will have to take, as well as who those very actors are. That is to say, who are the hermeneuticians? While *The Discourses* certainly place citizens at the center of the political community, Machiavelli seems to offer, within the same work, contrasting claims about who he is entrusting with this judgment. On the one hand, it cannot escape notice that all of the particular examples he gives of powerful action in the past are the result of singular individuals. From Numa, to Brutus, to Cesar Borgia, his historical exemplars are all, what we might call, political aristocrats: elite actors who are able to act decisively, and in most cases successfully, thanks to their own individual virtù that leads them down this course of action. This open up the possible interpretation that was Machiavelli is looking for are contemporary 'political aristocrats' to follow in the footsteps laid before them. It is this strong assertion of the dynamic and isolated acting individual that leads Sebastian de Grazia to the conclusion that, for Machiavelli, the cultivation of great men is an absolute necessity, especially for states in decline.

On this issue, de Grazia writes, "some men, those who create laws or fiats or similar restraints, may have to make moral choices of greater consequences than the rest" (deGrazia 1994, 110). While de Grazia does make note of Machiavelli's republicanism,

his repeated analysis of Machiavelli's call for 'great men' and for the 'Prince new' as the centerpieces of Machiavelli's theories of political renewal and salvation lead one to the conclusion that what Machiavelli is truly interested in is the presence of a sort of political aristocracy: the great and usually singular men who will be able to reform and remold the community through their strength and virtù. Hannah Pitkin also picks up on this theme in Machiavelli when she claims that, "the insistence on princely self-reliance becomes, in *The Discourses*, the theme of the solitary founder" (Pitkin 1999, 20). While Pitkin believes that the presence of The Founder will eventually give way to the rule by The Citizen, the issue of renewal and 'refounding' that was discussed in the previous chapter magnifies the issue that Pitkin draws out attention to. If founding (and, by extension, refounding) will, by necessity, require the presence of, and actions by, the great solitary founders, can we really deny the enduring presence of this political aristocracy?

Perhaps we can. Machiavelli himself qualifies this aristocratic interpretation in his own detailed discussion of political judgment. Rather than positing the need for a contemporary 'political aristocracy', he instead seems to offer a fairly compelling argument in favor of the political judgment of the many. John McCormick persuasively argues this point when he writes, "Machiavelli's prescription for a widely inclusive and popularly empowered form of government rests on a remarkably favorable assessment of the common people's abilities, especially their capacity for political judgment" (McCormick 2011, 65). To make this argument, McCormick is drawing upon Machiavelli's discussion in Book I of *The Discourses* in which Machiavelli makes a very impassioned argument in favor of the collective wisdom of the people. When comparing

the virtues of the people to those of a prince, Machiavelli writes, "in goodness and in glory, the people are by far superior…people are so much superior in maintaining the things established that, without any doubt, they add to the glory of those who established them" (Machiavelli 2008, 144). In addition, Machiavelli asserts that when the people exercise power in a well-organized community, they will be "stable, prudent, and grateful no differently than a prince, or better than a prince, and will even be considered wise" (Machiavelli 2008, 142). In McCormick's vision, it is not that all political power should be ceded to the people (understood here as the common people and not the elite), but that Machiavelli wants to maintain an "antagonistic political culture" (McCormick 2001, 297) where political action on the part of the people acts as a counterweight to the drives and machinations of the elite. To do otherwise, to leave the political/social/economic elite without an adequate political adversary would be to weaken a republic and leave the community open to political corruption and (perhaps) collapse.

In fact, this tension between the elite and the people opens up an interesting tension that McCormick seizes on and formulates a conception of political action that has some parallels to what I have been discussing. With regard to the motive force for the political activity and interests of the people, McCormick specifically addresses the issue of historical memory. He writes, "In particular, collective memory among the people of formal inequalities from the past seem to inspire within them a sensitivity to informal inequalities that persist in the present" (McCormick 2011, 14). This seems to replicate, to some degree, the very dynamic that we have been discussing: the way that attention to history seems to offer an opening for political action and awareness. However, the very

chapter in which Machiavelli seems to be offering this very spirited defense of the political acumen of the people qualifies itself a little bit, and brings us back, somewhat, to the initial claim of political aristocracy, thus forcing us to re-negotiate this issue. In an important sentence in the chapter, Machiavelli argues that, while the people may be better at maintaining laws, "princes are superior to the people in enacting laws, forming civil societies, establishing statues and new institutions" (Machiavelli 2008, 144). This seeming vacillation, between an idea of actors in an aristocratic sense and actors in a more democratic sense, is a tension that Machiavelli presents us with, but fails to adequately think through.

No doubt, some of this is due in part to the nature of public memory itself. As Wulf Kansteiner notes, "memory is a collective phenomenon, but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals" (Kansteiner 2002, 180). Other theorists of collective memory similarly wrestle with this issue: to what degree is the use of memory a collective undertaking, or the product of individual action. Sara VanderHaggen writes that, "The struggle for balance can be seen clearly among rhetorical scholars studying public memory, many of whom have noted its simultaneously collective and individual nature" (VanderHaagen 2013, 186). While in this chapter I hope to argue that this methodological consideration should not be seen as an either/or proposition, what is needed is a frame in which both collective and individualistic claims can exist and configure each other. I would argue that Machiavelli's engagement with these issues does not offer us that successful frame. His vacillation between a seemingly aristocratic

understanding of autonomy and more collective (democratic?) understanding simply means that the tension was one his theory could not deal with in a productive manner.

In searching for a remedy to this difficulty, I will argue that the thought of Max Weber, the eminent German Sociologist, can be quite helpful. More specifically, his ideas on the modern phenomenon of 'nationalism' actually offers us a useful framework and a compelling narrative. Most important for our purposes is the way in which he will ultimately define the nation as a 'memory community', and how this community positions citizens within it to engage in principled political action that is motivated largely through their recognition of themselves as part of this memory community. This chapter will also involve a fair amount of what I would call 'theoretical recovery'. Because Weber never set forth his ideas on nationalism in a systematic way, my argument will not be resting on an analysis of a single theoretical work of Weber's, but rather, it will be, to some degree, a theoretical reconstruction that is built on the scattered threads that appear throughout several works. By bringing those threads together and seeing how they might inform each other, I hope create a larger, more systemic picture than Weber himself produces. I believe that as a theoretical constellation, it illuminates the central problematic of the dynamic of memory and history in a compelling and helpful way. While Machiavelli points out the central historical dynamics of the political community, it is Weber, and his conception of nationalism that helps us give a shape to that community itself.

I. Max Weber's Nationalism

There is a growing body of literature that has begun to examine both the role that nationalism plays in the work of Max Weber. Much of this work seems to demonstrate how nationalism serves as a main undercurrent in Weber's academic work, informing his analysis in a significant, though largely unspecified manner. Beyond Weber's academic work, the issue of – and concern with – nationalism clearly has a very large presence in many of his political writings, most notably "Between Two Laws" and his Freiburg inaugural address, "The Nation State and Economic Policy". However, beyond some scattered and unfinished fragments from *Economy and Society* on ethnicity and nations, which he never fully developed,[46] Weber himself did not ever theorize nationalism in a systematic way; beyond these fragments, it is impossible to find an extensive treatment of the concept itself. Thus, for Weber, nationalism seems to have a spectral presence in his writings, important yet bewilderingly under-investigated as an idea. This situation led Perry Anderson to note that "Weber was so bewitched by the spell of nationalism that he was never able to theorize it" (Anderson 1992, 205). What Anderson is perceptive to note, and what is bewildering to those scholars interested in Weber's position regarding the issue and idea of nationalism, is that while nationalism seems to intersect with many other ideas of profound importance in Weber's corpus, such as status, power and history, this theoretical constellation never illuminates nationalism very clearly, and the specter remains quite hidden.

The two most prominent places where Weber deals with the issue of nationalism, the Freiburg lecture (1895) and the fragmentary chapters in *Economy and Society* (1910-1915), were written at least 15 years apart. This distance requires us to consider whether

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[46] At the time of his death, he had not prepared this work for publication.

or not Weber's concepts of nationalism and nation actually change and develop throughout the body of his work. Or more precisely, because he began his scholarly 'theorization' of the nation much later than his first 'politicization' of the nation, should we expect a significant change from one to the other, which would complicate any attempt to locate continuity in Weber's ideas on nationalism? Mommsen believes that we do see a significant change in Weber's conception of nationalism. According to Abraham, "Mommsen has argued that, after the Freiburg address, a basic reversal in his position on Poland' can be found in Weber's writings. This occurred, according to Mommsen, because Weber became more and more committed to the *Machstaat* and German imperialism, at the expense of his early commitment to the *Kulturstaat*" (Abraham 1991). Mommsen sees a significant change, a development that almost signals a complete break in conceptual understanding, toward the imperialist power-state, which would render an idea of strong continuity on the issue of nationalism quite moot. Norkus goes a bit further than Mommsen and offers two completely separate conceptions of nationalism that he believes can be found in Weber's writings. Norkus assigns to the 'early Weber' a conception of nationalism referred to as the 'political economic' model, while the late Weber develops a 'political sociology' model of the nation.[47] More importantly for Norkus is the claim that, "[Weber's] caustic 'deconstructive' analysis in *Economy and Society* can be considered (at least in part) as a work in self-criticism." Thus, in Norkus's interpretation the 'political sociology' model is essentially a strong corrective to the

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[47] This division might make sense insofar as Lawrence Scaff notes how Weber 'came' to sociology later in his career while beginning more strictly as an economist. Thus, Norkus's categories seem to parallel Weber's own intellectual development but he never offers a convincing account of how the two terms are so different as to constitute two separate forms of investigation.

original flawed interpretation. His attempt to 'redeem' Weber ignores a fundamental component to his overall work. As Lawrence Scaff writes, "Weber's 'nationalism' was a logical political correlate to his economic thought" (Scaff 1989, 31). Assuming significantly independent 'economic' and 'sociological' nationalisms presupposes significantly independent economic and sociological investigations on Weber's part, which is a presupposition that does not adequately describe Weber's work.

The other issue besides that of consistency is the issue of whether it is possible to read Weber's political and scholarly works together, or must we keep them separate. The conflation of the political and the intellectual seems to be a major issue when interpreting Max Weber. For someone who was so concerned with methodological investigation and a strong notion of science, Weber was, for his life, quite invested in politics. For someone who claimed himself to be "not an active politician, nor will he ever be one," (Weber 2002, 133)[48] he repeatedly noted that politics was 'his old secret love.' As such, it would be foolish to believe we could cleanly separate the political from the scholarly writings. Or as Mommsen claims, "there is in fact a fairly intimate connection between Weber's scholarly work and his political creed; in a way they are even two sides of the same coin. Weber's scholarly work has certainly been substantially stimulated by political considerations of a very fundamental nature." (Mommsen 1974, 25).[49]

This chapter will attempt to think both sets of writings together. In addition, in this chapter, I will investigate Weber's nationalism by proceeding with the assumption

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[48] This statement may be right on a narrow technical basis, but one would be hard pressed to make that claim that not being an active politician somehow made him, or his writings, less politically-inflected.
[49] Of course, by agreeing with Mommsen's characterization of Weber's way of working while disagreeing with Mommsen's content of Weber's work I am offering a double critique of Mommsen: that he misread not only Weber's work on nationalism, but has misread the political implications for this work.

that one can find a consistent line of thought throughout Weber's work. While granting the possibility that the later theoretical writings on nationalism differ to some degree from the earlier works, this is more an issue of self-clarification than a major shift in emphasis (Mommsen) or complete break in conceptual thinking (Norkus). This set of assumptions is being upheld for two specific reasons. The first is that an operating under the idea of an excessive separation, shift or change in Weber's writings runs the risk (especially for Weber) of overly psychologizing his work. That is to say, to put forth an idea of two Weber's, separated by his period of illness. Rather than falling into this all-too-easy periodization, it would be more fruitful to look for significant connections throughout his work. This task is easily abandoned or obfuscated with an excessive reliance on psycho-biography and it prevents us from seeing clearly just how concerned Weber was, throughout his life and all manners of work, with certain key ideas.

These key ideas, which form a strong continuity throughout his work, are the second reason why this chapter assumes continuity on the issue of nationalism throughout his writings. Moreover, it is my contention that only by acknowledging these key ideas as consistent concerns in Weber's work that we can come to understand and appreciate his ideas on nation and nationalism. The two most important ideas in Weber's work are the two giant and inescapable powers of the modern disenchanted age: capitalism and bureaucratization. Weber saw capitalist development as 'inescapable for us' as part of our fate, and bureaucratization was seen by him as an 'inescapability' of the modern world. While his scholarly works were devoted to an intellectual understanding of the histories, methods, emergence and characteristics of capitalism and bureaucracy, his specifically

political writings brought forth another, socially immediate, concern that involved these giant structures. In his essay "On the Situation of Constitutional Democracy in Russia", Weber asks, "how can democracy and freedom be maintained in the long run under the dominance of advanced capitalism?" (Weber 2002, 69) As for the issue of bureaucratization, in his essay "Parliament and Government in Germany", Weber asks, "How is it at all possibly to salvage any remnants of 'individual' freedom of movement in any sense, given this all-powerful trend towards bureaucratization?" (Weber 2002, 159). A third potential question might be how to avoid the leveling of democracy that seems to accompany bureaucratic rule in the modern world. These apprehensions are made all the more pressing when we remember the basis of Weber's sociology: the acting individual. Given these massive structures, what is the ultimate fate of the acting individual in the modern world?

These concerns all come together in the main premise that informed all of Weber's writings and scholarly undertakings. Mommsen sums this project up nicely when he writes:

> [Weber] worked hard to enlighten people's minds, and to suggest solutions which might enable to individual to hold his own against the rise of seemingly omnipotent bureaucracies, and to help Western societies to hold in check those social forces which were about to suffocate silently, but remorselessly the liberal individualistic, social structures of his day. (Mommsen 1974, ix)

I believe that it is only in light of this undertaking that we can begin to understand the 'spell of nationalism' that permeates Weber's work, but is little defined. To be more precise, it is **against** the two inescapable forces of modernity, bureaucracy and capitalism, that we must place Weber's ideas about the nation. I argue that it is only by placing his idea of nationalism against the backdrop of these totalizing structures we can

see how Weber's nationalism and his sociological individualism are related. As Sung Ho Kim writes, "In the end, nation and civil society formed an integrated idea in Weber's liberal nationalism, all for the purpose of empowering our agency and cultivating a self-governing individual-cum-citizen" (Kim 2004, 171). This purpose that Weber imputes to the nation (Kim's 'liberal nationalism') can be illuminated when we see how he connects the nation to certain key concepts, namely: history, culture, politics, freedom and responsibility. Moreover, these concepts, which for Weber are indispensable for engaging in meaningful human activity, and thus living meaningful human lives in modernity, are manifested in modern society in large part through the nation. As Mark Warren notes, "Weber's nationalism and statism, then, are not sui generis, but rather interdependent with his liberal commitment to persons." (Warren 1988, 37) In fact, I argue that Weber's nation is unthinkable without specific recourse to these very concepts, which are infused into his very understanding of the purpose, content and form of the nation. This is not to say that Weber envisions a wholesale re-enchantment of the world through the nation, for as he makes clear, "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (Weber 2000, 155). However, Weber's unique characterization of the nation serves, "to provide a balance of power to the rapidly bureaucratizing state. Rather than an ultimate goal, nationalism was instrumental to this ideal" (Kim 2004, 170). Although I believe Kim is largely correct in this assertion, there is one specific component to Weber's nationalism that he does not feature in his analysis. Kim minimizes one of the ways that nationalism is supposed to achieve these goals. Weber's understanding of the

nation turns national identity and nationalism more generally, into a temporal, and historical, concept. I argue that Weber does this because this form of national consciousness as historical consciousness is a way to expand or re-conceptualize ideas of political responsibility, freedom, and action to fit the icy modern world of bureaucracy and the 'iron cage' of modernity.

II. Placing Nationalism: Weber in the Context of German Nationalism(s)

In order to demonstrate just how important this temporal and historical dimension is to Weber's understanding of the Nation, it is helpful to first contrast Weber with some of the dominant forms of nationalism that he contended with. Unfortunatley, because many scholars ignore this historical dimension, there is a tendency among many scholars to conflate Weber's position on nationalism with some of the prevailing German nationalisms of the time. Most notably are Raymond Aron and Wolfgang Mommsen, both of whom see Weber advocating German nationalism as being, *in itself*, the highest goal and purpose that can be served. According to Mommsen, "[Weber] declared the national idea to be a kind of ultimate value which had to come first in politics and economics alike." (Mommsen 1974, 26) This assertion seems quite credible as Weber asserts in "The Nation State and Economic Policy" that, "The economic policy of a German state, and, equally, the criterion of value used by a German economic theorist, can therefore only be a German policy or criterion." (Weber 2002, 15) His subordination of politics to German nationalism seems all the more pronounced as he writes, "It goes without saying that the vital interests of the nation take precedence even over democracy or parliamentary rule." (Weber 2002, 133) Due to this exalted idea of the German nation-

state, which Aron calls, "the supreme value to which he would subordinate everything in politics, the God (or daemon) to which he had sworn loyalty," (Aron 1971, 87) Aron and Mommsen see Weber as endorsing a nationalistic form of absolute (or near absolute) power-politics, and they emphasize his thoughts on imperialism, the idea that nations must compete for 'elbow room' in the international arena, and the strict connection of politics to the 'pragma of power' to support their position.

Other authors read Nietzsche's influence on Weber's work and see in his conception of politics a certain elitist strain, wherein, "the active choice of a meritorious lie style is found only among particularly gifted individuals, while most people are incapable of developing such 'virtuoso ethic'" (Shafir 1985, 527). Regina Titunik notes that "Weber is typically characterized as a "Nietzschean" or "aristocratic" liberal whose primary concern with that prospect for freedom of exceptional individuals in the midst of a bureaucratically administered world" (Titunik 1997, 682). To make this point, critics often point to Weber's use of Nietzschean terminology and language within his own work, most notably in *The Protestant Ethic*, where Weber's lament over the future of the 'last men' can be read through a distinctively Nietzschean lens: "Then, however, it might truly be said of the "last men" in this cultural development: "specialists without spirit, hedonists without a heart, these nonentities imagine they have attained a state of humankind never before reached" (Weber 2002, 121). Among some commenters on Weber's nationalism, this type of aristocratic political sentiment is translated into the nationalist context. In this interpretation, Weber's promotion of German nationalism is seen through a Nietzschean-aristocratic lens. Gary Abraham sees Weber's nationalism as

a position of 'anti-pluralism'; focusing on the Freiburg address, and Weber's call for social unification, Abraham claims that, "Weber wanted individuals to be free to adopt the dominant ethnic-national identity, and if certain groups did not immediately appear to be disposed to such a choice, he thought they should be encouraged to make that choice by state policy" (Abraham 1991, 65). Although Abraham acknowledges that Weber does not reduce nationalism to one specific characteristic, but instead stresses a variety of factors that form the nation, he still sees this nationalism as a forcefully homogenizing one concerned with the question of "how 'we' can shape racial characteristics, in the widest sense, for the future." (Abraham 1991, 48). While I believe that Abraham does a disservice to a general understanding of Weber's position on nationalism, and his concern with a racialized reading of Weber misunderstands several of Weber's own key points, in raising the question of nationalism, Abraham focuses on a very important element: the notion of 'how "we" can shape racial characteristics'. The 'we' that informs Abraham's understanding of the national question can help us to recognize what I would like to call Weber's 'nationalist paradox' that I believe is essential to understanding what nationalism means in Weber's own work, and for distancing his notion of nationalism from both the aristocratic, power-political, and racial conceptions that have already been used to categorize Weber's own understandings.

To understand this 'nationalist paradox' we need to set nationalism as a term alongside Weber's own methodology and try to work out their relationship. As a scientist, Weber believed that "the fundamental unit of social analysis is individual conduct" (Bendix 1946, 518). Mommsen makes a similar observation when he notes that

Weber rejected the idea of 'collective concepts.' In the introduction to his magisterial *Economy and Society*, Weber himself writes, "for sociological purposes there is no such thing as a collective personality which "acts"" (Weber 1978, 14). For Mommsen, methodological individualism this is a further sign of Weber's 'aristocratic individualism' but from a purely scholastic standpoint, it alerts us to the idea that, as a social scientist, Weber's primary concern was always at the level of the individual. Gunther Roth makes an even more bold statement about Weber's individualism when he writes that, for Weber, "in history, only men act, not social organisms or reified collectivities" (Roth and Schluchter 1979, 205). Thus for Weber, the importance strictly falls upon the individual, and the acting individual as a unit of analysis and the causal agent in history.

However, individual action, especially within the modern world, needs to be understood within the context of powerful institutions. Andrew Koch reminds us that, "Weber saw modern life as an interplay of the various types of rationality as they became manifest in particular institutional forms. All social life was characterized by the formation and adherence to institutions…defined as patterns of behavior carried out by human individuals" (Koch 1993, 134). So while individuals are the unit of analysis and, "collective concepts…were simply the concepts used to describe the patterns of individual behavior within a large social context" (Koch 1993, 134), we cannot understand human action without understanding how that action is influenced and moderated through the rationality of modern institutions. Additionally, as we have noted above, nationalism seems to be a 'spectral presence' in his work, it might also be seen as a 'spectral institution'. Furthermore, nationalism, and the nation, are terms that are used to

describe *at least* a collectivizing enterprise and *at most*, as Abraham claims, a homogenizing force and idea. So how does this institution, an essential part of what Shafir calls a "totalistic political doctrine" (Shafir 1985, 521), fit into Weber's individualistic understanding of the world? One of the main themes this chapter will investigate is the extent to which Weber's 'nationalistic paradox' can be understood. In other words, "how is his nationalism compatible with his reputation as an individualist?" (Norkus 2004, 391). If his nationalism is as 'realpolitic' as Aron and Mommsen believe it is, it would seem that the paradox will most likely resolve itself when the concept itself swallows up the individuals contained within it. This 'homogenizing force', as Abrahams describes it, would seem to be overpowering when confronted with 'acting individuals' in the modern world.

For this type of analysis to be in any way accurate, I believe that it must rely on what I would call the narrative of Weber as a 'pessimistic social scientist', insofar as his research leads him to the conclusion that the 'iron cage' of modernity is all but inescapable. Moreover, this pessimism, as a defining feature of his sociological and political economic investigations became a key element in his political claims and beliefs. Andrew Koch describes this pessimistic narrative of Weber's scholarship by noting that, "There is no escape from the pessimism that has come to characterize Weber's work given his beliefs about science and human nature. Every step forward is a step deeper into the abyss" (Koch 1993, 144). However, I would like to assert that this pessimistic understanding of Weber is misleading in its conclusions and inaccurate in describing the trajectory of his thought (academic and otherwise). This is not to deny a

certain pessimism to Weber's thought: after all, he is largely indebted to Marx and Nietzsche, two of Ricoeur's three 'philosophers of suspicion'. So while this pessimistic starting point may be accurate, the course that this standard narrative charts moves along a trajectory that does quite a bit of violence to Weber's own ideas, as well as his general intellectual and political development. In re-evaluating Weber's position on nationalism, I hope to course-correct this story.

The characterization of Weber as a 'pessimistic social scientist' of modernity produces the following rough narrative. Through the course of his investigations, "Weber came to the conclusion that liberal modernity and its normative foundation in natural rights theories had become obsolete, which prompted him to seek such illiberal institutions as charismatic-elitist leadership, amoral realpolitic and irrational nationalism." (Kim 2000, 197-8). This 'irrational' nationalism can take many forms according to different interpretations: Andersons 'dominant ideology,' Aron and Mommsen's 'imperialist nationalism,' and Abraham's 'anti-pluralism' are all examples of this type of nationalism that Weber is supposedly to have 'fallen into' as a result of his despair over the 'iron cage' of modernity. Furthermore, Weber's understanding of modernity as a "condition of coercive conformity and dull passivity" (Titunik 1997, 680), leads him to this conception of nationalism as a means to re-invigorate a world of banality and lack of purposeful action and direction. Ultimately, "In no sphere of modern life did Weber see the emergence of a new source of rationalizing and ethical prophecy capable of making living meaningful and coherent again" (Shafir 1985, 527). Because Weber believes that the general conditions of modernity are not able to provide this type

of direction and meaning, he takes recourse in the only things available: irrational concepts and ideas that might help individuals, "select and adopt meaningful attitudes toward life" (Shafir 1985, 517). Thus, the ultimate end for Weber's disenchanted narrative is a recourse to the irrational and, perhaps, aesthetic. Absent any meaningful modern concepts that could revive meaningful human existence, Weber settles for what he might consider pre-modern ideas. A recourse to charisma based concepts an ideas seems to form his only possible 'way out' of this pessimistic conclusion.

However, I would like to assert that a more careful investigation of Weber's own ideas about the nation, its construction, and its purpose reveal a much more complex picture than is commonly granted by those who frame Weber as merely a power-politics nationalist. Although I will argue, at the end of this chapter, that Weber does indeed conceptualize 'the nation' as a means to perhaps re-imbue the modern world with meaning and purpose, he does so in a way that avoids irrationalism and overtones of pre-modern religion and charisma. To begin with, nowhere in his theoretical discussion of 'the nation' as a 'structure of power' does the term 'nationalism' arise. In his discussion he mentions 'sentiments of prestige,' 'sentiment of solidarity,' and 'national sentiments' (the closest he comes to the term nationalism. What is more astonishing is that in the works normally considered highly and overtly nationalistic (a claim that I would not quarrel with on a general level), "Between Two Laws" and "The Nation State and Economic Policy", the term is also conspicuously absent. This is not to imply that Weber is not concerned with nationalist issues, for he clearly is in those writings. Norkus, following Palonen, writes that "Weber was rather reluctant to identify himself as a 'nationalist.'"

(Norkus 2004, 392). What is more, Weber claimed that "our policy will furthermore, necessarily be anti-nationalistic, not antinational." (Norkus 2004, 392) This declaration by Weber seems to confirm the suspicion that he neither uncritically assimilated dominant views on nationalism into his own work nor that he was comfortable with the prevailing ideas about nationalism, and German nationalism in particular. His analysis of the nation and the sentiments that form national bonds (akin to nationalism) demonstrates a very unique mix of components that go into his understanding of the nation. What this might indicate, however, is that Weber was consciously attempting to steer away from this term. Where he was trying to steer his ideas toward is what we shall turn to next.

The most immediately recognizable element of Weber's analysis of the nation is his insistence on the irreducibility of the nation and national sentiments, to any one factor. Weber writes that "the fervor of this emotional influence does not, in the main, have an economic origin. It is based upon sentiments of prestige." (Weber 2000, 171) While resisting the temptation to reduce the nation to a mere superstructural phenomenon, Weber further complicates the reducibility of the nation in his discussion of national sentiment. Weber notes that, "one must be clearly aware of the fact that sentiments of solidarity, very heterogeneous in both their nature and their origin, are comprised within national sentiments." (Weber 2000, 179) Thus, the very motivations that comprise national sentiment seem to be diverse even within the 'national' community. Weber was especially interested in moving away from a biological or race-based reduction of the nation. He warns that, "We had better disregard entirely the mystic effects of a community of blood, in the sense in which the racial fanatics use the phrase."

(Weber 2000, 177) In this passage, it is clear that, "Weber, for one, would have none of the 'zoological nationalism,' as he put it, that was cultivated at some German universities, as well as in the Pan-German league and other societies of that kind devoted to political agitation." (Mommsen 1974, 33) In addition to rejecting the biological determination of national identity, he rejected the idea of the nation as a linguistic community. If national sentiment cannot be reduced to such a thing as biology, race, or language, does Weber posit any type of dominant causal factor? I would like to argue that the dominant factor Weber identifies not only allows us to reconfigure his understanding of the nation and nationalism more generally, but provides us with a very useful conception of nationalism in the furtherance of the construction of a public hermeneutic.

III. Weber's Nation and National Sentiment

In Weber's writings, the dominant factor that emerges as quite important for the creation of national sentiment is the idea of collective memories. On the issue of memory and national sentiment, Weber writes, "The reason for the Alsatians' not feeling themselves as belonging to the German nation has to be sought in their memories. Their political destiny has taken its course outside the German sphere for too long; their heroes are the heroes of French history" (Weber 2000, 177). Certain memories, especially memories of victorious battles, as well as general "memories of a common political destiny" (Weber 1978, 923), seem to play the most important role in Weber's definition and understanding of national sentiment. In this sense Weber seems to be echoing Ernest Renan's conception of a nation as sharing a structured memory, rather than based in claims of language, blood, or religion. Renan claims that "the essence of a nation is that

all the individuals share a great many things in common and also that they have forgotten some things." (Renan 1961, 892) Weber's insistence on the importance of memory in fostering and sustaining national sentiment seems to equate the nation with what Norkus describes as a 'collective memory community'. However, this reliance on memories might lead us to a problematic conclusion. Much the same way that we theorized the purpose and presence of the Athenian conception of autochthony, can this be seen as a Weberian nostalgia making a retreat into a type of origin myth? In her discussion of Weber's analysis of the historical emergence of the city, she notes that Weber's understanding of the structure of the city as a political community relies upon "The myth of an origin, the symbolic founding" (Schwartz 1985, 548). Might the same thing be true with regard to Weber's conception of the nation as a political community? Abraham believes this is indeed the case, and he claims that in Weber's conception of the nation, "those developments in history that account for the existence and character of the nation of the political community and its development also possess cultural significance" (Abraham 1991, 66). Abraham's argument here is interesting, for while he still argues that Weber's nationalism should still be seen primarily in racial terms, he also sees the construction of the racial identity of the national community precisely within this historical link. This link, the continuous survival of this origin myth, serves as a type of historical/mythological authority that confers an identity upon current generations by their 'forefathers'. Abraham here seems to be echoing a claim most famously captured by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

> Here the conviction prevails that the race only exists by virtue of the sacrifice and achievements of the forefathers-and that one is obliged to repay them through sacrifice

and achievements: a debt is recognized, which gnaws incessantly…ultimately, the forefather is necessarily transfigured into a god! (Nietzsche 1996, 69-70)

What both Nietzsche and Abraham are claiming is that a 'collective memory community' runs the risk of being imprisoned within the very memories that sustain it. A type of historical weight that is impossible to overcome is projected into the past, and as a result the 'collective memory community' is authoritatively bound and delineated.

Although Weber does not shy away from the importance of memory in sustaining national sentiment, I believe that he is not attempting to use memory to tie national sentiment to the preservation of past political structures. For as much as, in "The Nation State and Economic Polity", Weber argues that future generations should be able "recognize the character of its own ancestors in us" (Weber 2002, 15), he argues that is cannot be our duty to impose ideals upon them. In fact, much of Weber's work can be seen as an invective against the return of past political forms, despite the fact that memories serve as a context within which identity is acknowledged and political activity is undertaken. Weber notes that because history has moved on and the political and social reality of the world has changed a restoration of old political forms, or a holding on to past political arrangements could be politically disastrous. In "The President of the Reich", Weber passionately argues that the German people should "debar all members of the dynasties from this office [presidency] in order to prevent any restoration by means of a plebiscite." (Weber 2002, 305). Moreover, much of Weber's discussion of the Junker class in "The Nation State and Economic Policy" can be seen in the same light. Much of this piece is dedicated to the issue of how the rise of capitalism will change the fate and face of German politics. Weber notes that the rise in the political importance of cities as opposed to landed estates demonstrates that there are major demographic, cultural and

political shifts that result in large part from the social reorganization that modern capitalism produces. Because of this reorganization of politics, the Junker class, once invaluable to German politics, was now reduced merely to struggling for their narrow economic existence as a class. As such, Weber saw the Junker class as no longer a viable political form of leadership for the German state. With changing historical structures comes the concomitant need to change political forms to adapt.

It is not just certain political forms that Weber believes become antiquated in history but national, or political, culture can also wane. One of the results of the disenchantment of the world is the loss of the ultimate authority for 'the ultimate and most sublime values'. What this means for a Weberian conception of culture is: "that which is historically given becomes 'culture' because we assign significance to a finite part of it, not because of its supposedly valid content, inherent meaningfulness, or ontological status." (Scaff 1989, 85). If 'culture' cannot be objectively and absolutely measured by some type of transcendental standard, but is only granted the status of culture when it is given meaning by a certain segment of 'cultural beings' endowed with the capacity to produce meaning in/on the world, culture becomes just as susceptible to the vicissitudes of history as political forms or classes. Weber was keenly aware of this fluctuation of cultural ideals and norms in the movement of history when he wrote that, "even our highest, our most ultimate ideals in this life change and pass away. It cannot be our ambition to impose them on the future." (Weber 2002, 15). Insofar as Mommsen is correct in noting that Weber's thought on nationalism embraced a definition of the

nation as the embodiment of cultural values and traditions, we need to view the idea of cultural values and traditions as temporal.

National sentiment, as Weber sees it relating to culture, is to be concerned not with creating the culture and identities of the next generation(s) but rather creating the conditions under which future generations can create their own culture. In Weber's conception, the past can help produce the conditions for the realization of the present (culturally and politically) but it cannot assume itself as the present. The goal of national culture is to allow future generations of cultural beings to produce their own meaning in the world. Thus Weber is attempting to keep open-ended the very historical processes that both Nietzsche and Abraham saw as closing off possibility and potentiality. This would seem to force Abraham to at least slightly qualify his belief that "Weber's nationalism is based on a version of the *Kulturstaat* theory that modern societies must be based on a common culture." (Abraham 1991, 35). The necessity of continual re-creation not simply of political groups but of culture seems to mark Weber as opposed to memory as a nostalgic mythical understanding. In this regard, "he, for one, would have nothing in common with Stefan George and his personality cult, or with Spengler's Germanic myths." (Mommsen 1974, 103). The culture that Abraham sees as being homogenizing and problematic in Weber's account actually seems to be open up to more change than he might like to admit.

This understanding of culture as an ongoing process of creation is closely related to Weber's general conception of history, which involved "his insistence on keeping 'the future as history' open to human will and resolution." (Roth and Schluchter 1979, 201).

This also brings to light one final aspect of national affinity and culture inherent in Weber's understanding of the nation. Although Weber was reluctant to reduce the idea of the nation to any singular conception, he ultimately did (at least provisionally) settle upon what he saw as the 'common object' behind the idea of 'the nation,' and for Weber, that common object is "located in the field of politics." (Weber 2000, 176) As Kim notes, "national groups are first and foremost political in nature – not cultural groups and certain not ethnic or linguistic ones." (Kim 2004, 170). If we remember that for Weber, politics is about contestation than we see the true nature of the Weberian idea of culture that is supposed to animate the nationalist sentiment. Scaff writes that, "[national] culture is preeminently a sphere of disagreement, value conflict and competing *Weltanschauungen*." (Scaff 1989, 85). If nation is fundamentally a political concept, as Weber claims it is than the idea of open contestation and struggle lies at the very heart of the concept. It cannot be reduced to culture, linguistics or anything else that is seen as outside of politics, to contestation and choice. Culture remains a part of the nation only because it comes into being only through a process of production and signification.

All of Weber's comments concerning the relationship of the nation to culture, history and politics crystallize in perhaps the most explicitly consistent line of thinking that runs throughout his writings: that the nation, and national purpose are defined most explicitly, perhaps heroically, through its **concern for future generations**. This, in fact, most precisely characterizes what Weber means when he writes of 'our responsibility before history'. In *Economy and Society*, Weber writes, "the attachment to all this political prestige may fuse with a specific belief in responsibility towards succeeding

generations," (Weber 2000, 172) and this inter-generational responsibility is a theme that

is only magnified in his explicitly political writings. In *The Nation State and Economic*

Policy, Weber contends "If our work is to have any meaning, it lies, and can only lie, in

providing for the future, for our descendants." (Weber 2002, 14) Yet as some

commentators have noted, this is a very specific form of 'providing for the future,' one

that has been characterized as distinctively Nietzschean. In *The Nation State and*

Economic Policy, Weber is not concerned with the 'well-being' that future generations

will enjoy, or the 'kind of economic organization' that is handed down to them, but rather

'what kind of *people* they will be'. In a particularly telling passage, Weber writes:

> It is not given to our generation to see whether the fight we are engaged in will bear fruit,
> nor whether posterity will acknowledge us as its forefathers. We shall not succeed in
> exorcising the curse that hangs over us (that of being the belated offspring of a great, but
> past political epoch), unless we discover how to become something different: the
> precursors of an even greater epoch. (Weber 2002, 28)

The idea of a 'belated' generation becoming the precursors of an even greater epoch has

strong resonances with Nietzsche's claim in *The Twilight of the Idols* that the most

painful condition (contemporary humanity as he saw it) often prepares the way for new

greatness to emerge. Regardless of how closely we would like to tie Weber's thought

here directly to Nietzsche, the salient point for our purposes is that while Weber is trying

to define the nation and national sentiments through the idea of memory and history, he is

attempting, much like I argue Machiavelli does, to understand the intra-generational

relations contained within this memory community in a way that does not close down

political possibility and political agency. Rather than the memory connection being one

of indebtedness, it should encourage political activity. Nancy Schwartz notes that while

the creation myth is central to Weber's analysis, "Weber says the myth claims that the

origins were in man's free will…if it is true that such a myth is crucial, there must be ways for the citizen to re-enact the founding, to make it real in his own life...participation by the citizen would be a way of recovenanting the original purpose of the community" (Schwartz 1985, 548). Now while I believe the use of the term 'original purpose' might be a bit problematic given my earlier analysis of Weber, Schwartz is pointing to an important component of Weber's understanding of this memory community, whether a city or a nation. While this communal memory produces some type of intra-generational bond that establishes a sense of identity, a purposeful version of that bond is one that recognizes the ability of past generations to act decisively, that recognizes the ability to act decisively as the inheritance of the present generation, and that recognizes the ability to act decisively as perhaps the most important trait that must be protect for future generations.

Now that we have drawn out the major premises and ideas that inform Weber's own highly nuanced and complicated understanding of the nation, we must look at how this conception of the nation is meant to fit into Weber's overall description of modernity. This will involve not only bringing back the concepts related to the idea of the nation and national sentiment but also how this idea helps to inform more precisely Weber's important notions of responsibility, conviction and freedom. I believe that it is in this discussion that we can fully fuse Weber's idea of the nation with Machiavelli's conception of the political community as an historical phenomenon, as well as the larger project of conceiving of a 'public hermeneutic'.

IV. The Role of the Nation in Modernity

Mostly importantly, for our discussion, is the way in which Weber sets his (fragmented) analysis of 'the nation' within the broader context of the politics and society of modernity. While, as discussed above, Weber's analysis of the nation is fragmentary in nature, it is impossible to fully engage with these ideas separate from the political background that Weber sets them in front of. This is important because it moves us away from Machiavelli's interesting, yet somewhat unhelpful idea of 'decay', and toward a more engaged discussion of the specific dynamics at play. Instead of using such a broad and imprecise term, Weber directs our attention to specific elements within modern politics that, to return to Machiavelli's language for a moment, might be the cause of the 'decay' that Machiavelli and Weber both seem concerned with. Both writers see the need for decisive principled action as an antidote to a certain weakening of politics within the community (city, state, etc…), but Weber's analysis offers us a very clear description of the causes of this decay, as well as a way in which he believes that politics can be reinvigorated through the concept of the nation. In order to clarify this, it would be beneficial to see exactly what, for Weber, defines this political 'decay' and to see how that decay as the direct result of specific forces and structures in the modern world. Once we can understand how these structures work to limit and devalue political action, we can see how Weber's idea of 'national sentiment' and the historical/memorial way in which Weber frames this sentiment can act as some type of remedy to this situation.

In "The Nation State and Economic Policy", Weber makes note of a nadir that he sees in German political development. He writes, "after the struggle for the nation's unity had been won, and its political 'situation' was an established fact, a peculiarly

'unhistorical' and unpolitical spirit seized the rising generation of the German bourgeoisie, drunk as it was with success and thirsty for peace. German history appeared to be over." (Weber 2002, 24) This unhistorical/unpolitical political crisis manifested itself, for Weber, in the lack of true political leadership that characterized Germany near the turn of the century. Instead, what Weber saw as the likely future of German politics was, "the triumph of the iron cage of bureaucracy, the growing dominance of the party machine in the age of mass democracies, the decline of innovative leadership within the iron law of oligarchy" (Turner 1993, 158), and increasing political and social stagnation. The Junker class which, as previously mentioned, once formed the political core of Prussia had devolved into a type of anachronism, fighting politically for its narrow economic interests. However, surveying Germany, Weber saw no alternative party or group capable and ready of taking over for the declining Junker class. In addition, the dour political situation ran much deeper than simply a crisis of leadership, for it "necessarily accompanied a crisis in citizenship. It also had to be understood as a product of a system of relationships rather than as a temporary, incidental feature of the political landscape." (Scaff 1973, 133) Weber saw, at the heart of this issue exactly that: a manifest lack of articulated and committed citizenship. This lack was due primarily to the three inescapable conditions of the modern world: capitalism, bureaucracy and the disenchantment of worldviews. Taking Weber's conception of the nation as it has been explicated, we can now begin to see how the nation as a concept serves as a means to invigorate and substantiate German citizenship, serves as a (partial) antidote to great forces of modernity that Weber saw as having such a negative impact upon German

society, and ultimately, serves a means to preserve an amount of personal and political freedom in the modern world.

The issue of freedom in this analysis is an important one and worth elaborating on for the purposes of our argument. As mentioned above, Weber is often concerned with the question of exactly how freedom can be maintained in a modern world that is increasingly defined by the massive social and political structures that we see gaining in power and importance. Given this reality, how can spaces, or practices of freedom be carved out and maintained?   I believe that, even though the language used by Weber departs from that of Machiavelli, they are close to sharing a common concern here. We saw in chapter three that Machiavelli seems to be interested in strong principled action that is the result of a (individual or collective) virtù. In his understanding of freedom, I believe that Weber is also looking for a means to encourage and develop such a type of principled political action. Regarding Weber's understanding of freedom, Kari Palonen writes, "the personal freedom of life conduct demands an exercise of freedom in a more or less open horizon of action" (Palonen 1999, 528), and it is this 'open horizon of action' that is essential. Weber's understanding of freedom or free action is one that is not directly related to the ends of an activity, or the direct goals of action, but rather, is seen as, "a condition of the openness of action" (Palonen 1999, 536), and one where the 'situation of acting' is the most essential part. Ultimately for Weber, a world in which political freedom exists, is one in which the conditions are such that individuals are able to choose and commit to a plan of action in as unconstrained a manner as possible. Now while Machiavelli sees virtù based action as increasingly difficult within a community

beset by decay, Weber wants to present us with a modern world in which the conditions of life and politics work to reduce the possibilities of freedom.

The rise of the modern state, and politics within the modern state, in the West is connected with emergence and continual refinement of both capitalism and bureaucracy, and "the modern state is characterized by impersonality." (Scaff 1989, 167). The bureaucratically organized and run state is one in which "community action [is carried] over into rationally ordered 'societal action'…societal action which is methodically ordered and led." (Weber 2000, 228). It is characterized by 'precise obedience within habitual activity'. In addition, both the emergence of the modern capitalist market and the bureaucratic state are interested in "a discharge of business according to calculable rules and without regard for persons." (Weber 2000, 215). For Weber, the bureaucratic state means a displacement of politics. This displacement takes the shape of a conflict between "the formal rationality of bureaucracy and the substantive rationality of politics." (Warren 1988, 34). Wolfgang Schluchter notes that when bureaucratic politics takes over, vigorous political discourse is slowly but seemingly irretrievably abandoned, with the result being that politics is subsumed within an impersonal bureaucracy so that nobody takes responsibility for political decisions, or as Lawrence Scaff writes, "administrative action is condemned to a kind of alienation and unaccountability, to a separation between humans and their means of action that Hannah Arendt once appropriately called "rule by nobody"" (Scaff 1989, 168). The rise of a politics constrained by these massive structures is, for Weber, a condition wherein we see the "bureaucratic usurpation of political decisions" (Scaff 1989, 156), and a dwindling of the

possibilities for principled political action. If freedom is seen as a condition for the openness of action, it would seem that, within an increasingly bureaucratic state, those possibilities are fewer and further between.

Alongside the rise of state bureaucracy, we see the further development of capitalism as a structure that dominates the modern world, and for Weber, capitalism, just like bureaucracy, produces a diminution of political action. As Brian Turner writes, for Weber, "the administrative routinization, specialization of tasks, and calculation of behavior required by advanced capitalism were seen to be incompatible with freedom and democracy" (Turner 1993, 187). The way in which capitalism successfully uses the same tools and techniques as bureaucracy, further delimits the sphere of free action. In addition to the furthering of the bureaucratic structure and rationality, there is another important way in which capitalism also decreases the capacity for principled action: by producing within the individual a very narrow set of interests and pursuits. As with the example of the Junker class in Germany, capitalist undertakings force one to narrow the sphere of interests and actions, away from larger concerns and toward the immediate and unending rational action that capitalism necessitates. This same narrowing of focus is also attributed to the leveling democracy, which Weber sees as an accompaniment to the bureaucratic state. Kim notes that for Weber, "the danger of democracy, as Tocqueville insists tirelessly, lies in the fact that each individual may be exclusively pre-occupied with his or her own interests and that citizens may no longer aspire to any public ideal." (Kim 2004, 149). Rather than pursuing any type of 'public ideal', Given the impersonal nature of these modern structures, and the thoroughly routinized action which they create

and demand, "Weber's criticism seems to be predicated on the recognition that all of these organizations fail to cultivate the idealized citizen he calls a 'personality,' who is capable of principled and even defiant moral actions with a passionate conviction and a sense of responsibility." (Kim 2004, 153). This failure to create a 'personality' is important in this regard, for it allows us to see exactly how Weber believes these structures reduce the sphere of free political action.

It is not enough to see these structures as outwardly dominating individuals' ability to act, or perhaps to see their size so dwarfing the individual that we are compelled to see our potential actions as having no effect on the outcome of any decisions. While those elements are important, a focus on the personality reorients us to a type of internal, or psychological effect that these structures have on the individuals who are confronted by them. As Andrew Koch writes, "Weber saw modern life as an interplay of the various types of rationality as they became manifest in particular institutional forms….institutions were, for Weber, defined as patterns of behavior carried out by human individuals" (Koch 1993, 134). Simply put, Weber sees existence within these structures as having a profound impact on who are, and how we see ourselves, internally, and the behavior that we then manifest outwardly. Weber sees this change in the basic structure of our personality, as one of the largest impediments to principled action in the modern world. In making this claim, we can again see Weber's debt to Nietzsche, specifically the second essay from *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In that essay, Nietzsche describes what he sees as the process by which 'the oldest state' uses forms of violence (both physical and psychological) to ensure that "this raw material of people and semi-

animals was at last not only thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also *formed*" (Nietzsche 1996, 86). For Nietzsche, the *formation* of the modern subject is identical to the construction of a 'bad conscience' and with the growth of this 'bad conscience' we see, "this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated with and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself" (Nietzsche 1996, 87). Thus, Nietzsche focuses on the ways in which the psychology of the subject is formed through a life lived in modern conditions. Though Weber avoids focusing extensively on the idea of 'violence' and describing this process as one in which, "the oldest 'state' thus appeared as a fearful tyranny" (Nietzsche 1996, 86), his analysis is right in line with the idea of the modern world as "an oppressive and remorseless machine" (Nietzsche 1996, 86), and for Weber, as for Nietzsche, what is important is to see how that 'remorseless machine' impacts the psychology and personality of the modern subject.

We can see this Nietzschean concern emerge quite clearly at the end of The Protestant Ethic, when Weber analyzes the end result of the 'puritan calling' as it has found its way into the modern world, and most importantly, helped to create the modern subject. Weber writes,

> The puritans wanted to be men of the calling-we, on the other hand, must be. For when asceticism moved out of the monastic cells and into working live, and began to dominate innerworldly morality, it helped to build that might cosmos of the modern economic order (which is bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanical and machine production). Today this mighty cosmos determines, with overwhelming coercion, the style of life not only of those directly involved in business but of every individual who is born into this mechanism, and may well continue to do so until the day that the last ton of fossil fuel has been consumed. (Weber 2002, 86-87)

In this analysis, Weber is illustrating how a certain psychological state (the 'calling') produced a vast economic order (the mighty cosmos of capitalist economic production), and that order, in turn coerces a certain universal psychology or personality (the style of

live of every individual born into that mighty cosmos). Thus, while Weber is in many ways concerned with the technical issues of the modern world (legitimacy, rationality, bureaucracy), he is also interested in how those technical issues and the structures that utilize them, create a type of psychological personality, and how "the development of an ethical 'style of life' that was 'spiritually adequate' for the formation of modern capitalism" was able to achieve "a remarkable and enduring 'victory in the souls' of human beings" (Scaff 1989, 89). It is these results, and these 'psychological victories' of the institutions of modern life that interest Weber as much as anything else.

In describing this social-psychological aspect to Weber's work, Andrew Koch writes, "as individuals adjust themselves to the requirements of external, formal, structures, and become dependent on those structures for their new identity, there is only one political outcome that is possible. The adherence to an internal set of norms and substantive values is replaced by the substantive requirements of the external culture" (Koch 1993, 142). In this regard, Koch could easily be describing the cultural analysis from the end of *The Protestant Ethic* discussed above. Additionally, for Weber, the construction of the personality of the modern subject adds to the limiting of the possibility of principled political action, as "'order,' 'control,' 'duty' and 'discipline' replace the more 'sublime values' that are not in retreat before the march of rationalism in modern culture" (Koch 1993, 142). Thus, it is not just an institutional requirement of capitalism or bureaucracy that narrows our political commitments, in Weber's estimation, it is the fact that these institutional requirements produce in the modern subject a certain psychological dependency on those requirements, which creates a narrowing of our

psychological and political fields of vision. As our psychology and our modern personalities and 'styles of life' become attuned to, and internalize, the needs and requirements of the modern world, those rationalities dominate not just external requirements, but internal logic and understandings.

To further complicate the social-psychological component to Weber's diagnosis of the modern world we must add perhaps his most trenchant commentary on the conditions of the modern world. In addition to these social and political structures we have already discussed, Weber added one more component that he saw as a hindrance to conditions of freedom and the possibility of principled political action: the 'disenchantment' of the world, and the disenchantment of modern worldviews. As Weber saw it, the disenchantment of the world brought with it the retreat of the 'ultimate and most sublime values' and a subsequent recognition that moral or ethical positions had no objective grounds from which they could, in the last analysis, be completely justified. In addition, the disenchanted world found itself in an inescapable historical continuum. Weber notes that due a recognition of this continuum as part of the modern world, "the individual life of civilized man, placed into an infinite 'progress,' according to its own imminent meaning should never come to an end, for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress. And no man who comes to dies stands upon the peak which lies in infinity." (Weber 2000, 139-140) This unceasing progress eliminates the 'finality' of life, or at least a notion of a finality with meaning and as such, 'man' cannot be 'satiated with life' that is always being surpassed by history and progress.

So, for Weber, it is not only the psychological dependency upon modern rational-institutions, but also the seeming 'infinity' of the world bears down oppressively upon the finitude of the individual. This leads us back to the questions we posed earlier: given this situation of existence in the modern world, how can one be made aware of the possibility of principled action in the world? For Weber, I believe that the answer lies in the new political vantage point that is offered by nationalism and the inter-generational commitment that it entails. The commitment to future generations is the phenomenon that, according to Weber, "stirs us as we think beyond the grave of our own generation." (Weber 2002, 15). Additionally, the understanding that the nation is a community of memory, and thus transcends the present in *two* distinct directions (both the past and the future) offers an enlarged understanding of the place of the individual within the nation, as well as an enlarged understanding of the role of political action in the present.

Typically Weber is seen as offering one of two choices: accept the fundamental lack of meaning offered by the 'progress' of modernity or retreat to religion which provides meaning but denies the nature of modernity as endless progress and subjectivity. In fact, some note that the only time Weber is seen as offering a meaningful component to life is "in war, when the individual can believe that he knows he is dying for something." (Weber 2000, 335). It could be argued, however, that the nationalist commitment to future generations provides a distinct alternative. Inter-generational commitment is a means by which an individual can recognize the historical continuum, accept it as a fact of the modern world and yet still find meaning in it, rather than simply despair over the lack of holistic finitude that the individual faces. By envisioning

himself as the 'precursor to an even greater epoch,' nationalist sentiment allows the Weberian citizen to find conviction and meaning in one's life, or, as Weber notes in his discussion of dying in wartime, the belief that you are dying for something. This is not to make the utopian claim that Weber's nationalism somehow displaced or could make unnecessary war in the modern world. Weber would never have made that claim, but the issue here is that these feelings of national prestige, and the nationalistic commitment to other generations, when cultivated, allow the idea of conviction and principle to exist outside of those moments of war that provide the archetypal blueprint for such conviction. This action becomes possible because Weber believes this way of understanding the nation, and the individuals' position within it, cultivates a greater understanding of one's responsibility as a political actor, and that actor is able to use that new understanding as a motivation for the type of action that Weber is searching for.

For Weber, responsibility in the modern world is a means by which the narrow sphere of interest and action that is conditioned by bureaucracy, a leveling democracy and capitalism is enlarged, and a new engaged political vision can emerge. It proves to be something of an antidote to the psychological dependency the modern subject exhibits with regard to the rationalities of modern institutions such as capitalism and bureaucracy. Scaff notes that "responsibility from its earliest appearances in Weber's language of action was meaningful not merely for the person, but for the future, in relation to subsequent generations." (Scaff 1989, 183). The recognition of those whom the actor was responsible for in her/his actions immediately provides the actor with a context within which to think about actions and the responsibility for them. For principled action

to be a realistic option, "some kind of belief must always be present," (Weber 2002, 355) and I would argue that in the ethic of inter-generational responsibility, you can see belief readily present itself. It is an ethic that is removed from the religious and other world views that, in Weber's reading, have been forced from public life, but it is an ethic that reinforces itself and expands its sphere of commitment, thanks to its expanded understanding of identity and belonging. However, this form of inter-generational responsibility also tempers the ethic of absolute conviction that Weber sees as being dangerous to political action if unchecked.

For Weber, "an ethic of conviction…is predicated on an absolute belief in the innate goodness of a certain action that transcends time and space and that, by virtue of its goodness, can even remove the burden of responsibility for its consequences." Weber famously, does not want to completely distance himself from the ethic of conviction, "the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposite. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being who is capable of having a 'vocation for politics'" (Weber 2002, 368). And while Weber's two famous 'ethics' must complement each other, it is important to note how his understanding of 'nationalist sentiment' can be seen as a means of invoking principled action that avoids the absolute certainties of the ethic of conviction, most notably the fact that "responsibility for the *consequences* is lacking" in a pure ethic of conviction. In order to see how this is possible, we need to return briefly to the narrative of Weber as the pessimistic social scientist.

For some thinkers who subscribe to this narrative, Weber's despair over the direction of modernity: the loss of meaning, the loss of action, and the prospects of the iron cage, lead him to embrace a conception of politics that borders on the irrational. Gershon Shafir notes that as a result of Weber's diagnosis of the modern world, "charismatic leaders, capable of combining intellectual and mass needs, and of creating a new merit directed to a new destiny, seem again to be called upon in the modern world" (Shafir 1985, 522). Additionally, "Weber…reserved the role of the innovator to the charismatic leader. Though both the intellectual and charismatic individual share the endeavor to seek out a meaningful life, the latter is also distinguished by a sense of personal mission, which drives him to put his vision in effect" (Shafir 1985, 518). Given the way in which "Charisma has a central role in Weber's conception of social change" (Koch 1993, 140) it might seem as though Weber has an interest in a certain political re-enchantment through the emergence of charismatic leaders, in order to combat the patient 'hard business' of politics in the modern world. The outcome of this is that "Weber is, so to speak, able to prop up the state by an appeal to certain irrational political instincts in the masses towards the nation state" (Turner 1993, 197). Only in this way, by appealing to the irrational, or holding out hope for the charismatic politician to emerge, can we be saved from the icy night of bureaucratic politics. Again quoting Turner, "[Weber's] theory of political organization required the intervention of charismatic authority in order to avoid the dangers of political stagnation" (Turner 1993, 158). It would seem that, given his despair over the world of modern politics, a return to charismatic leadership would be perhaps a most important element.

But if charisma was so important to Weber, and if his politics really did rely on a certain irrationalism, or at least a marked preference for the charismatic as opposed to the intellectual leader, how are we to square this with his seeming repulsion at those modern political movements that Weber saw as wholeheartedly embracing that very thing. In "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber claims that "although politics is something done with the head, it is certainly not something done with the head *alone*" (Weber 2002, 367), and while this may lend *some* credibility to the idea of charismatic leadership, it is important to note that Weber is not discounting a rational element to politics. Clearly this is not a retreat into the irrational, but is simply reminding us that Weber's politics does require a certain amount of belief (tempered as it may be by rationality and intellectual leadership). Additionally, Weber's condemnation, in *Science as a Vocation*, of those who, despairing the condition of the modern world, run back into open arms (and doors) or the church as a way to avoid the conditions of the modern world, indicates that those movements that are not willing to honestly confront those conditions, but rather retreat into the irrational or the pre-modern, are dangerous alternatives. What Weber is looking for is "a conception of responsibility or accountability as a vocational *ethos*" (Scaff 1989, 183) that attempts to open up an enlarged space for political activity, but does so through a direct confrontation with the conditions of the modern world.

It is true that Weber's attachment to the ethic of conviction is an important one, because it touches on a fundamental issue that Weber wants to hold onto in the modern world: a conception of more robust political possibility, or an enlarged sphere of political

action. Weber notes the importance of this enlarged vision when he writes, "it is of course entire correct…that what is possible would never have been achieved if, in this world, people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible" (Weber 2000, 369), and Lawrence Scaff sees this desire to reach for 'the impossible' as a feature of the ethic of conviction. However, Weber requires a political stance that simultaneously includes striving for the impossible, with a tempering of the ethic of convictions' understanding of goals that transcend time and space.

Weber's nationalism is predicated upon a certain open-ended political development. As he writes:

> When, as a politician, he is moved by the political fate of his people…he will think in terms of the next two to three generations, even where the creation of new political formations is concerned, since these are the people who will decide what is to become of *his* nation. If he proceeds differently, he is no politician but one of the litterateurs. In this case, let him concern himself with the eternal truths and stick to his books, but he should not step into the arena where the problems of the present are contested (Weber 2002, 270-71)

Given that Weber's conception of politics seems to roundly reject 'eternal truths' or unchanging political formations, he also cannot fully embrace an ethic of any kind that transcends time and space as Weber understands the virtues and cultures connected that to nationalism are fundamentally a) conditioned by time (generation to generation) and b) cannot be known in advance because the acting subject will not have the same subjective standpoint as will future generations, from which they will judge culture, goodness, and the like. This subjectivist impossibility of knowing the culture and political world of the generations the actor is beholden to forces the actor to recognize a 'pathos of distance' between herself/himself and others, tempering the conviction which is animating the political action. Therefore, while expanding political horizons, allowing for the ethic of responsibility to emerge, and providing, with the modern progress of history a conviction

that one's life has a worthwhile meaning, Weber's nationalism sets limits on the extent to which an immediate, subjective conception of that conviction can judge political action; as Weber writes, "three qualities are pre-eminently decisive for a politician: passion, a sense of responsibility, judgment." (Weber 2002, 352). Weber's nationalism can be seen as being a significant factor in providing a space for the cultivation of all three of these qualities in the modern world. This dual sense of conviction and responsibility, the two ethics that must be combined in whomever discovers a 'vocation' for politics can be seen as coalescing around Weber's idea of, and commitments inherent to, national sentiments that Weber theorizes.

The disenchantment of the world brought about a paradoxical situation for modern politics and modern life. At the same time that politics can be seen as the type of activity through which one can cultivate a manifestation of responsibility, the lack of completely objective values makes politics a more demanding test of responsibility than ever before. In the face of that anguishing paradox as well as the giant structures of power that emerged, Weber attempted to find something that could serve as a guide for meaningful political activity. Kari Palonen notes that Weber "does not, however, oppose individual freedom to political action but maintains a close connection between them." (Palonen 1999, 523). If this is so, than are we to locate our freedom within the nation? I believe that this is very much the case, for Weber. And it is precisely the historical nature in which he theorized the nation, and the historical conception of responsibility that emerges from within it, that allows him to make that claim.

Max Weber saw the nation and national sentiment as counterbalances to the powers of bureaucracy, capitalism, and the narrow views of life they offered in a thoroughly disenchanted world. With this in mind we can see what Weber meant when he wrote about "the specific function of the leading economic and political strata to be the bearers of the nation's sense of political purpose. In fact, this is the only political justification for their existence." (Weber 2002, 21). Weber noted that in 'great moments' (such as times of war) the national purpose became more tangible to the entire population, but it subsided during 'normal times'. Weber's national political education used "the nationalist sentiments as an alternative way of imbuing secularized modern society with a sense of collective purpose that would contribute to the formation of autonomous personalities." The purpose of a political economist is only political if the work being done fosters an opening of the spheres of responsibility and possibilities for principled action. This is one of the reasons why Weber was so critical of the Junkers. Rather than espousing "national-public spiritedness and somber realism, [they] embraced a misguided glorification of vain power politics, as reflected in the popular longing for a new Bismarck and mass support for overseas expansion." (Kim 2004, 147). Moreover, economic analysis of the Junkers can help explain why they are attempting to pursue such a policy, and thus, to demonstrate how it either forwards or diminishes the interests of the nation as a whole.

This is not to deny Weber's position as a political realist; he held no illusions about war and instability in the world as a condition of modern politics but his realism, and his nationalism was not an ultimate value, as Aron contends. Here again, this sets

him apart from other German nationalist thought that conceived of a pure power politics. For Weber, "the popular nationalism of the day did not represent an acceptable stance…suffering from an arrogant blindness, it disclosed unrivaled irresponsibility and destructive potential…the achievements of the mere power politician were externally meaningless and inwardly weak and empty." (Scaff 1989, 182). In fact, it is because power and politics are so intertwined that pure power politics is excessively dangerous if it is not tempered by responsibility and a sense of duty. Power politics as such is indistinct from a bureaucratic politics that lacks a strong value commitment, notably a strong value commitment to individual human beings. For Weber, it is this sense of responsibility and commitment that emerges when we begin to see this historical conception of a national sentiment become an animating factor in modern politics. Pure 'power politics' is tempered by this enlarged commitment but irrational nationalisms are also avoided because Weber's nationalism is not a sentiment that arises out of a retreat from the disenchanted conditions of the modern world, but acknowledges them and still works to find the kind of purposeful commitment that Weber sees as the hallmark of the 'ethic of conviction'. Moreover, this nationalism, because it is not predicated on the existence of some type of trans-historical values or goals, avoids complete identification with an ethic of conviction: it cannot see itself as absolute in any sense, but must, by its very nature, leave itself open to further action, contingency, or value-judgments.

V. Conclusion

I believe that understanding of 'national sentiment' is helpful in three important respects. First, by situating his discussion of 'national sentiment' in the context of

modern politics, Weber gives us a very clear framework for analyzing how political action in the present can be constrained and how strong political commitments can be weakened. While both Machiavelli and Weber can be seen as proponents of 'principled political action' as being necessary for the survival of the political community, both thinkers force us to ask the question why we should pay such attention. For Machiavelli, the answer is helpful, but ultimately, not as helpful as we might like. His various discussions of the inevitability of political 'decay' and 'corruption' seem prescient, but there is not much to explain what this corruption is and how it functions within society. Aside from some analysis of the changing nature of religious rites and practices, Machiavelli is largely silent on this issue. Because of his silence, it is quite easy to see him as simply a theorist who places a higher value on the qualities, people, and practices of the past and denigrates the present. In the last chapter I showed how this reading was incorrect in several important ways, but because Machiavelli fails to offer a clear discussion of the cause of this decay, other than it being related to the political community being part of an historical continuum, this reading is easy to understand. Under the spell of this reading, we might see Machiavelli as arguing for a simple return to 'the past' as the antidote to the decayed conditions of the present.

Weber's analysis helps us clarify this tension between the past and the present. Given Weber's analysis of the present it is clear that a simple return to the past would be as unwise as any other imaginable possibility. In this regard, let us again remember Weber's criticism of the Junker class in Germany. Because political, social, and economic conditions have changed, a simple return to the politics of the past is not just

unadvisable, but would be ruinous to the political community. Weber is not despairing of the politics of the present in order to argue for a return to the past; political renewal must engage directly with the condition of politics that the present makes possible: capitalism, bureaucracy, disenchantment. While Weber's nationalist sentiment allows us to acknowledge, like Machiavelli does, that the political community is an historical community political activity must be more than an exercise in political nostalgia.

Secondly, Weber's idea of the nation as a concept allows us to avoid the earlier issue I raised with Machiavelli regarding how this political renewal is supposed to unfold. I argued that within Machiavelli there seems to be a tension between an aristocratic reading of political renewal and a more democratic one. I believe that by placing subjects within the nation, or by seeing 'national sentiment' as something to which one has access simply by virtue of being part of that historical collectivity, Weber allows us to, somewhat fruitfully, sidestep this controversy. Although some commentators see a strain of Nietzschean aristocratic sensibility within Weber's work, there is nothing within this understanding of national sentiment that supports such a reading. I am not making the claim that Weber *himself* is offering us a strong democratic project, that is not his goal or aim (but will be our aim in the next chapter), but he does allow for a politics that moves *somewhat* confidently in that direction. To understand this, we need to remember how 'national sentiment' can be seen as a counterforce to the limiting conditions of modernity that Weber was so concerned with. By focusing on how those conditions act upon the passions, motivations, and psychologies of *all* modern subjects, Weber is giving us a clear picture of how he believes this modern lack of political commitment is a *common*

condition within modernity. Thus, national sentiment seems to be consistent with Weber's commitment as a methodological individualist. When Weber asks how individual freedom is still possible in the modern world, I answer that by understanding yourself as part of a nation, as the inheritor of this 'national sentiment', individual freedom can be preserved.

The last important aspect of Weber's idea of national sentiment gives us a bit more clarity with regard to just how individual freedom can be preserved under the conditions of modern life: through the concept of political *responsibility*. In this chapter, I argue that against the forces of the modern world that work to shrink and limit the scope of responsibility, Weber's idea of national sentiment offers a possible means through which responsibility can be expanded and heightened. By situating oneself within the continuum of past-present-future, the citizen is able to better comprehend an enlarged conception of the political community itself. Paul Ricoeur writes that, "a political body exists not only in the present but in the past and in the future, and its function is to connect past, present, and future. In a political community several generations exist at the same time; the political choice is always an arbitration between the claims of these different generations" (Ricoeur 1986, 210). In this sense, it is telling that Ricoeur is contrasting the political community, and political commitments, with mere technical commitments, which he defines as occurring "only in the present and only according to the present system of tools" (Ricoeur 1986, 210). The historical nature of the nation, captured by Weber in his idea of a nationalist sentiment as not only a collection of memories, but a means by which individual citizens can see themselves as

simultaneously the inheritor of memories as well as being a part of the memories that *will* be inherited in the future, offers this enlarged conception of the political community, which can allow for an enhanced idea of political responsibility to emerge. Seen as a part of this national sentiment, individual responsibility can escape, with much greater ease, the technical, limited, and narrowly circumscribed responsibilities of a technological, bureaucratic, capitalistic, and disenchanted modernity.

Chapter Six

The past of every society always contains aspirations, hopes, and promises that have not been fulfilled.

- Bernard Dauenhauer,
Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics

I: Introduction

If, as I argued in Chapter four, Niccolò Machiavelli gives us a vision of a political community as an historical phenomenon, thanks to his concern with the ideas of decay, corruption, and rebirth, Max Weber places that understanding squarely within the late-modern world and clarifies its importance regarding issues of citizenship and political action. Through the concept of 'the nation', I argue that Weber attempted to bring this historical conception of politics to the fore. My claim was that, despite his reputation as a (pessimistic) theorist of disenchantment Weber was actively looking for something that would encourage principled political action without needing to retreat into theories of mysticism or irrationality. Weber was searching for concepts that would face the conditions of late-modern politics, and still offer the possibility of individual freedom.

Weber was only able to put forward that concept of 'the nation', *because* he distinguished his understanding of 'the nation' from the ethic German nationalisms that were so prevalent, by putting forward an idea of 'the nation' as a community of memory. In his speech, "The Nation State and Economic Policy", he highlights what he takes to be the essential historical consciousness that political actors must take. Weber outlines a complicated dynamic that envelops us within something like a common culture or tradition, while acknowledging a sense of political openness that is just as important. Weber writes, "Even our highest, our ultimate ideals in this life change and pass away. It

cannot be our ambition to impose them on the future. But we *can* want the future to recognize the character *of its own ancestors* in us." (Weber 2002, 15). A politics that 'imposes' itself on the future is one that does not allow for the future well-being of that cultural community. Thus, for Weber, the national community is made up of 'inheritors' insofar as they exist within a context of law, politics, and economics in which they find and understand themselves; a context that predates them and into which they become actors. However, Weber insists that those actors be able to work to create new political ideals to replace those that, through the course of time, have 'passed away'.

Paul Ricoeur writes, "But tradition…remains a dead tradition if it is not the continual interpretation of this deposit: our "heritage" is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening…Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation" (Ricoeur 2007, 27). Just as Ricoeur believes that tradition without interpretation is 'dead tradition', Weber is worried that a political system that is inherited without being made, is equally as problematic and, echoing Machiavelli's concerns, can very easily lead to political and cultural decay. In light of this, we can make sense of Weber's assertion that, "It is dangerous, and in the long term incompatible with the interests of the nation, for an economically declining class to exercise political rule" (Weber 2002, 21). For Weber, I would argue, it is not just that an 'economically declining' class is dangerous simply because of their economic position. For Weber, they are dangerous because they carry with them an entire set of political ideals and goals that, over time, grow more incongruous with the changing needs and ideals of modern life.

There is another reason why I believe Weber insists on this complex dynamic to the historical nature of community, which has to do with the idea of an enlarged sense of political responsibility. As much as Weber is worried about an economically declining class exerting power, he warns that, "it is more dangerous still when classes which are moving *towards* economic power, and therefore expect to take over political rule, do not yet have the political maturity to assume the direction of the state" (Weber 2002, 21). Here again, I believe it is fruitful to bring the analysis back to this historical nature of the political community. The historical outlook that Weber is arguing for in "The Nation State and Economic Policy" is one that he believes, "stirs us as we think beyond the grave of our own generation" (Weber 2002, 15), and this outlook is one that imbues the work of politics with importance and gravity. In situating this historical outlook firmly at the basis of modern politics, Weber argues that, "If our work is to have any meaning, it lies, and can only lie, in providing for the *future*, for our *descendants*" (Weber 2002, 14). But of course, for Weber this notion of 'providing for the future' must be tempered by his conception of the political community as existing with history: we must 'provide' for future generations without 'imposing' on them. We must strive for our own ideals, while simultaneously recognizing their impermanence.

While it would be a horrible oversimplification to reduce Weber's conception of political maturity[50] to this historical understanding of the political community, I believe it provides an essential component. Acknowledging the political community as an historical community, and forwarding a conception of politics that embraces this dynamic is a way for his ethics, the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction, to come together in a

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[50] Which is well outside the bounds of this dissertation.

meaningful way. While in "The Profession and Vocation of Politics", Weber does distinguish certain defining traits of both ethics, he argues that, "the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do the produce the true human being who is capable of having a 'vocation for politics'" (Weber 2002, 368). The ethic of responsibility, where the actor is aware (and acts in awareness of the idea that "one must answer for the (foreseeable) *consequences* of one's actions" (Weber 2002, 360), and the ethic of conviction where the purity or absoluteness of the political goal is paramount seem to find an imperfect melding within this historical vision of the political community. The pure conviction of political action is tempered by a responsibility not simply to ourselves, but to our descendants, and their ability to act decisively in the future for themselves, and for their own ideals and goals.

I would argue that this enlarged sense of political ethics, combining both conviction and responsibility, is a direct consequence of situating ourselves, as political actors, into an historical context that is constantly aware of, and politically sensitive to, a relationship between predecessors, contemporaries, and descendants. Regarding this threefold relationship, Ricoeur notes, "as Alfred Schutz develops this notion, we are oriented, not only to our contemporaries but also to our predecessors and to our successor; this temporal sequence constitutes the historical dimension of action" (Ricoeur 1986, 185). As we saw in chapter one, Schutz attempts to orient social action along this historical axis, noting that our potential motivation as actors in the world can only be understood if we take that relationship seriously, if we acknowledge that action,

"comprises both a backward reference to the past and an orientation toward the future" (Schutz 1967, 90). That is, the situatedness of political actors in that historical continuum as the descendants of ancestors, and the ancestors of future descendants, plays a fundamental role. I believe we see Weber constructing a similar framework. Political activity can be made meaningful when it is seen as a continuation of that historical relationship. This process of reception and engagement, of 'providing' without 'imposing' is a key element in his understanding of the political maturity of political actors. This maturity is arrived at only through recognizing, and embracing, this enlarged sense of political responsibility – which emerges when political actors see themselves as acting within that historical tradition, and as part of that 'memory community'.

As important as these theoretical forays are that Weber allows us to take, and as important as that clear distinction between acting and imposing will be for a theory of public hermeneutics, this interpretation of Weber only gets us so far. I would like to sketch briefly what I see as constituting the two most important weaknesses that we must overcome. The first is Weber's tying together the relative health or robustness of a political community to the positioning of 'rising' or 'declining' classes within the community, as well as relying on a notion of the political 'maturity' or 'education' of entire classes of citizens, understood as some type of acting collective. Not only does this seem to place an overly mechanistic structure of politics onto a more fragmented reality (can we really rehabilitate over monolithic concepts like a class or the bourgeoisie?), but it runs the risk of identifying the (potential) political health of the community as the exclusive province of a specific sector, or group within the community.

I see this type of (mis)identification as having two consequences. The first is that identifying any specific group within society as a 'rising' group and charging it with the political health and future prospects of the community runs the risk of producing an 'aristocratic' understanding of politics, tasking a group with a type of political good fortune that other groups inherently lack. In his essay, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today", Wolin himself cautions us against thinking in these terms when he writes, "the problem is not to show that a social class should seize power – no social class in an advanced society can pretend to the universality of right which Marx presupposed in the workers of his day – but to reinvent the forms and practices that will express a democratic conception of collective life" (S. S. Wolin 1992, 249). Thinking in terms of rising or declining classes serves as a major impediment to the democratic impulse that Wolin is drawing our attention to: the construction of new 'forms and practices' that bring to light a democratic *collective* existence.   This mechanistic construction is especially problematic when we think that many of the groups within a political community that might not be seen as 'tasked' with the political health of the community: the poor, sexual and racial minorities, and other marginalized groups, would continue to be quite efficiently marginalized under this conception of political health. Thus, the collectivity expressed through the antagonism of distinct classes would most likely continue to construct 'collective life' in a way that is exclusionary and oppressive toward those groups that cannot effectively claim to be a 'rising' political class.

The second major weakness has to do with a need to develop the 'memory' side of the 'memory community' that Weber sees as fundamental to his definition of the

nation. What is needed is a conception of the construction of this 'memory community' as a more dynamic process. While Weber does seem to take notice of the fact that any idea of the presence of these memory communities in the modern world have to content with a certain instability, as he claims that "the differences in national sentiment are both significant and fluid" (Weber 1978, 925) it is important to note that Weber locates this fluidity *between* different nations rather than *within* the individual national communities themselves. In fact, differences, or fluidity within the community seems to exist outside his theoretical framework. This leads directly to a tension that I see existing between the freedom and openness Weber desires for political *action* and a closure that he seems to ascribe to the *memories* that sustain the memory communities. Weber writes, "The significance of the "nation" is usually anchored in the superiority, or at least the irreplaceability, of the culture values that are to be preserved and developed only through the cultivation of the peculiarity of the group" (Weber 1978, 925). Note the shift in terminology between his earlier assertion that our ultimate ideals eventually fall away, and now, where the values that make up the nation are irreplaceable. This seems to position Weber as caught between an irreplaceable context and a desire for an openness of action *within* that context, without acknowledging that an openness of action might require a certain openness of the context itself. Weber argues that it is not our duty to 'impose' ourselves upon our descendants, but if we act within an historical continuum that is characterized by a need to preserve 'irreplaceable' cultural values, does that run the risk of the 'imposition' that Weber is wary of? How can we maintain a robust political openness if the contexts within which we are acting are not subject to the same

type of interpretive openness. I would argue that this tension is ultimately too much, and that political openness, absent a similar openness to the values, memories, and contexts within which we will be acting, is impossible. The transmission of values and the process of reinterpretation must be seen as connected to one another.

This is not to bury Weber, nor necessarily to praise him, but to claim that these tensions point to a concern that must become part of our work as we move forward: the irreplaceability of the interpretation and contestation of the tradition that these 'memory communities' find themselves within. I would like to use this insistence on interpretation in order to argue for a political theory that approaches these 'memory communities' from a less hierarchical position. As I see it, the overarching issue with Weber's work on 'national sentiment' is that he approaches these memory communities from a largely unacknowledged perspective of authority and hierarchy. His use of ascending and declining classes, his insistence on the irreplaceability of certain cultural values that structure the memory community seems to be an understanding of this community that comes from the position of an already established authority that goes unacknowledged and un-interrogated in Weber's work.

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur writes, "the identity of a person or a community is made up of those values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, *in* which the person or community recognizes itself" (Ricoeur 1992, 121). But if these values and memories are of such fundamental importance, it must be remembered that Ricoeur also believes that only those values will continue to exist that survive the process of 'reinterpretation'. I believe that Weber's language of irreplaceable values does not offer the same subtlety,

and these weaknesses produce an understanding of the 'memory' side of the equation that allows for very little difference, and almost no contestation at the level of the framework within which Weber wants to see principled political action. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis, and integration, of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics with Sheldon Wolin's theory of democracy that allows us to fully flesh out a conception of democracy as a 'public hermeneutic' and that re-contextualizes the dynamics of this historical understanding of the political community that Weber has developed; encouraging the type of principled political activity that Weber hopes for, but that I believe his theoretical assumptions render difficult.

II.   Tradition: Interpretation and Appropriation

"Submission to traditions precedes their examination"
- Paul Ricoeur, *Ethics and Culture*

In his essay, "Fugitive Democracy", Sheldon Wolin writes, "Democracy is not about where the political is located but about how it is experienced. Revolutions activate the demos and destroy boundaries that bar access to political experience" (S. S. Wolin 1996, 38). This summarizes much of what theorists have been attentive to in Wolin's work: the idea of democracy as transgressive, and as action carried out by the demos. Nicholas Xenos neatly summarizes these when he claims that Wolin's democracy is, "egalitarian, participatory, decentralist, and constituted by active citizens" (Xenos 2001, 26). This is not to deny any importance to these ideas within Wolin's lifelong engagement with the problems of democracy; in fact they are quite central to his work. In his description of fifth century Athenian 'radical democracy', Wolin claims that it was, "the work of the demos…the politics of the demos was disorderly and often rebellious,

defined by its opposition to existing arrangements" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 41). However, I want to shift my focus slightly, while still remaining not merely sympathetic to, but supportive of, those other concerns. In keeping with the spirit and, I believe, the theoretical goals of Wolin, but perhaps departing from the more familiar democratic concerns of his work, one of the primary goals of this chapter is to build upon this idea of democracy as an *experience*.

Although he is not always consistent with the language he uses to describe democracy, we can often see him using language that that seems to point to a common concern with democratic *activity*. In his essay "Norm and Form", perhaps his most sustained theoretical analysis of this idea of democracy, he asserts that, "democracy is not primarily a set of political institutions but a cultural practice" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 50), and later in the same essay he claims that "Democracy needs to be reconceived as…a mode of being" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 54). When take as a constellation of terms, they all point at something important to his democratic theory, which we will pursue throughout this chapter. Namely, that for Wolin, any robust conception of democracy that does justice to the potential of the idea needs to be understood in terms of a political experience, an activity with a certain depth that connects to our mode of being in the world, as individuals and, as we shall see, as part of a community. Specifically, I will be concerned with how this notion the experience of democracy is connected to the idea of remembrance, and how memory, history and political participation come together in ways that are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. In order to make these connections more deliberate I want to bring his work into a sustained dialogue with the hermeneutical

philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, and show how by incorporating this hermeneutical philosophy more directly into Wolin's work, we can arrive at a conception of democracy that is highly attuned to Wolin's main concerns over democratic action in the contemporary world, while resisting what I see as some of the shortcomings that weaken the impact of his later work, *Democracy Inc.*

I would argue that Paul Ricoeur is a helpful addition to any theory of democracy that is rooted in a notion of democracy as an 'experience' because Ricoeur's philosophical work has consistently, and innovatively, combined phenomenology with a general a general theory of hermeneutics that he develops through his engagement with the work of both Heidegger and Gadamer, where "existence as it relates to a hermeneutic philosophy always remains an interpreted existence" (Ricoeur 2007, 24). And I believe that, once we see how some of the major aspects of this theory fit together with the earlier analysis of the relationship between the political community, political action, memory, and history, we will be able to bring these various strands together that does justice to an idea of democratic experience that is rooted fundamentally in the notion of the experience of democracy as hermeneutic practice.

At first glance, Ricoeur's combination of these two philosophical traditions might seem at first like an uncomfortable paring together of two traditions. Hermeneutics is a theory based on the notion that "there is no self understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts; in the last resort understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms" (Ricoeur 2007, 15), while phenomenology, for Ricoeur, is a philosophy that "discovers, in place of an idealist subject…a living being, which

from all time has, as the horizon of all its intentions, a world, the world" (Ricoeur 2007, 9) and is devoted to understanding the world as it is immediately experienced by the 'living being' and the "struggle of the self to identify itself through its perception of the world and the other person" (Scott-Baumann 2009, 11). As he writes in *Oneself as Another*, "if there is an existential category especially appropriate to an investigation of the self…it would be that of thrownness, thrown-there" (Ricoeur 1992, 327). So, for Ricoeur, phenomenology is a philosophy that attempts to understand the 'living being' by investigating how beings immediately experience the world that they are thrown into. However, Ricoeur insists this notion of a philosophy of pure reflection can run into serious failings and flaws: a philosophy that uncritically seeks to understand the 'experience' of living beings can easily slip into a type of naïve philosophical idealism. He believes that a turn to hermeneutics allows us to "free phenomenological reflection from the idealistic temptations to which it is prone" (Jervolino 1996, 71). Ricoeur writes, "what hermeneutics has ruined is not phenomenology but one of its interpretations, namely, its *idealistic* interpretation" (Ricoeur 2007, 25). What is at danger, for Ricoeur, in his concern over an idealistic phenomenology, is the idea that the living being experiencing the world does not experience it outside of certain structures that can function in such a way as to distort experience, and this distortion can only be overcome with a move toward a hermeneutic process.

As Richard Kearney notes, "Ricoeur's hermeneutics thus exposes phenomenology to a radical awareness of the limits and obstacles of consciousness" (Kearney 2004, 14), and Ricoeur believes that understanding must include interpretation if it is to, even

provisionally, work to overcome those obstacles that stand in the way of consciousness and experience. Drawing perhaps on his earlier analysis of Freud, where Ricoeur marveled at the psychoanalytical process of the interpretation of dreams and drives as a means to overcome psychological resistance, he later remarks, "phenomenology must become hermeneutic because what is closest to us is what is most covered over" (Ricoeur 1988, 87). And while Ricoeur is interested in a philosophy that is focused on understanding our 'being in the world', we need to confront the reality that all human understanding is bound up with those obstacles and barriers. Or, as writes, "hermeneutics is in effect, a reflection on the "presuppositions" of any understanding of the world" (Ricoeur 2013, 99). This is not to make the claim that at the 'end' of the process of hermeneutics we will arrived at a purely heightened understanding of ourselves in the world that is free from barriers and presuppositions. There will never be an existence that is free from distortions, but the point of tying hermeneutics to an engagement with presuppositions and the 'covered over' nature of human life is to remind ourselves of this never ending process. We can interpret to try to understand better, to try and overcome some presuppositions that we confront, but the process will always remain unfinished. This is not, however, a failure for Ricoeur, for it is always also a reminder to avoid the easy trap of relying on an idealistic philosophy relying on unmediated notions of human experience and understanding. An understanding that is arrived at through an unmediated notion of experience is the very hallmark what Ricoeur sees as the fatal flaw in idealist phenomenology, and this move from unmediated to mediated consciousness, of

experience mediated by interpretation, is Ricoeur's answer to the temptation toward idealism.

Johann Michel argues that, in fusing these two philosophical traditions, "Ricoeur sought both to conserve and surpass phenomenology with the resource of hermeneutics" (Michel 2015, 101), which draws our attention to *part* of project, but seems to leave out a crucial element to Ricoeur's unique combination. Just as, for Ricoeur, hermeneutics was able to help phenomenology overcome its idealist presupposition, phenomenology provides a fundamental corrective to a pure theory of hermeneutics. Ultimately, it is Ricoeur's major philosophical assertion that, "*phenomenology remains the indispensable presupposition of hermeneutics*. On the other hand, phenomenology is not able to establish itself without a *hermeneutical presupposition*" (Ricoeur 1975, 85). While he argues that hermeneutics helps to overcome a certain phenomenological idealism by relating our living experience of the world to interpretation and a certain historical sense, we need an awareness of how those interpretation are received and lived by those very interpreting beings, the idea that, "behind the texts…there are human beings to act and suffer" (Jervolino 1996, 71). Thus, phenomenology brings a sense experience to the process of interpretation that forces us to recognize the lived experience of interpretation. In this way, Ricoeur's combination of these two philosophical methods will allow us, I believe, to produce a very robust theory of democracy and democratic experience. While this chapter, and my engagement with Ricoeur more generally, is not devoted to a complete and systematic presentation of his entire philosophical corpus, what *is* of great interest to this project is the way in which I believe his combination of hermeneutics with

phenomenology (into a philosophical outlook that, from this point forward, I will simply call his hermeneutics) casts the hermeneutical project as a social and political project. In this way, Ricoeur's project, which continually looks to connect a world of interpretation of meaning and signs to a world of acting and suffering humans, offers us several suggestive ways to pursue a robust theory of democracy and democratic experience is rooted in the historical nature of political communities, as outlined in my readings of Machiavelli and Weber, but rooted in the historical nature as fundamentally a project of interpretation of an ongoing and public process of hermeneutic activity. The first aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutics that is essential to the development of our democratic theory is the idea of *distanciation*, which according to Ricoeur, must be acknowledged and that we must understand plays a fundamental role in any robust theory or practice of interpretation.

As we saw in Chapter Three, Ricoeur, following Gadamer, takes hermeneutics out of the sphere of biblical and literary interpretation and asserts that hermeneutics is not simply epistemological, but it is in fact, an ontological category. That is, interpretation is fundamental to our very experience in the world, and cannot be simply isolated as a method of scientific or scholastic inquiry. Just as a text can be understood only through a process of interpretation, so can human actions, and human existence more generally, be understood only through an ongoing process of interpretation of the world, and objects, that the individual or group confront. In the essay *Explanation and Understanding*, Ricoeur makes this quite clear when he asserts, "human action is in many respects a quasi text. It is externalized in a manner comparable to the fixation characteristic of writing"

(Ricoeur 2007, 137-8). Just as a written text is a certain fixation of discourse, the externalization of it into an object, which thus makes it open to the process of interpretation, Ricoeur wants to see human action, and the human world in a larger sense, in much the same light. Our world is experienced, lived and felt by 'acting and suffering' people, but can only be experienced and understood through interpretation.

But if hermeneutics is ontological rather than epistemological, it is not simply a written text that we are interpreting, what is it that serves the role of the text writ large in this ontological situation. The answer for Ricoeur is the idea of tradition. As he writes, "human beings discover…the fact that they first find themselves amid traditions" (Ricoeur 2013, 73). To see ourselves as hermeneutic brings is to see ourselves as enmeshed within traditions. So what then, is essential for our ability to interpret these very traditions that we find ourselves living within? For Ricoeur, it is the idea of distanciation which is key to our understanding of just how we are to situate ourselves with regard to tradition, as well as how we are to see the relationship between received traditions, and the presence of acting and suffering beings in the world.

Like Weber's idea of nationalism, Ricoeur sees traditions as historical, that is to say, they come down to us through a process of transmission through successive generations, and to understand any community as an historical community, we need to see it as engaged in a continual process of possessing, passing-on, and receiving these historical traditions in which we, as members of a community, cannot stand outside of. In the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur asserts that, with regard to tradition we "rather are always first of all in the position of being heirs" (Ricoeur 1988, 221). This

idea of being heirs to tradition as mush as anything else means that the situation of being found within a tradition is inescapable. David Linge, in his introduction to Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, makes this inescapability of traditions that Ricoeur borrows quite clear when he writes, "as prejudice and tradition, the past also defines the ground the interpreter himself occupies when he understands" (Gadamer 2008, xv). But this raises an interesting point, and one that Ricoeur is quite invested in proposing an answer to. If we cannot stand outside of those traditions, how can we properly be seen as being able to interpret them in any meaningful sense, and what allows us to position ourselves as interpreters of a tradition that serves as the very ground upon which we are interpreting? This is where, for Ricoeur, the notion of distanciation becomes so essential.

Distanciation refers to a certain distance at which we, by virtue of being part of an historical community, stand with regard to the tradition(s), texts, and artifacts in question, or more specifically, it is "the effect of being made *distant* from the producer of a text and the cultural condition under which he or she wrote" (Simms 2003, 39). Gadamer refers to, "the insuperable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by historical distance" (Gadamer 2006, 296), and this distance is essential for Ricoeur's understanding of the process of interpreting received traditions. According to Ricoeur, "the concept of distanciation is the dialectical counterpart of the notion of belonging, in the sense that we belong to a historical tradition through a relation of distance which oscillated between remoteness and proximity" (Ricoeur 2007, 35). That is to say, the traditions in which we find ourselves, as part of a community are seen as both present and historical, and this dialectical relationship, for Ricoeur, offers up essential space for the

process of meaningful interpretation and the active reception of tradition to take place. John Thompson believes that this issue of distanciation crucially separates the hermeneutics of Ricoeur from that of Gadamer, their similar ontological claims about hermeneutics notwithstanding. Thompson argues that, "this distanciation which Gadamer regards as an ontological fall from grace appears as the very condition for the possibility of hermeneutics," for Ricoeur (Thompson 1981, 67), where "a certain dialectic between the experience of belonging and alienating distanciation, becomes the mainspring, the key to the inner life, of hermeneutics" (Ricoeur 2007, 297). Rather than seeing a choice between, "alienating distanciation and participatory belonging", which Ricoeur argues is an unproductive (and faulty) binary, he proposes "a positive and, if I may say so, productive notion of distanciation" (Ricoeur 2007, 76). What this productive acknowledgement of distanciation does is allow Ricoeur to posit a specific type of relationship to tradition that we, as inheritors of tradition, are able to take, a specific relationship that involves, and emerges directly from a constant relationship *between* distance and belonging. In his essay, *The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation*, Ricoeur argues that, "we must place at the very heart of self-understanding that dialectic…distanciation is the condition of understanding" (Ricoeur 2007, 88). This self-understanding, whether individual or collective, must incorporate this productive notion of dialectic between distanciation and belonging.

When Ricoeur uses the term 'alienating' to describe the condition of distanciation, he wants to suggest that the distance is alienating only in the sense that it allows us to stand at some level of *remove* from the object itself. Distanciation is productive for

Ricoeur because in this sense, the alienation attributed to distanciation is productive. It allows us to take a critical distance from the material that we have received. Andreea Ritivoli argues that, "Ricoeur departs from the Gadamerian approach because he believes that distance from the past can become a critical vantage" (Ritivoli 2006, 87). Ritivoli draws our attention to a key element in understanding how Ricoeur wants to repurpose this notion: tying to the construction of a 'critical vantage' which is central to his idea of how we truly 'belong' to a community. In his work *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur offers an understanding of society as having, "the burden of transmitting from one generation to the next what it holds to be its cultural acquisitions" (Ricoeur 2004, 60), and much of that entire work can be seen as a philosophical treatise on the myriad connections between memory and community, or society. But unlike Weber, who seems to vacillate between his desire to not 'impose' on the future and the 'irreplaceability' of certain transmitted cultural values, this 'memory community' that Ricoeur proposes is fundamentally different. As Ritivoli notes, "in Ricoeur's view, a tradition constitutes a community of interpretation" (Ritivoli 2006, 75). And by connecting these two ideas, the 'community of memory' with the 'community of interpretation' we can see just how Ricoeur uses distanciation and alienation in a productive fashion.

We, as members of any political community, are constituted by our relationship to inherited traditions. And while, for Ricoeur, we stand, at least initially, as 'heirs' to tradition, and as the recipients of them, that does not capture the entirety of the relationship. For it is just as important to note that we are also interpreters of tradition: we need to interpret it in order to understand the meaning it has for us. However, by

incorporating this idea of 'alienating distanciation' into the equation, Ricoeur offers us a powerful understanding of interpretation. Based on the very fact that we are interpreting traditions that stand at a distance to us, and are in fact 'alien' to us, interpretation is necessary to overcome this type of distance. In *Existence and Hermeneutics*, Ricoeur writes, "the purpose of all interpretation is to conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch" (Ricoeur 2007, 16). But we are only able to conquer this distance between ourselves and this tradition, if our process of interpretation is one of a certain kind. Ricoeur believes that, given these social realities of distanciation and tradition, any real act in interpretation involves not just revealing a certain meaning or understanding, but must also actively engage in producing meaning for ourselves. In his essay, "Hermeneutical Logic", Ricoeur makes this very clear when he writes, "an interpretation is not genuine unless it culminates in some form of appropriation, if by that term we understand the process by which one makes one's own what was initially other or alien" (Ricoeur 2013, 61). In Ricoeur's estimation, the process of 'making one's own' something that was alien can only happen when interpretation is joined together with appropriation. That means that interpretation is an active process in two fundamental, and deeply related senses: it is active with regard to approaching those symbols, values, and texts that make up a tradition in order to understand them, but furthermore, it is active in that we, as interpreters need to make that tradition meaningful *for us*, for *our* contemporary political condition, and responsive to *our* political needs. Understanding past tradition is not enough. In Ricoeur's hermeneutic presentation of society, it is essential that understanding include repossession. Or, to stay more faithful to the terms

that Ricoeur himself relies upon, the *interpretation* of traditions must always necessarily be a *re-interpretation,* "values cannot be preserved if they are simply passively received" (Dauenhauer 1998, 28).

In *The Promise of Risk of Politics*, Bernard Dauenhauer notes the way Ricoeur sees interpretation functioning in its mediation of active agents and the traditions they inherit. He initially argues that, for Ricoeur, "the self is always an embodied self both made possible and constrained by its material and cultural situation, but also capable of genuine initiative, in inaugurating something new" (Dauenhauer 1998, 109). This theoretical intervention, defining the embodied self as both constrained as well as capable of initiative and invention begins to draw the contours of Ricoeur's citizen. For Ricoeur, we cannot understand citizenship outside of the potential for initiative, for 'inaugurating something new'. As he writes in *Time and Narrative*, "initiative is, above all else, what actualizes the competence of the acting subject" (Ricoeur 1988, 257). The acting subject is only an actor so long as they can act at bringing something new into the world. Here, we can see shades of Weber's desire for principled political action. However, while Ricoeur claims the importance of this notion of initiative, the fact that we, as actors, are 'embodied' means that we must understand initiative in a specific way. Dauenhauer later argues that, "we have all been born into a world already furnished with ethical value. Though we can and do "transvalue" the received values, we cannot create them beginning from zero" (Dauenhauer 1998, 227). The fact that we are, to some degree, constituted by traditions, and 'embodied' by the histories and memories contained within those traditions means that our initiative is not some type of absolute category, and that we

must recognize the fact that "we are never in a position of being absolute innovators" (Ricoeur 1988, 221). This is the dynamic that Ricoeur sees as functioning through his concept of reinterpretation. Reinterpretation allows us to receive the past but, through this process of 'making our own' what is 'alien' to us, the distanciated past, we are capable of initiative, and able to inaugurate novelty through this engagement with tradition. Ultimately this is what Ricoeur hopes to achieve through his embrace of distanciation: acknowledging the distance of a tradition allows us to make it ours through a process of reinterpretation that involves an ever present, though not absolute, claim to innovation and novelty.

This brings us to an important set of questions, however. What exactly, for Ricoeur, is the difference between a passive reception of the past and an active reinterpretation? When he calls for a 'making our own' of the distanciated past, what exactly of the past are we making our own? Several authors draw our attention to this specific dynamic, though I believe their ultimate presentations of this engagement with tradition, while not incorrect, is lacking a certain amount of persuasiveness. Dauenhauer describes this Ricourean process quite succinctly when he writes, "however much they are shaped by the heritage they receive, it is their responsibility to preserve their heritage by their free, creative reinvention of its values" (Dauenhauer 1998, 51-2), and this language runs throughout his work on Ricoeur. In addition to 'preservation' through reinvention, Dauenhauer argues that "a cultural tradition remains alive only so long as it constantly creates itself anew" (Dauenhauer 1998, 87). Several other authors look to Ricoeur's dynamic understanding of tradition in much the same way, imbuing their

analysis with similar language and points of contention. Richard Kearney writes that, for Ricoeur, "tradition needs innovation in order to sustain itself as a living transmission of meaning capable of being reactivated" (Kearney 2004, 6). Both Kearney and Dauenhauer engage certain terms to try and encapsulate this connection between interpretation and initiative, to describe this process of interpretation that only succeeds when the project of making something new is attached to it. References to a 'living tradition' that is not simply 'passively received' abound in these works. They both very clearly link these communities to an ongoing process of active creation. Andreea Ritivoli nicely summarizes this cultural community when she argues "Ricoeur emphasizes the individual's conscious participation in imaginative practices that lead to the formation of a community" (Ritivoli 2006, 58). What is important about this analysis is the fact that they all point to an essential creative facility that is at work in this cultural reinterpretation of tradition, and, indeed, at work in the very cultural identity of these communities.

It is my contention that, as helpful as these analyses are, they leave a certain key aspect under-theorized, which means their interpretations remain somewhat critically underdeveloped. In short, I believe that these authors fail to account for exactly what it is in this process of interpretation/reinterpretation that allows us to make the claim that these new interpretations are, somehow, alive. That is, what is it about this interpretation that makes it somehow more meaningful, more vital, and essential to an active community? To return briefly to simple textual hermeneutics, just because we offer a new interpretation of a text, doesn't necessarily mean that this new interpretation somehow

becomes a more 'vital' way to understand the work. Can we not pose the same question to this larger form of hermeneutical understanding? What is it that allows us to link the existence of a 'new' interpretation or understanding of a cultural tradition to the larger claim that it is, therefore, more alive, or imbued with meaning *for us*? This assumption, however, is made both in Kearney and Dauenhauer's work. They both contrast received tradition with reinterpreted tradition, one being more alive and necessary than the other. However, they seem to displace the important question of just how this reinterpretation allows us to make the claim for vitality. In another essay on Ricoeur, Dauenhauer seems to point to at least a provisional answer to this question when he argues that, "each society must face the judgment of subsequent generations" (Dauenhauer 1997, 132). This linking of reinterpretation to the notion of judgment is helpful, for it does begin to point us toward a certain understanding of this process of reinterpretation: it is a method whereby levels of individual and collective judgment about the qualities of inherited tradition are made and, perhaps, repurposed. But I argue that this simply pushes the question further into the distance. What is it about Ricoeur's idea of cultural interpretation that links up with judgments? How exactly does distanciation, the key feature of Riceoeur's theory, function as a component of judgment? I believe that Ricoeur offers us a compelling answer, one that is largely unacknowledged in Kearney, Dauenhauer and Rivitoloi, but that offers us a complete picture of this hermeneutic process. In order to illustrate this more clearly, we will need to turn to another important element in Ricoeur's philosophy: the idea of a 'critical hermeneutics'.

III.   **A Critical Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Ideology**

Ricoeur's idea of a critical hermeneutics stems from his intervention into the Gadamer Habermas debate of the 1960's. Ricoeur, ever the mediator, sought to find a 'third way' between the hermeneutic method of Gadamer, with its insistence on the necessity of interpretation and the recovery of tradition, and Habermas, who insists that the hermeneutical project lacks a meaningful component of critique, and as such, generally fails to move beyond the status of a project that produces the uncritical acceptance of the traditions of a society. More to the point, Habermas believes that the interpretation occasioned by hermeneutics has no space for interrogating the ideological distortions of past traditions. Or, as Ricoeur summarizes, "Gadamer inevitably turned hermeneutic philosophy toward the rehabilitation of prejudice and the defense of tradition and authority, placing this philosophy in a conflictual relation to any critique of ideology" (Ricoeur 2007, 273). In place of hermeneutics, Habermas offers the notion of a critical social science that, rather than reflecting upon tradition, is engaged in analyzing the ideological distortions and repressive tendencies inherent in tradition, or as Ricoeur argues, "the critique of ideologies sees in the same tradition the place par excellence of distortions and alienations" (Ricoeur 1974, 248). Crucially for Habermas, a critical social sciences, by unmasking these distortions and alienations, by freeing us from the distortions inherent in tradition, moving us toward a more liberated future. Where Habermas sees Gadamer's hermeneutics as reinvesting tradition with authority, Habermas outlines a critical social theory that works to unmask authority from the past, and replace it with a regulative future goal of authority freed from ideological distortion.

Ricoeur proposes what he calls a critical hermeneutics, where "he argues that Habermas' concerns can be addressed within a hermeneutical framework and that philosophical hermeneutics can incorporate within itself a Habermasian impulse toward critique" (Piercey 2004, 262) Ricoeur simultaneously attempts to resuscitate hermeneutics (though not necessarily Gadamer himself) from the charge leveled at it by Habermas, while at the same time incorporating some of Habermas' social critique by demonstrating that Habermas' separation of critique from tradition is an untenable opposition. Continuing his uneasy relationship with Gadamer, Ricoeur notes, "in spite of his earlier critique, it is to a theme of German Romanticism that Gadamer returns, linking *authority* to *tradition*. That which has authority is tradition. When he comes to this equation, Gadamer speaks in Romantic terms" (Ricoeur 2007, 279). Gadamer may, in Ricoeur's estimation, fall prey to the very Romantic hermeneutics that he cautions against, but this does not exhaust the entirety of hermeneutics, it simply forces a re-evaluation of Gadamer's contribution, an acknowledgement that "Gadamer often expresses himself in ways that downplay the critical recourse of hermeneutics" (Piercey 2004, 265). It is this reevaluation that Ricoeur uses to bring hermeneutics closer to Habermas' critical social science. Ricoeur writes, "I want to show…however…that hermeneutical philosophy has other resources and that it is required by its internal logic to reintroduce a critical moment…as a necessary dialectical factor of the hermeneutical process" (Ricoeur 1974, 252). It is this 'critical moment' that ultimately serves as the hinge upon which Ricoeur brings together hermeneutics and critical social science. Ricoeur is interested in formulating this idea of a critical hermeneutics that, while

remaining true to the interpretative reality that hermeneutics proposes, and the acknowledgement of a relation to tradition that accompanies it, also contains that 'critical moment' that he sees as having been given a clearer articulation within critical social science.

Ricoeur simultaneously takes issue with Habermas' insistence on seeing tradition as simply the reservoir of ideological distortions as well as his methodological insistence on rupturing critical theory from tradition. For Ricoeur, this engagement with Habermas proceeds into two distinct ways. The first, is the frank acknowledgement by Ricoeur that, "critique is also a tradition. I would even say that it plunges into the most impressive tradition, that of liberating acts" (Ricoeur 2007, 306), and as such, Habermas' insistence on a radical separation is, from even a logical standpoint, untenable. Ricoeur continues to argue that critique in the contemporary world might not even be a possible undertaking if that 'tradition' of critique "were effaced from the memory of mankind" (Ricoeur 2007, 306). Thus, for Ricoeur, part of what we 'inherit' within our tradition, is the ongoing critique of tradition, and if we are to rupture our connection to tradition, does that meant that this element of critique similarly lost? Allison Scott-Bauman draws our attention to this reconfiguration, noting that Ricoeur, "described hermeneutics as disruptive…when we want to interpret our relationship with tradition and interpret it critically" (Scott-Baumann 2009, 173). Now the difficulty for Ricoeur here is that this critique of tradition is not always the most present or obvious moment, and it will take work in order to unearth it, but it is precisely this very process of unearthing this tradition as critique, that he poses as one of the main tasks of a critical hermeneutics.

Just as critique itself has/is a tradition, the process of criticizing tradition can only take place from within a tradition. As discussed above, Ricoeur sees us as embodied individuals, who can only exist within, and as part of, inherited traditions and cultures, and any theory of critical engagement must take that claim seriously. While Ricoeur has great sympathy for Habermas' interest in emancipation, he restates his longstanding assertion that, "none of us finds himself place in the radical position of creating the ethical world *ex nihilo*" (Ricoeur 1974, 268). Therefore, any critical enterprise can only arise from within a certain set of traditions, from a certain cultural, social, and political standpoint. Or, as Robert Piercey notes, "the critique of ideology is possible only on the basis of hermeneutic presuppositions – that is, on the basis of its embeddedness in a highly specific historical tradition" (Piercey 2004, 267). Our understanding of tradition, especially our understanding of whatever types of distortions and alienations we see within those traditions, can only come to consciousness and become part of our political engagement, from a position located within those traditions themselves. To highlight this, Ricoeur asserts that "we must confess that we are always situated within history in such a fashion that our consciousness never has the freedom to bring itself face to face with the past by an act of sovereign independence" (Ricoeur 1974, 252). In this way, Ricoeur brings together crucial elements of these two modes of inquiry to fashion his understanding of critical hermeneutics. The hermeneutic presuppositions, that of existing within traditions and histories are brought together with an interest in emancipation through a process of critiquing ideology, as well as systematic distortions found within those traditions. This process of criticism and interest in emancipation, however, cannot

locate itself outside of inherited traditions and cultural forms, but must be seen from within. In combining these two practices, Ricoeur hopes to avoid a flattening out of both. Just as "Ricourian hermeneutics never turns into the mere praise of tradition" (Michel 2015, xvii), critical social investigation cannot be seen as the mere opposite of tradition, or the product of a project and consciousness that is wholly outside of traditions. By combining elements of them both into this project of critical hermeneutics, Ricoeur offers us a heightened, and more complex, sense of both.

I would like to finish this discussion of critical hermeneutics by returning to the idea of distanciation, which now can be seen as playing an even more important role. For Ricoeur, it is the very fact that we stand at a distance from these traditions that we are able to incorporate that critical element into the process of hermeneutical explanation and interpretation. Here we now see much more clearly what Ricoeur means when he writes about the process of 'making ours' what is alien and distant to us, which was missing in the discussions by Kearney, Dauenhauer, and Ritivoli. This process of reinterpretation through distanciation, whatever else it entails, must incorporate this critical element of unmasking ideological distortions. In engaging with what is alien to us we must work out what alienations (in a more Marxist conception of the term) are being transmitted to us through tradition, and within the historical cultural communities that we find ourselves belonging. Because Ricoeur embraces distanciation as a productive element within hermeneutics, tradition is to a substantial (but not a complete) degree, de-linked from authority (contra his interpretation of Gadamer), and the process of reinterpretation is now seen as a process of re-constructing that authority, through a critical analysis of the

distortions and ideological constructions found within the interpreted traditions. This gives us a more complete answer to how we should understand those descriptions of 'living' traditions. The active part of this reinterpretation has to do with a critical engagement with experiences of ideology and distortions contained within any historical traditions, communities, and practices. This leads us to a very important question about what, for Ricoeur, is the nature of ideology, and how he sees ideology functioning within this idea of tradition.

A key to understanding Ricoeur's hermeneutics comes with the acknowledgement that every major component of his philosophy indicates a limit to which we can never extricate ourselves, despite a need to constantly engage with them. Just as we can never get outside of the need to interpret, and we can never find a position outside of tradition and history, neither can we find ourselves outside of the presence and influence of ideology. However, this does not mean that an engagement with ideology, as a constant presence within our communal existence is impossible, or unnecessary. In fact, such an engagement is essential for maintaining the political and social well-being of the communities we find ourselves in. Due to the fact that, for Ricoeur, we cannot get outside of, or fully extricate ourselves from a lives lived through the force and presence of ideology, it serves several important, and related functions. And it is only through an engagement with the understanding that Ricoeur has of ideology, that we can understand the full consequences of his theory of reinterpretation, and the true importance of a critical hermeneutics. Specifically, for Ricoeur, we need to understand the way in which he casts ideology as a resolutely historical phenomenon.

In his work, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Ricoeur gives his clearest and most systematic accounting of how he understands the role(s) of ideology, and the account of ideology that he gives here informs a great deal of the rest of his work on memory, history, and hermeneutics. Drawing largely on the theory of ideology offered by Louis Althusser, Ricoeur writes, "a system of oppression survives and prevails thanks to this ideological apparatus which both places the individuals in subjection and at the very same time maintains and reproduces the system. Reproduction of the system and ideological repression of the individual are one and the same" (Ricoeur 1986, 133). Just as Althusser claims that the presence of what he calls Ideological State Apparatuses in society insures the reproduction of an entire social system that the economy demands, Ricoeur wants to make a similar (though slightly more cautious) claim. Ricoeur eventually distances himself from Althusser, especially over the distinction Althusser makes between ideology and science, which Ricoeur believes is an untenable distinction. However, what he finds useful in Althusser's conception is the idea that "ideology reflects in the form of an imaginary relation something which is already an existing relation, that is, the relation of the human beings to their world" (Ricoeur 1986, 136), and this relationship that ideology reflects is key to the first purpose that Ricoeur assigns to ideology.

In continued sympathy with Habermas' project of emancipation, Ricoeur will not distance himself from the idea that ideology serves a distorting function, but that does not capture the entirety of it. In fact, we cannot make sense of the *distorting* function of ideology without understanding the larger and more general purpose that Ricoeur

attributes to ideology. Regarding this larger purpose, Ricoeur borrows heavily from the anthropology of Clifford Geertz when he argues that "whether distorting, legitimating, or constituting, ideology always has the function of preserving an identity, whether of a group or individual" (Ricoeur 1986, 182), and elsewhere he refers to it as the "guardian of identity" (Ricoeur 2004, 83). Specifically, for Ricoeur, ideology serves to integrate identity on two levels it "supports the integration of a group not simply in space but in time. Ideology functions not only in the synchronic dimension but also in the diachronic dimension" (Ricoeur 1986, 261). This ties ideology directly to history and memory, in that he recognizes the ideological component of social and cultural memories in performing an integrative function. Ricoeur argues that, "the memory of the group's founding events is extremely significant; reenactment of the founding events is a fundamental ideological act" (Ricoeur 1986, 261). The memory of these acts, and in many cases the 're-enactment' of these acts serves to produce and legitimize a sense of identification that individuals make to a community and that a community makes to itself. Recall Wolin's discussion of the American bicentennial celebration: "a bicentennial might be thought of as an official story that narrates a past to support an image of collective identity that conforms a certain conception of the present" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). Here, we can clearly see the fundamental attributes Ricoeur gives to ideology: a narration of a collective identity, the acceptance of a conception of the present. Though Wolin does not use the term 'ideology', he notes that these celebrations ultimately 'legitimate' a specific understanding of the present. Thus, memory's larger ideological function is that of integration. In trying a community together, "the underlying integrative

function of ideology prevents us from pushing the polemical element to its destructive point – the point of civil war" (Ricoeur 1986, 263). Any community that is to have any sort of permanence, can only do so, according to Ricoeur (again borrowing from Geertz) if there is a strong level of integration that can overcome "the threat of the lack of identity" (Ricoeur 1986, 261), and produce a certain level of stability and continuity with regard to the symbolic identification that is shared by the members of the community.

In making these claims, Ricoeur is arguing that "ideology is similarly basic and ineluctable" (Ricoeur 1986, 259). We cannot see it as something that belongs simply to the 'superstructure' of society, the way that Althusser, despite the importance he gives to ideology, seems content to do. Nor can we argue that ideology is synonymous with distortion, as Habermas does. Instead, we need to see that ideology "belongs within a broader framework that recognizes the fundamentally symbolic structure of human existence" (Dauenhauer 1998, 215). Ideology serves as the means by which individuals, and communities, come to identify and understand themselves. If we come to understand ourselves, as individuals and members of a community, through the symbols we are confronted with: texts, values, and traditions, then ideology is thus constitutive of the very idea of community and identity. But if ideology is simply constitutive of how we make sense of our symbolic identities, does that not eliminate the 'critical moment' that Ricoeur places at the heart of his critical hermeneutics? Allison Scott-Baumann argues that "it is clear that Ricoeur wants us to become expert in exercising suspicion" (Scott-Baumann 2009, 44), but if ideology is simply symbolic integration, how are we able to

become at all suspicious of the ideological *distortions* deposited within history, traditions, and the past more generally?

Simply because ideology is integrative for Ricoeur does not mean that it ceases to be both distorting and working in the continual service of the legitimation of alienation and domination, for Ricoeur does argue that, "ideology, when all is said and done, revolves around power" (Ricoeur 2004, 83). Similarly, just because we cannot get *outside* of ideology, does not mean that we cannot unmask those very distortions, to which we are subjected. Rather, we need to understand the specific way in which Ricoeur understands ideology to function with regard to authority and the distribution of power. In doing this, we will be able to understand the distorting and legitimating effects of ideology that give purpose to Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics. Ultimately, we will be able to grasp just how Ricoeur's notion of reinterpretation, by joining it to the acknowledgement of these other functions of ideology, allows for this critical hermeneutics to serve what Ricoeur calls initiative, and what Weber imagined as principled political action.

IV.   Ideology and Surplus-Value

> "What is at stake in all ideology is finally the legitimation of a certain system of authority"
> -   Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*

In his Introduction to *The Presence of the Past*, Sheldon Wolin defines a constitution as, "not neutral or purely formal; they are prescriptive…Constitutions and their politics are about power: about what power is to be used for, by whom, and according to what understandings and justifications, as well as to privilege certain public

meanings and symbols" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). For Wolin it is not just that a constitution is a document that settles questions of power, but it is also a rhetorical document that attempts to persuade and offer a legitimation for that distribution of power. Wolin writes, "As a political event the Constitution represented a settlement about power on terms that the leaders of the dominant interests…agreed upon and believed they could persuade the politically significant part of the population to accept" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 3). This is to say that a constitution not only distributes power and authority, but is also the beginning of the political and social project of justifying, legitimizing, and perpetuating that authority. This definition of constitutions as distributions and legitimations of power and authority, helps us highlight what, for Ricoeur, is the central role that is played by ideology, understood now in its legitimizing (Habermas would say distorting) function.

In a concise description of Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between constitutions and the state, Bernard Dauenhauer writes, "Whatever the constitutional form of the State, power is of its essence. All constitutions distribute power. In doing so they establish limits and oppositions" (Dauenhauer 1998, 76) and because the state, and constitutions, are ultimately about power, the question of legitimacy cannot be removed from the discussion. In the introduction to Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, George Taylor writes, "the question of legitimacy is ineradicable in social life…because no social order operates by force alone" (Ricoeur 1986, xvi). Ricoeur here is concerned with the legitimation of leadership, that is, what right does political leadership have to exercise that control over the population. As Ricoeur writes, "the legitimation of leadership confronts us with the problem of authority, domination, and power, the

problem of the hierarchization of modern life. Ideology has a significant role here" (Ricoeur 1986, 12). But he is also interested in the legitimacy of the institutions that support hierarchy and power, and it is in relation to those two concerns that the concept of ideology returns to his analysis. But just what is the role that ideology plays? How does it insert itself into the discussion of power and authority?

Ricoeur argues that in any political system there is always a gap between the amount of authority and power that is claimed by political leadership, and assumed by political institutions, and the rationale or justification that can be made on their behalf. It is here that ideology becomes absolutely essential. As Ricoeur argues, "ideology occurs in the gap between a system of authority's claim to legitimacy and our response in terms of belief" (Ricoeur 1986, 183). In a creative repurposing of a central Marxist term, Ricoeur refers to the functioning of ideology in this gap as a type of 'surplus-value. "Ideology functions to add a certain surplus-value to our belief in order that our belief may meet the requirements of the authority's claims" (Ricoeur 1986, 183). Ricoeur extends this analysis of the surplus value of ideology in his later work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where he writes, "ideology is supposed to add a sort of surplus value to our spontaneous belief, thanks to which the later might satisfy the demands of the authority" (Ricoeur 2004, 83). What Ricoeur is pointing to here is that ideology allows for a smooth functioning of power and authority by symbolically legitimating its workings and applications. A specific (ideological) conception of the past becomes, in a sense, a reservoir of authority to legitimate a present arrangement of political institutions and a certain distribution of power, which allows for the functioning of power and domination

while largely masking its operation. As Ricoeur writes, "law can mask the relation of force only in the measure that the power of the state flows from the ideality of the past" (Ricoeur 2007, 253). This notion of the 'ideality' of the past, which we saw functioning in Pericles' Funeral Oration as a means to legitimate and perpetuate not only a certain identity, but a specific arrangement of power and authority, is key to understanding the legitimizing function that ideology serves.

I would like to argue a further point here, however, with regard to how ideology functions in Ricoeur's theoretical schema. By perpetuating a sort of 'ideological past', ideology itself works to rhetorically obfuscate the historical and, more importantly, the *contingent*, nature of the current distribution of power and authority. When discussing the beginning and growth of political societies, Ricoeur argues, "their violent birth then becomes reabsorbed in the new legitimacy which they foster and consolidate. But this new legitimacy always retains a note of contingency" (Ricoeur 2007, 258). Just as the Athenian myth of autochthony served to obscure the historical origins of Athens in order to perpetuate a stable and enduring political identity and structure, the removal of contingency from the origins of modern societies seems to function in much the same way. Legitimacy, specifically the 'surplus' legitimacy supplied by the ideological functioning of the past covers over, or renders invisible, that contingency. Much the same way that Castoriadis argues that the already imagined institutions of society serve to de-historicize social arrangements and roles, the ideological impulse to remove contingency makes it easy for a society to continually overlook the largely democratic idea that, "political power seems to…pose the specific problem of its self-constitutions and,

correlative to this, of its self-limitation" (Ricoeur 2000, 89). Because these questions of self-constitution and self-limitation are minimized through the lack of acknowledgement of historical contingency, the relationship between power and the emergence of political institutions is largely severed. While Ricoeur notes the importance of founding events for the stabilization of identity, he also notes that the celebration of founding events has a problematic component to it, one that is directly related to this issue. He writes, "What we celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right. What was glory for some was humiliation for others" (Ricoeur 2004, 79). And of course, for Ricoeur, this legitimating state of 'right' is made less so by the smooth functioning of ideology.

While I would like to side step the issue of 'founding violence',[51] what is important for our purposes here is the way in which this understanding of state legitimation is productive of a political/historical consciousness in which, "past losses are dissociated from present choices, and as a result the range of choice is circumscribed by the needs and wants of the victors" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 4). As history is seen as less and less contingent, "we feel our historical experience as a totalization in process" (Ricoeur 1974, 282). Historical contingency and political contingency, in this sense, seem to march hand in hand. As long as we do not see the political past as contingent, as long as we do not see our history as one of conflict, loss, and struggle, current political arrangements will continue to be buttressed by the ideological production of legitimacy and the smooth flow of 'surplus power' to the central political institutions of the state. Ultimately this means that "the questions of what is discursively possible in a given historical situation"

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[51] Again, something that could not be adequately treated within the confines of this dissertation.

(Ricoeur 2000, 119) will be similarly very narrowly circumscribed. The lack of political possibility that Ricoeur fears is described by Bernard Dauenhauer as 'political ossification'. For Dauenhauer, "a "formalist" ossification…would refuse to give serious consideration to any significant modification of the society's main political institutions" (Dauenhauer 1998, 271), and he sees one of Ricoeur's major political goals as being the resistance of this type of political ossification. What Dauenhauer excludes from this analysis, however, is the way in which ideology serves as a major contributing factor to the production of this ossification. Dauenhauer offers some remedies: more open participation, the attentiveness of citizens to their 'others', but by not directly tying ideology to how these solutions might work, he leaves out a connection that is key in understanding why more participation is important, and why these strategies helps resist this ossification.

If, for Ricoeur, individuals and communities "are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history" (Ricoeur 1988, 247), then we need to see ossification as one possible result of this process of identity-formation. For as important as these identities are to the integration of the community, the integrating function of ideology can become (in Ricoeur's terminology) pathological, and in this sense, "something becomes ideological…when the integrative function becomes frozen" (Ricoeur 1986, 266), when the process of integration becomes so powerful that political structures and the distribution of power becomes ossified and more and more resistant to change. This ideological distortion, the superabundance of integration and the constant presence of ideological 'surplus value' can work to desensitize a political

community to the contingency of its foundation, laws, and institutions, and as such, the space for democratic potential and democratic energies is more narrowly circumscribed. In this sense, the 'totalization in process' that Ricoeur assigns to any political society edges closer and closer to reality. It is in this sense, that Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics plays an indispensable role. For Ricoeur, the critical side of hermeneutics must confront this ideological distortion toward ossification by, "establishing the limits for any claim to totalization" (Ricoeur 2004, 343). This bringing together of the distortions of ideology with Ricoeur's hermeneutic project now allows us to recast, with a bit more clarity, Dauenhauer's potential solutions to ossification. If ideological distortion emanates primarily from the growth in power of a specific identity that is narrated by a community that becomes their 'official history', any attempt to break the spell of that ideological distortion needs to start from the fact that "narrative identity…can include change, mutability" (Ricoeur 1988, 246), but where would that change and mutability come from? While Weber, much like Ricoeur, seems to want to resist the encroaching prospect of political ossification, Weber's insistence on the irreplaceable values of the nation precludes him from offering a strong antidote. Ricoeur, however opens up possibilities where Weber seems to deny them. For Riceour, the ability to resist political ossification, to resist the 'totalization in process', is found in the process of destabilizing those very historical and cultural values that Weber notes are constitutive of then nation.

If ideology functions (both in its integrative mode as well as its more distortive modes) by producing and reproducing a history that works to create identity, stabilize institutions, and promote political legitimacy, any antidote to that functioning must

approach history, and the traditions that are sustained by that history, in a different way. For Ricoeur, this alternative approach sees "history…as an extensive development of meaning and as an irradiation of meaning from a multiplicity of organizing centers" (Ricoeur 2007, 39). This idea of history as multiplicity is essential, for it allows us to contest the ideologically functioning of history as a totality in process, and "this very plurality chips away from within the very concept of history as a collective singular" (Ricoeur 2004, 301). It is most important, however, that this not simply be seen as an exercise in reading history, but as an exercise in the democratic recovery of historical voices and alternative meanings as a specifically political project. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Ricoeur argues that "dissident voices are fundamental to the democratic process itself" (Ricoeur 1986, 249), and this engagement with otherness and democratic participation must include, and in fact is largely dependent on this historical recovery. If ideological institutions promote stability, than the reinterpretation undertaken by a critical hermeneutics, is inherently de-stabilizing. Dauenhauer notes this instability when he writes, "it is also possible, within limits, to tell more than one story about the same set of events" (Dauenhauer 1998, 277-8), and the political importance of these 'conflicting stories' is revealed more fully when we see how they connect to the histories and traditions that lie at the heart of all political communities. As Ricoeur argues, in *The Course of Recognition*, "the relating of memories can also turn into a conflict through the competition among memories about the same events that do not agree" (Ricoeur 2005, 254). Additionally, this contestation of memory must take place around the very same structures that offer stability and identity to the political community. As Dauenhauer

notes, "only if these founding events receive different, and even competing accounts, can they avoid becoming part of a stultifying, even dangerous tradition" (Dauenhauer 1998, 277). Thus, the histories and traditions that Ricoeur's hermeneutics wants us to actively re-interpret are important because their reinterpretation makes plural what is increasingly seen as singular, and fractures the ossification that accompanies whatever is increasingly seen as a totalizing narrative. For Ricoeur, the dissident voices of any democratic project are largely dissident voices of the past.

V.   Ideology and Utopia

If I have so far argued that the move toward totality that is occasioned by ideology is a powerful one, it has to do with the link that Ricoeur establishes between ideology and tradition, it is because, as Bernard Dauenhauer argues, "The problem posed by traditions is that…what is transmitted claims to have a distinctive authority, the authority of the past" (Dauenhauer 1998, 224). Ideology enables tradition to be seen as a specific historical narrative that carries with it legitimation and the ability to stabilize contemporary relations of power due to its social 'surplus value'. However, Ricoeur insists on carving out a space for the 'note of contingency' that is present within every set of historical traditions that engage the political community, a contingency that ideology can cover up, but never erase. This insistence on the part of Ricoeur is substantiated by his claim that it is not only contingency that can never be fully erased by ideological 'surplus value' but the existence of *difference*. As Ricoeur argues, "one aspect of the very idea of traditionality…is that identity and difference are inextricably mixed together in it" (Ricoeur 1988, 20), and as much as ideology functions to suppress difference, the idea of

'difference within traditions' is inescapable. Just as Ricoeur wants to understand this critical hermeneutics as engagement with ideological distortion, it is also a process by which these differences within tradition, regardless of how much they have been suppressed through the functioning of ideology, are recovered. Kearney offers a succinct elaboration of this project when he writes, "in interpretation we endeavor to reappropriate those meaning that have been disappropriated…we strive to recover that which has been removed" (Kearney 2004, 31). But how, exactly do we connect Kearney's comment to Ricoeur's more overtly social claim about the existence of difference within tradition?

For Ricoeur, difference within tradition refers to alternative social and political possibilities that have been, at least partially 'disappropriated' or removed from the more ideologically inscribed understanding of tradition. In this sense, recovering the difference at the heart of tradition means "we must struggle against the tendency to consider the past only from the angle of what is done, unchangeable, and past. We have to re-open the past, to revivify its unaccomplished, cut-off – even slaughtered – possibilities" (Ricoeur 1988, 216). For Ricoeur, it is the very process of re-interpretation that allows us to become aware of these alternative possibilities. And most importantly, this recovery is not simply a matter of 'straightening out' the historical record, or having a more 'accurate' understanding of the past, but it is the very thing that can serve as motivation and inspiration for future-oriented political action, our expectations for future-oriented political action can allow us to engage more clearly with those disappropriated parts of the past. In this sense, Ricoeur's hermeneutical project is more radical in its political implications, and open to the realization of political possibilities, that some authors give

him credit for. C. Bryn Pinchin argues for a strong sense of conservatism to Ricoeur's hermeneutical project, claiming that "there is no vision here of historical tradition as oppressive, imperialist, or patriarchal, and no sense of struggle, discontinuity, and exclusion" (Pinchin 1997). Given how distinctly Ricoeur connects the process of reinterpretation with the recovery of 'unaccomplished possibilities' as well as the very fact that he locates difference at the heart of tradition, and the this recovery of difference serves as the primary motivating force for his re-interpretive recovery, any claims that his hermeneutic theory favors stability of contestation seems to miss the essential tasks with which he charges hermeneutics. Additionally, I would argue that his critical hermeneutics, as a process of re-interpretation does not just look to acknowledge the possibilities buried in the past, but attempts to connect those past possibilities with political action.

Regarding this connection, Ricoeur writes, "the repercussion of our expectations relative to the future on the reinterpretation of the past may have as one of its major effects opening up forgotten possibilities, aborted potentialities, repressed endeavors in the supposedly closed past." (Ricoeur 1988, 227). By embracing distanciation, traditions and histories can be reinterpreted in a way that brings to light, not simply the contingency of present political arrangements and structures of power, but an awareness of the repressed differences, and the buried past potentials that reside within traditions and are a part of all histories. But for Ricoeur, if the recovery of these alternative (forgotten) possibilities is an important political task, how does that recovery then feature in, or help to produce those 'expectations relative to the future' that he connects to reinterpretation?

How do these historical recoveries connect to his idea of 'initiative', of the "*intervention of the agent of action in the course of the world*" (Ricoeur 1992, 109)? To accomplish this, Ricoeur puts forward the idea of 'utopia', which Ricoeur sees as a concept and practice that "unmasks surplus-value" (Ricoeur 1986, 298), that results from the power of ideology as legitimation.

Ricoeur ties his understanding of utopia to his previously elaborated concept, ideology, connected the two via the issue of power. He writes, "both ideologies and utopias deal with power: ideology is always an attempt to legitimate power, while utopia is always an attempt to replace power by something else" (Ricoeur 1986, 288). This is not to say that Ricoeur believes that any utopian project can eliminate the existence of power from social life; that would be an impossible task. Rather, he sees 'replacement' of power as really the ability to offer alternative conceptions of how power should be distributed. In this sense, he also connects ideology and utopia together by noting that each one is connected not just to the existence of power, but to its legitimation. Whereas ideology, through the generation of 'surplus-power' legitimates existing arrangements of power and authority, "utopia also operates at the level of the legitimation process; it shatters a given order by offering alternative ways to deal with authority and power" (Ricoeur 1986, 179). Utopia, as a process of expressing alternative visions, re-acclimates our (individual and collective) understanding of, as he notes in *The Just*, what is possible at our given historical juncture. Utopia, "in the positive sense of the term, extends to the boundary line between the possible and the impossible" (Ricoeur 1986, 253), and by

offering 'alternatives to the existing arrangements of authority and power', allows us to engage in "the exploration of the possible" (Ricoeur 1986, 310).

Ricoeur is indebted to the work of Karl Mannheim to the degree that ideology and utopia must be seen as relational terms. Ricoeur writes, "The merit of Karl Mannheim, is that he both connected ideology and utopia and at the same time reserved their differences" (Ricoeur 1986, 272). Additionally, Ricoeur finds Mannheim helpful in his assertion that "a utopia is not only a set of ideas, but a mentality" (Ricoeur 1986, 274). Mannheim defines this utopian mentality as "all situationally transcendent ideas…whish in any way have a transforming effect up on the existing historical-social order" (Mannheim 1936, 205), and his underlying notion that all utopian mentalities are incongruous with reality and work to, in Ricoeur's estimation, 'shatter' the given reality, demonstrates the debt that Ricoeur's understanding of the term has. However, there are several issues that Ricoeur takes with Mannheim's sociology that are key to this analysis.

Most importantly for Ricoeur, is Mannheim's insistence that the utopian mentality seems to be in sharp decline. After discussing his historical utopian types, Mannheim argues, "the historical process itself shows us a gradual descent and a closer approximation to real life of a utopia that at one time completely transcended history" (Mannheim 1936, 248). That is, Mannheim believes that each successive utopian mentality has become less incongruous with reality than the one previous and "that each utopia…manifests a closer approximation to the historical-social process" (Mannheim 1936, 249). Ricoeur believes that because of Mannheim's insistence on incongruity as the measure of utopia, "he must take the elimination of noncongruence as a positive

gain…since it expresses an attempt to cope more closely with social reality (Ricoeur 1986, 281). For Ricoeur this is a major point of contention: where Mannheim seems to be as least somewhat optimistic about this diminishing of utopian mentalities Ricoeur wants to resist this understanding. In fact, I would argue that Ricoeur wants to 'recover' the noncongruence of the utopian mentality, as part of his hermeneutical project. Mannheim, says Ricoeur, "believes that the category of totality has been effaced, and he thinks that his is the main character of our epoch" (Ricoeur 1986, 282). This would explain Mannheim's claim that the contemporary world is "no longer in the making" (Mannheim 1936, 257). However, as we have seen, Ricoeur is looking for tools that will allow us to resist such a totalizing conclusion, to re-insert notes of contingency and allow us to question that 'totalization in process'. In fact, for Ricoeur it would seem that politics would be impossible without such resistance.

However, Mannheim's explicit connection between the utopian mentality and the idea of 'rising' social strata seems to mitigate his claims that utopian mentalities are declining and congruence is the defining feature of contemporary life. Mannheim himself acknowledges the presence in the world of "those strata whose aspirations are not yet fulfilled" (Mannheim 1936, 257), which would seem to render his earlier claim problematic. If the utopian mentality is tied to social strata that are not dominant in the world, doesn't that imply at least the (potential) continued existence of the utopian mentality, of forces and ideas that active work to shatter given political and social structures? Ricoeur insists as much, noting that "today the problems of the Third World would completely shatter this image. Nothing is less true than Mannheim's claim that we

are "in a world which is no longer in the making"" (Ricoeur 1986, 282). Wouldn't the existence of these 'strata' speak to the very issue that Ricoeur claims is fundamental to his project of 'critical hermeneutics': the recovery of alternatives and possibilities that have been suppressed and overlooked by the current configuration of power and authority. While Ricoeur resists the strict compartmentalizing of this process of reinterpretation into specific classes or 'strata', Mannheim's acknowledgement of those unfulfilled aspirations speaks to the very claim that Ricoeur is making: this reinterpretation, this re-engagement with those lost or suppressed aspirations is the very thing that allows us to continually resist that totalization.

For Mannheim, ideology and utopia are related, but contestatory. Utopia is that which works to shatter a given reality, while "the ideological mentality assumes the impossibility of change" (Ricoeur 1986, 175). We must remember, however, that Ricoeur acknowledges the integrating function of ideology, and as such, we cannot posit such a simple relationship: ideology as preserving, utopia as shattering. As Ricoeur notes, "even a historical force that works to shatter the present order also presupposes something else that preserves the identity of a certain group, a certain class, a certain historical situation, and so on" (Ricoeur 1986, 180). Ricoeur wants to hold on to the integrative function of ideology as necessary to the functioning of his notion of utopia, even as this utopian impulse works against the distorting function of ideology, and the totalization that it works to produce. We need to see this utopian 'shattering' as emerging out of that integrative understanding of ideology because it is only through an engagement with those historical traditions that structure a society that a utopian project can emerge.

Dauenhauer writes, "Healthy utopianism does not concoct its aspirations from whole cloth. It constructs them…by drawing on past possibilities that were left unrealized" (Dauenhauer 1998, 317). Otherwise, we run the risk of encouraging "the "pathological" role that Ricoeur grants to utopia – that is, a radical project of social and political change that does not have any basis within the space of experience" (Michel 2015, 138). This pathology can emerge because, for Ricoeur, a utopian project without an historical anchor, runs the risk of losing a sense of collective purpose and common care for one another that adds, for Ricoeur, an important component to the utopian project. As he writes, "the interest in emancipation would be empty and anemic unless it received a concrete content…if it were not confirmed by our capacity to creatively reinterpret our cultural heritages" (Ricoeur 1974, 266). If we cannot locate an emancipatory project within a cultural tradition, and as one that takes its bearings from the dynamics of that tradition, Ricoeur believes that such an abstract movement can have no true political purchase, and hence, no effectiveness. The integrative function of ideology, on the other hand, "can help provide the utopian imaginary with a space of experience and rootedness" (Michel 2015, 136). Lastly, Ricoeur argues that utopia must be rooted in that historical experience of tradition because it is the best way to inspire action. He writes, "We must resist the seduction of purely utopian expectations. They can only make us despair of all action, for lacking an anchorage in experience, they are incapable of formulating a practical path directed to the ideals that they situate "elsewhere"" (Ricoeur 1988, 215). Ricoeur wants to avoid this despair that can come from positing a purely a-historical or non-contextualized utopia because of the difficulty (impossibility) of

realizing such a project. For Ricoeur, the goal of this idea of utopia, is to inspire action: not just a utopian mentality, but a politics as well.

What then, is Ricoeur's utopian politics? For Ricoeur, it involves, "the imagining of an alternative way to use power" (Ricoeur 1986, 192). That is to say, the ultimate goal of Ricoeur's use of the idea of 'utopia' is as a project of imagination (re-imagination) and initiative, the process of acting in the world. But this acting must be seen as emerging from that historical setting in which it emerges. As Dauenhauer writes, "initiative takes place in a historical present, a present that has predecessor presents and anticipated successor presents" (Dauenhauer 1998, 116). Political imagination is nourished by this utopian drive, and, as George Taylor asserts, "the utopian quality of the imagination moves us from the instituted to the instituting" (Ricoeur 1986, xxx). The use of this terminology brings us back to Castoriadis and his project of 'radical autonomy', "the (radical) socially instituting imaginary in contrast with the socially instituted imaginary" (Michel 2015, 133). However, Ricoeur's insistence on the relationship between utopia and the integrative function of ideology produces a fundamental difference. Where Castoriadis insists on a complete break between the 'instituted' and the 'instituting', Ricoeur argues that the two must be seen as part of the same larger structure. He argues for "two functions of the social imaginary. The first moves toward integration, repetition, reflection. The second…tends toward wandering. But you cannot have one without the other." (Ricoeur 2007, 186). Moreover, the production of the new out of received institutions, while seen by Castoriadis as an impossible project, is essential for Ricoeur who acknowledges that, "new social and political imaginary meaning are always

inherited from prior imaginary forms" (Michel 2015, 132). This is possible for Ricoeur because he acknowledges the existence of 'difference' within the received past, where the past is not seen as closed, but as the repository of suppressed possibilities and aborted potentialities. Additionally, where Castoriadis poses autonomous, democratic societies as those that are completely self-creating and self-limiting, Ricoeur believes that "there still persists extra-social sources and what he calls the "residual violence" of political institutions, even in democratic societies" (Michel 2015, 132), which is largely, for Ricoeur, contained in the 'surplus-value' that ideology can confer, even upon the most democratic social conditions, that no society can ever be free of.

Ultimately, Ricoeur argues that history and tradition must be understood as carriers of difference as much as anything else, and it is acknowledgement of that difference that emerges through reinterpretation. Those differences at the heart of received traditions, which are largely the residue of "forgotten possibilities, aborted potentialities, repressed endeavors in the supposedly closed past" (Ricoeur 1988, 227), can be seen as those possibilities for collective life and political community that have been suppressed by the current ideological construction of authority and legitimacy that describe and define the contemporary community. These potentials serve as an animating force for the very utopian project that Ricoeur is looking for, a utopian project that can inspire political action and participation. Through an engagement with those suppressed alternatives, through a reinterpretation of the 'differences' at the heart of all traditions, Ricoeur believes that we can productively, and significantly, re-imagine the distribution of power and authority that shape our political communities, and our collective lives. I

would now like to bring this into dialogue with Wolin in order to clarify his spectral idea of a 'public hermeneutic' as a core element to democratic experience.

VI.   Wolin, Ricoeur, and a Public Hermeneutic

A consistent theme in the work of Sheldon Wolin is his tying of democracy to a process of recovery. In *The Presence of the Past*, he argues that the book "might justifiably be considered essays in retrieval" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 4), and elsewhere he describes democracy as "a political moment, perhaps *the* political moment, when the political is remembered and re-created" (S. S. Wolin 1996, 43). This theme persists even into his most recent work on democracy, *Democracy Inc.*, where he writes about the necessity of "going back for democracy" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 276). In his analysis of Wolin, Scott Nelson deliberately ties this idea of recovery or remembrance to the practice of democracy, arguing that, "this 'will to remember' – to partake in the work of memory – is critical to vital democracy's ethos or its culture" (Nelson 2010). However, much of the commentary on Wolin's work focuses less on this aspect of recovery, and rather draws our attention to how Wolin posits democracy as a creative force: not retrieving *from* the past, but rebelling *against* it. George Kateb argues that for Wolin, "the democratic moment is by its very nature rebellious or revolutionary" (Kateb, Wolin as a Critic of Democracy 2001, 40), and even commentary more sympathetic than Kateb's draws our attention to this same idea. Nicholas Xenos argues that "the democratic moment must be a moment of transgression of boundaries and not a renewal of them" (Xenos 2001, 34). These commentaries are not wrong to emphasize this element of Wolin's democratic theory. Though I argued in the first chapter that Wolin conceptually

distinguishes democracy from revolution, he does bring the two terms close together, and identifies some shared dynamics. In discussing the origin of Athenian democracy, Wolin notes (approvingly) that, "democracy was born in transgressive acts for the demos could not participate in power without shattering the class, status, and value systems by which it was excluded" (S. S. Wolin 1996, 37). This ultimately leads Xenos to make that claim that democracy, for Wolin, is a term that is mean to illustrate how "the striving of the demos challenges and overflows the forms that attempt to contain it" (Xenos 2001, 31). As important as this element is to the unique presentation of democracy that Wolin offers, I believe that to take the full measure of his theorizations, both aspects of his understanding of democracy – recovery and rebellion – need to be thought of together.

Wolin captures this relation when he writes, "The answer is…to reclaim our politicalness. This means not only finding new democratic forms but of recovering an old idea, the idea of Everyman as a morally autonomous agent" (S. S. Wolin 1982, 57). While here, Wolin's idea of recovery is aimed at a very specific political concept, we see throughout his work multiple references to political recovery that is less specific, but seemingly just as important. It is only in a productive joining of the creation of 'new forms' with the retrieval of past ideas, or the recovery of some lost inheritances (recall the discussion of 'birthright' from Chapter One) that we see the full flowering of Wolin's democratic theory. In the first chapter, I attempted to show how Wolin could maintain the relationship only by incorporating (in the limited way he does) the idea of a 'public hermeneutics' into his analysis, as well as conceiving of citizens as 'interpreting beings'. Furthermore, I claimed that because this hermeneutic element drops out of his later work,

the tension between retrieval and creation that animates the heart of his early work is lost, and that loss weakens his project significantly. I would like to demonstrate how a more full engagement with hermeneutics might clarify and strengthen his theory of democracy, and to do so we must first turn to his idea of 'politicalness' or 'the political'. Not only will an examination of these ideas allow us to trace out the hermeneutic potential that is inherent in his democratic theory, but it will help us clarify Wolin's understanding of democracy as "not primarily a set of political institutions but a cultural practice" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 50), or as discussed above, democracy as experience.

At the center of Wolin's conception of democracy is this notion of recovering the 'political' which he defines in *Democracy Inc*. as "the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well-being of the collectivity" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 31). That is to say, Wolin connects this 'coming into being' of this democratic collectivity to the transgressive element of democracy, which is why Wolin goes to great lengths to distinguish democracy as experience from settled forms of political institutions. Wolin writes that "a constitution in setting limits to politics sets limits as well to democracy, constituting it in ways compatible with and legitimating of the dominant power groups in the society" (S. S. Wolin 1996, 34), and rather than seeing democracy emerge from within a constitutional form, he wants to ask, "what of democracy is suppressed by a constitution" (S. S. Wolin 1995)? If democracy is essentially about transgressing boundaries, and a constitution is about establishing and perpetuating a certain set of boundaries, then the two are in constant conflict, and Wolin

urges us to see democracy as a moment that destabilizes and unsettles the instituted forms of power and authority housed within, among other things, constitutions. Or, as he describes the Athenian democratic movement, "The political challenge of the demos inevitable overflowed the customary and institutional boundaries within which elites were attempting to fix politics" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 48).

However, it is not simply destabilizing, it is not simply about questioning or overflowing established barriers. Contrary to Kateb's claim that "Wolin…attributes no creative power to the democratic moment" (Kateb 2001, 40), creativity and innovation play a crucial role. In addition to his concern with 'moments of commonality' as transgressive, he imbues these moments of democratic collectivity with a concern for the creations of new forms of (among others) civility, power sharing, and of "people taking hold of conditions at hand and steadily shaping them to accord with how they think equal beings should live" (S. S. Wolin 1981, 24). This is why, in his essay on revolutionary action, he focuses on John Locke as opposed to other more common thinkers of revolutionary activity. In this discussion of revolution, Wolin wants to assert that "the right to revolt is about devising new institutions…it is about a capacity to share in power, to cooperate in it" (S. S. Wolin 1992, 250). That is to say, Wolin's transgression of given boundaries is done in the service of imagining, proposing, and creating new political conditions and goals. But if all of this, the transgression of old forms as well as the construction of new, is conditioned on the possibility of the creation and recognition of commonality among citizens, we need to ask the question, how does that commonality arise?

We get a sense of this from Wolin himself. He argues that democracy will always be "a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 55). Here, we seem to be returning to Wolin's concern with the historical nature of citizenship that was analyzed in Chapter One. Our memory of moments of collectivity, of the (periodic) historical eruptions of the political seems to be the very condition for its re-emergence. Nelson echoes this claim when he argues that "Wolin articulates a political conception of community that fosters a deliberate tradition-reflective political life, a special conception of what it means to live in a community of shared experience" (Nelson 2010, 38). In his article, Nelson elaborated a conception of political-historical recollection that allows for the 'reconstruction' and 'revision' of the democratic collectivity. While I believe that Nelson's 'tradition-reflective' conception of citizenship is helpful, Ricoeur's deliberate use of interpretation, especially with regard to tradition, gives us a more nuanced understanding of just how this political-historical recollection infuses Wolin's democratic collectivity with an animating purpose and commonality.

As discussed above, Ricoeur understands citizenship, and citizens more generally, as being the inheritors of tradition, which is a term that is not alien to Wolin. Wolin's idea of 'the birthright' means "we come into this world preceded by an inheritance" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 138) and the idea of that inheritance as a tradition permeates many of the chapters in *The Presence of the Past*. Nelson makes the claim that "Wolin intends 'tradition' to be used as a synonym for culture…that community of individuals which cares for a nurtures political values like equality, community, legislative power, the good life, and democracy" (Nelson 2010, 37), however, I think this is too rosy of a claim.

While equality and democracy may be *part* of a tradition, it is not the whole of it. Our tradition also includes constitutional forms (that limit and displace democracy and democratic energies) laws, and a certain distribution of power and authority. These are parts of tradition that are not immediately supportive of those moments of democratic commonality, but instead are concerned with legitimating dominant groups, and perpetuating boundaries that serve elite interests. But then how can this tradition, containing as it does not simply triumphant moments of collective action, but also (primarily) containing moments of elite control and the suppression of democracy, serve to re-animate those collective energies of the demos that Wolin is so concerned with preserving?

Similar to the way I argued that Machiavelli sees the return to principles as a means to inspire powerful political action, I believe that this Ricoeurian idea of tradition can do the same for Wolin's conception of democracy, despite how anti-democratic much of that tradition may be. Ricoeur writes, "Composed of possibilities that are neither chosen nor fettering, but are handed down and transmitted…a heritage is what can be received, taken over, assumed by someone" (Ricoeur 1988, 74). I believe that Wolin's theory allows for the possibility that this tradition can in fact work to produce democratic power, but only if we face that tradition, that inheritance, in a certain way. This is exactly why Wolin "calls for a citizen who can becomes an interpreting being" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 141), because he is worried that a non-interpreting citizenry will fail to see this tradition precisely AS history, as a collection of historical projects that must be critically re-interpreted and re-purposed. Instead, they will see it as a set of institutions that are

largely beyond the power of citizens. A non-interpreting citizen will instead be susceptible to the temptation of what Wolin variously calls 'biblicism' or 'archaism', a mode of understanding our political traditions as containing "privileged moments in the past where a transcendent truth was revealed…steadily distancing contemporary society from its past…that bind the identity of the believers" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 117). While Wolin argues that this archaism produces a sense in the believers of the transcendental, unchanging truth of those moments and the pure forms of those institutions, I believe, that Wolin sees the other side of this archaism as a profound moment of de-democratization and disempowerment. In this sense, Wolin writes about 'demoralization', which he sees as "living continuously and hopelessly in circumstances where one is assailed endlessly by forces that one cannot understand, much less control" (S. S. Wolin 1982, 55), and that eventually the belief in this transcendental truth will lead to a condition of existence characterized by demoralization, as adherence to transcendental truth can only be purchased at the expense of democratic potential and energy. We can see 'demoralization' as perhaps the opposite of 'the political'. One is a condition where people recognize the ability to act in common to create new conditions of existence, whereas the other is a condition where that possibility escapes citizens: rather than collective actors, they see themselves as continually subject to powers beyond their capacities for judgement, action, and change.

In contrast, an interpreting citizen is one who will approach that tradition in a 'critical hermeneutic' manner, who will understand that traditions must be interpreted in order to overcome the alienation and distanciation that exists between the inherited

tradition and themselves, to make and remake the tradition that we have inherited. As Ricoeur writes, "a living reinterpretation of tradition can permit modern societies to resist the leveling to which the consumer society submits" (Ricoeur 1974, 293). The only way that citizens can overcome the condition of 'demoralization' and of de-politicization that in Chapter One we saw Wolin bemoaning, is through a process of 'living reinterpretation. For Wolin's theory, this distanciation allows us to see this tradition as made up of difference, in fact, difference is the essential lens through which the interpreting citizen must see this history that has been inherited. With regard to this history, Nelson writes, "memories of past successes and failures are indispensable to the forms of democratic renewal Wolin hopes can happen" (Nelson 2010, 40), and this is quite close to the definition that Ricoeur gives of tradition: a history that contains "unaccomplished, cut-off – even slaughtered – possibilities" (Ricoeur 1988, 216). But what is it about these 'successes and failures' or these 'unaccomplished possibilities' that are so essential for the continued possibility of democracy? I do not want to argue that Nelson is wrong when he claims that the memories of successes and failures are tools of remembrance that can inspire the emergence of democratic moments of experience, but I believe that reducing this historical component of Wolin's theory to simply remembering past events as inspiration is lacking the full measure of the importance of this process of interpretation.

It is not simply a matter of reviving these successes and failures, or imitating them. Rather, when we see these choices, when we see this difference contained within the past that we are interpreting in order to overcome the distanciation of tradition, we are

presented with the fact that our governing institutions are both *historical* and *ideological*. They are historical in the sense that they are the result of political decisions made in the past and they are ideological in the sense that we can see, following Ricoeur, how they all contain a certain amount of 'surplus power' that is used to fix, and render legitimate a certain distribution of power and authority. This surplus power makes it easy for citizens to "become *disposed*, included in such a way that political authorities can count on their active support most of the time" (S. S. Wolin 1981, 10). This disposition that Wolin theorizes, a disposition that seems to lie at the heart of his concept of 'demoralization' has echoes of Ricoeur's idea that we often feel our historical experience as 'a totalization in process', which Dauenhauer believes can lead to political ossification. By rendering the ideological[52] component of our tradition explicit, we can hope to overcome this tendency toward political ossification, or totalization. This ossification is what Wolin refers to variously as 'Biblicism' or 'archaism', ways of looking at those inherited institutions that "contribute to steadily distancing contemporary society from its past" (S. S. Wolin 2008, 117) by positing the past as transcendental, unchanging, and an ideal form. Just as Wolin wants to see democracy as a means to destabilize political institutions, this reinterpretation of tradition is a means to destabilize the ideological power of that very tradition, opening up space for creative re-appropriation and engagement: the very foundations of Wolin's democratic experience.

What emerges from Ricoeur's process of reinterpreting tradition is the ability for us to imagine a new distribution of power and authority. For Ricoeur, this is the specifically utopian element that is part of the process of reinterpretation: it unmasks the

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[52] Ideological in this sense more in terms of distortion more than integration.

functioning of that ideological surplus value that reinforces the authority of political institutions and, in doing so, provides us with an impulse to "reimagine the boundary line between the possible and the impossible" (Ricoeur 1986, 253). For Wolin, this too is a key element to the democratic potential of citizens, "democracy is committed to the claim that experience with, and access to, power is essential to the development with the capacities of ordinary persons…power is…something to be used collaboratively in order to initiate to invent, to bring about" (S. S. Wolin 1989, 154). The collective engagement with power that is the cornerstone of his idea of 'the political' ultimately has its greatest purpose in the ability for the collectivity to use that power in order to create new forms of collective life: new institutions, and new constitutions that reflect this shared conception of equality or collective rights. In this regard, it is interesting that in his essay "Norm and Form", Wolin assigns to democracy, a "political surplus, the unwillingness of the demos to remain contented with a simple "share" in the major political institutions" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 49). I would argue that this *political* surplus that can be accessed through democratic action is in a sense the redistribution of the *ideological* surplus that Ricoeur sees housed within political institutions so long as they remained ossified, or are experienced primarily as totalized institutions, rather than institutions that are historical, and the result of contingent, provisional decisions. This critical, public hermeneutics allows us to see contemporary distributions of power as not simply natural, or given political phenomena. Instead it is a practice of interpretation that produces "the radical denial that social deference and hierarchy are "natural"" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 50), and that contemporary distributions of power and authority are simply possible ways of

experiencing or navigating power and authority that exist within a *universe* of possibilities: some tried, some not, and some not yet imagined.

Just as these differences within the historical material form, for Ricoeur, the conditions out of which the utopian drive and imagination emerge, it also appears to be an essential part of Wolin's notion of democratic experience. Nelson's claim about historical material as inspiration is important for perhaps understanding the specific material around which commonality can be formed, but it is important that we remember that for Wolin, it is not just about commonality, but it is about commonality in the service of *experiencing power*, and using power to reimagine collective life. The overcoming of distanciation and alienation that Ricoeur attributes to reinterpretation is beginning of a process that is central to Wolin's theory of democracy: the ability for a collective to assert creative power over and against a set of institutions that limit political activity, and largely function to set the boundaries of permissible political activity or claims. By rendering these institutions historical, this process of interpretation allows collective groups to reposess the surplus power that is otherwise alienated to these institutions, and in returning that power potential to the collective, it opens up the possibility for the emergence of democratic experience. A reclamation of creative power that destabilizes the present forms of institutional arrangements by destabilizing the historical traditions that transmit and (if not actively reinterpreted), buttress those very arrangements. The last element of this public hermeneutic that is important for our discussion of Wolin has to do with one of the most unique, and sometimes frustrating elements of Wolin's theory of democracy: the pronounced 'formlessness' that he ascribes to democracy. I wish to assert

however, that, from the perspective of a public hermeneutic, this formlessness is not a weakness, or an oversight, but is essential to the very functioning of democracy.

Wolin variously describes democracy as 'fugitive', 'momentary', and 'episodic', and beyond that, he does not offer very much content to the term itself. In "Norm and Form", Wolin writes that "Democracy…is not so much amorphous as polymorphous" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 50), and he regularly seems to resist thinking of democracy as any type of settled term or idea. This harkens back to his idea of democracy as an experience, and as a "moment rather than a teleologically completed form" (S. S. Wolin 1995, 40). This polymorphous nature to his understanding of democracy has not gone unnoticed. Nicholas Xenos claims that, for Wolin, "Democracy has a protean quality that transcends tradition" (Xenos 2001, 27), and Nelson argues that "Wolin appears reluctant to fill in the 'content' of the *polis* or community…Wolin never supplements the idea of the populace or 'people' with anything more than a generic gloss" (Nelson 2010, 32), and he refers to Wolin's theory as largely ambivalent[53] in how it theorizes these terms and ideas. But this does raise an important question: why does Wolin insist on this ambivalence? Is there something productive to his defining democracy in this way?

One possible answer is that Wolin is reluctant to give much content to the definition of democracy in order to keep focus on democracy's ongoing efforts to transcend institutional forms that are established to contain potential democratic energies. Kateb argues that, with regard to Wolin's theoretical disposition, "institutionalization is the triumph of form over content" (Kateb 2001, 48) and Wolin worries that we could succumb to the widespread belief that "Democracy…is the form of government that has

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[53] Though it should be pointed out that Nelson does not see this ambivalence as a negative trait.

had its revolution" (S. S. Wolin 1992, 240). All of this could lead to a condition where we instinctively see democracy as being effectively housed with a certain set of electoral, constitutional, and institutional arrangements, thereby allowing us to sidestep the very idea of democracy as an experience that transgresses institutional boundaries. Desiring to offer an interpretation of democracy as transgressive and repeatedly tied to (though distinct from) revolution, Wolin might want to resist the temptation to reduce democracy to a clear and concise definition, in order to maintain the tension he posits as existing between settled institutional forms and moments of democratic activity. Nelson seems to echo this possibility when he argues that Wolin "wants to recover aspects of a democratic experience that are at odds with a domesticated democracy, that is, a highly structured *form*" (Nelson 2010, 35), and that is why Wolin relies on these various terms, and staunchly refuses to full them with clear and formal content. Nelson goes beyond this, however, and argues that these amorphous (polymorphous?) terms are important for Wolin because "he sees in them the possibility for critical-reflective energies that can be deployed when priorities shift" (Nelson 2010, 35). That is to say, it is not simply in order to maintain this tension between form and transgression, but that the terms themselves offer a certain purchase when investigating the changing nature of political priorities and goals. While I do not want to dismiss either of these claims, I would like to argue that there is something even more fundamental at work here with regard to Wolin's ambivalent, or polymorphous descriptions of democracy. I would argue that this 'formless' definition that Wolin gives to democracy is related to the very functioning of a

public hermeneutics, and this hermeneutic project draws upon, and is sustained by, this very formlessness.

Much the same way that Wolin's conceptualizes democracy as a moment, and not a 'teleologically completed form', Ricoeur argues that "democracy…is not a finished political form. It is a history that is underway and that we must prolong. It is a form in the making and under contest" (Dauenhauer 1998, 36).[54] This idea of a 'form in the making' is important to both Wolin and Ricoeur, it draws our attention to the idea that democracy is something that is perpetually contestable and changeable, and the various (nearly limitless) demands that democratic movements *can* make, means that tying it to a specific form can only limit those possibilities, and defuse its revolutionary spirit, which Wolin and Ricoeur seem hesitant to do. As Wolin writes, "Others claim that…a revolution against democracy in the name of democracy is a contradiction…as long as a political system is democratic, it makes no sense to think of revolutionary activity as an appropriate or obligatory form of action" (S. S. Wolin 1992, 240). So by giving a concrete form to the idea of democracy means that once that form is established – whether it be universal suffrage, open elections, a welfare state, etc – the tendency would be to believe that the (potentially) powerful, near revolutionary democratic moments should be curtailed, because such activity is no longer necessary nor desirable. This, for Wolin, would be tragic because moments of democratic experience should always be seen as potentially able to congeal against conditions of injustice, or relations of power that have been institutionally established. Because it would be impossible to really

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[54] Dauenhauer gets this definition from his translation of an early essay by Ricoeur, "La Crise de la Democratie et la Conscience Chretienne".

imagine a set of institutions in which settled power relations are completely just and equitable, so too should it be impossible for democratic activity to be severed from its potential. But how exactly could this argument be sustained? What argument can we offer about the potential of democratic experience that supports this openness of form, or this understanding of democracy as a continuous 'form in the making'? Why wouldn't it be enough to assign democracy a set of formal institutions and concerns that can be achieved as a sign of the arrival of a democratic form of government?

I would argue that Ricoeur himself gives us a compelling answer this questions when he defines his hermeneutical understanding of the world. Ricoeur describes existence as an 'unending' process of interpretation because we can never *arrive* at that endpoint, or as Kearney writes, "interpretation remains an ongoing process, which no one vision can totalize" (Kearney 2004, 5). If, for Wolin, (potentially) democratic citizens are 'interpreting beings' and if we take from Ricoeur the idea that interpretation is a never ending process, we can argue that democracy as interpretation, as a public hermeneutic, cannot be tied to a set of institutional forms, because doing so would run the risk of producing a 'totalizing vision' that would disable the type of contestation that hermeneutics provides. Its very openness is tied to the hermeneutic impulse that I see animating Wolin's entire project.

But it is not simply a technical issue that allows us to see why Wolin's formless conception of democracy is important, there is an important political reason as well. Insisting on this formlessness allows for us more assiduously to leave open the possibility of new voices that add to the process of interpretation. Much the same way that Ricoeur's

insistence on interpreting 'difference' into tradition, an insistence on the hermeneutic and political openness of democracy allows for new voices to emerge, voices that can offer new interpretations and new frameworks to contest present political forms. William Connolly argues that one of the consequences of Wolin's definition of democracy is that "it extends old frontiers by drawing new groups, concerns, priorities, supports, or rights into them. Hence, democracy must not be governed too tightly by a prior set of moral principles, constitutional rules, corporate dictates or normative codes" (Connolly 2001, 15). Ricoeur's notion of a critical hermeneutics directs us to much the same claim. Just as Ricoeur argues that interpretation must see difference within tradition, it is essential for us to see interpretation as multiple, and never as a unified process producing a 'totalizing vision' out of that interpretation. As early his writing of *Freud and Philosophy*, he argues that "not one but several interpretations have to be integrated into reflection" (Ricoeur 1970, 54), and later, when defining hermeneutics, he writes, "what the work of reading reveals is not only a lack of determinacy…but also an excess of meaning. For every text…is revealed to be inexhaustible" (Ricoeur 1988, 169). But what does this mean for a public hermeneutics, how can this hermeneutics confront this inexhaustible excess of meaning that can (potentially) be found within the difference we find at the heart of tradition. Andreea Ritivoli, draws our attention to a politics that " draws on the interest and beliefs of groups that are commonly not represented" (Ritivoli 2006, 133), and Dauenheuer argues that a Ricoeurian political ethic derived from this understanding of multiplicity "calls for…people to be hospitable to the memories that foreigners have that are constitutive of the identity and distinctiveness of their culture" (Dauenhauer 1998,

276). While they are both pointing to an important element in Ricoeur's conception, it becomes clearer when we tie these 'excluded groups' or 'foreigners' to this hermeneutic process. The inclusion of new voices or new standpoints in this hermeneutic process will ensure new interpretations, new ways of understanding the difference at the heart of tradition, and new challenges to the distributions of power and authority that emerge from the traditions that are being interrogated.

In Chapter Two I argued that Wolin's dropping of his nascent hermeneutics leads him into a situation where his non-hermeneutic understanding of retrieval moves in a conservative direction that leads him perilously close to the idea of retrieval-as-archaism that he spends a fair amount of *Democracy Inc*. critiquing. Additionally, his notion of democratic 'retrieval' and 'recovery' of 'hard won practices' promises to move his theory toward an undercurrent of the very American exceptionalism that he is so attuned to elsewhere. That is to say, this non-hermeneutical project seems to leave him with a slightly reified conception of the historical material that he is drawing upon, making it difficult, if not impossible, for his project to incorporate alternative historical material. I believe that reasserting and making explicit the hermeneutic side to this project can avoid the conservatism that colors the reification and quasi-archaism. A public hermeneutics that insists on the constant interrogation of tradition can be nourished and sustained when it subsequently insists on the inclusion of new voices and interpretative standpoints from which to interrogate the traditions that we find ourselves the inheritors of. This allows for Wolin's democratic project to break from the strict confines of the state that he begins to succumb to in *Democracy Inc*., and offer a tentative conception of democracy that, while

still primarily concerned with the interrogation of political forms that we associate with states (constitutions, electoral systems) is not fully constrained by them, and as a result can offer a much more robust conception of 'retrieval'. A conception that is nourished by the inclusion of more voices, more opinions, and more attempts to reinterpret the conditions and traditions that give rise to the political institutions that structure our collective lives.

VII. Conclusion

The work of Sheldon Wolin is some of the most powerful work on democratic theory in the contemporary American academy, and I do not wish to undersell the vitality and importance of his efforts. What I have attempted here is what I would call a 'creative re-appraisal' of Wolin's work that is designed not to dwell on certain perceived weaknesses, but to offer an analysis of how those weaknesses can be overcome if we are attentive to, and work to develop, certain 'semi-buried' components of his work. To this end, I have attempted to understand his theory as a hermeneutical undertaking by drawing attention to his use (albeit in a limited way) of the term 'public hermeneutics', and then expanding on this as a robust possibility. Ultimately, by bringing his democratic theory into a more deliberate conversation with the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, I attempt to illustrate how the weaknesses that I believe emerge in his later work can be largely mitigated thanks to this deliberate recasting of his democratic project as a political-hermeneutic project.

In this chapter, I have tried to develop two important features that define this public hermeneutic. The first is the way in which the hermeneutic ties together

reinterpretation and the recovery of tradition with the Wolinian democratic impulse toward the creation of new forms of collective existence, and the transgressing of given boundaries and political and institutional restraints. Wolin's insistence, in *The Presence of the Past*, on citizens as 'interpretive beings' means that any retrieval of the past must involve the Ricourian process of reinterpretation and the active transmission of traditions, which involves actively rethinking and repurposing that tradition. It is a retrieval that challenges inherited forms, rather than simply re-presenting them or maintaining them in a non-dynamic way. Moreover, this form of reinterpretation allows us to see our historical and political traditions not as part of a totalization, or as an ossified vision, but as traditions defined by difference within that tradition. This difference allows us, as democratic actors to 'denaturalize' the given political present, to see within it possibilities for alternative forms for the distribution of power and authority within and throughout society. Much the same way that Ricoeur sees the 'utopian' element of politics arising out of the received historical traditions, by reconceptualizing Wolin's democratic theory as a public hermeneutics, we can also see how his theory ties together these twin processes of recovery and creation.

The second important element has to do with the idea that this hermeneutic process can never arrive at a final endpoint. If the critical element of hermeneutics is to unmask the distorting functions of ideology, we need to admit that we will never be able to arrive at a system free from distortion, and therefore the hermeneutic task, much like Wolin (and Ricoeur's) description of democracy, must be seen as a constant 'form in the making'. Just as the purpose of a public hermeneutic is to resist the 'totalizing' tendency

of political institutions and the traditions that sustain them, hermeneutics itself must resist seeing any interpretation or understanding as similarly totalizing or absolute. This repeated opening up of the hermeneutic task will be nourished with the constant addition of new voices that will offer up new interpretations of those traditions: unmasking novel interpretations of how the surplus-value of ideology is functioning to legitimate political systems and offering new alternatives for how those systems can be refashioned and reimagined. I argue that this hermeneutic task is well suited to Wolin's theory of democracy due to the 'formlessness' that he assigns to the term itself, which allows it to adapt to this constant hermeneutic undertaking. This public hermeneutic, the endless process of reinterpreting and reevaluating the historical material and traditions that are part of our inheritance as citizens, and utilizing those interpretive acts to inspire moments of collective purpose and action that are concerned with reclaiming power and forwarding new patterns of collective life forms an essential component to the democratic theory of Sheldon Wolin, one that strengthens his project: its purpose, and its potential.

Conclusion

In the introduction to his final major work; *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur announces, "I continue to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and forgetting" (Ricoeur 2004, xv). In this dissertation, I attempted to show why exactly that type of concern might be important, because of the impact it might have on citizenship and, more specifically, the potential for meaningful democratic participation in the contemporary world. Ricoeur's concern with memory is especially acute due to his insistence on the ontologically hermeneutic nature of the world we inhabit. History becomes important politically, and collectively, because it is through the interpretation and re-interpretation of history that we are able to take possession of the world that we inherit, overcome the distanciation of inherited tradition, and we are able to make this history into something vital and alive for us.

Even though he is less overt about any concerns he might have for history and memory, Sheldon Wolin voices concerns over the possibility and potential for democratic experience, and for citizens to engage with their democratic and creative potential. I argued that the crisis of citizenship that Wolin is so acutely aware of can be understood more deeply if we integrate his understanding of democracy and democratic citizenship with Ricoeur's concern for history and his focus on the development of a critical hermeneutic. In the end, I argued that Wolin's crisis of citizenship is in fact, a hermeneutic-interpretive crisis. He bemoans the loss of citizens as interpretive beings,

and outlines just how that loss can produce a serious democratic deficit. However, Wolin's democratic theory evolves in such a way that (to a degree) loses sight of that very hermeneutic-interpretive dimension, and this loss has serious consequences for his democratic project overall. Therefore, I attempted to go about the process of reinvigorating Wolin's theory by returning it to the hermeneutical issues that are so central to his crisis of citizenship and that, if we return Wolin to those issues, are able to return his overall democratic theory to its rightful vital and vibrant place.

To show just how these political and historical concerns should more readily be ours as well, I attempted to bring this Wolinian/Ricoeurian crisis into a sustained dialogue with Niccolò Machiavelli, Max Weber, and Cornelius Castoriadis, three thinkers who I would characterize as not being so concerned with the *interpretive* powers of citizens as they are with the *political* powers of citizens: establishing the conditions for principled and meaningful political action is one of the major ambitions that I would argue they all share. However, I attempted to show that if we take Ricoeur's claim seriously about the ontological nature of hermeneutics, none of these thinkers can avoid historical and interpretive issues. Castoriadis, because he divorces political creativity from historical institutions, produces an untenable distinction between active and passive societies that doesn't accurately capture the political dynamics at work in a society that can hinder or help creativity. So even though his symbolic and imaginary understanding of society moves us in the direction of a hermeneutic theory of politics, ultimately his firm insistence on seeing creativity as an ex nihilo product, complicated his project as much as anything.

I argue that Machiavelli and Weber offer a more promising connection between politics and history. Though neither one of them would be classified as hermeneutic philosophers, they each, in their way attempt to link a certain understanding of history with political action. Machiavelli insists on the notion of a return to institutions, which I have argued he uses not just as historical lessons, but as moments of historical inspiration to draw the attention of political actors to their creative political potential. Weber, whom I approached through a reconstruction and elaboration upon his scattered theorization of nationalism offers us a specific form within which we can see this potentially hermeneutic process taking place. The reception of national culture and memories can serve as a means to bring a collectivity together, and draw its attention to the possibility of principled political action, despite Weber's pessimism over the crushing conditions of late-modern life. While both of these thinkers offer valuable steps toward a fruitful elaboration of this hermeneutic process, both are incomplete and tentative steps. Machiavelli because it is difficult to understand just who he sees as the interpreter and the actor in this process, and Weber because, for all that he tries to connect the reception of this historical memory to the potential for activity, he seems to offer a conception where the very context itself is not open to contestation or change.

To overcome these deficits, I draw on the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur to fully flesh out what this public hermeneutic looks like. While maintaining a connection to the historical material that is received by a political community, he insists that any hermeneutic engagement with this tradition is one that needs to not just passively receive these traditions but must actively reinterpret an make them one's own. Thus, a

collective actor can, in a sense, emerge, that brings together the reinterpretation of tradition with the ability for principled political action. This leads us back to the democratic theory of Sheldon Wolin. By integrating this hermeneutic project into his larger democratic theory we are able to see how this notion of interpreting can be put in the service of creative democratic action, both as inspiration and as a constant re-opening of the (fugitive) democratic collective itself. By subjecting tradition and inherited institutions to this constant reinterpretation and reappraisal Wolin's democratic project can emerge in a more robust manner that more easily avoids the pitfalls of his project when it is divorced from this hermeneutic element.

Ultimately, I have attempted to bring together two important philosophic concerns. The first is a concern for interpretation, which Ricoeur, firmly within the hermeneutic tradition, is attentive to and cultivated throughout his career. The second is a concern with political praxis, of action within the political world. I argue that this is the overriding concern of Wolin, Machiavelli, and Weber. What I hope this dissertation has accomplished, to some small degree, is to allows us to better see these two concerns as not disparate ideals, but in fact intimately related. This distinction has a long historical tradition itself. In his famous 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx writes that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Tucker 1978, 145)[55]. I believe that this project combats this prejudice, and in fact seeks to restore an important relationship between the two. In a deliberate echo of

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[55] I do not necessarily want to argue that Marx's project radically separates interpretation from praxis, in fact I think you could argue that Capital is in fact a project of interpretation leading (hopefully) to praxis. I would aruge, however, that various understandings of Marx, and especially this line, have produced an historical tradition that separates praxis from interpretation.

Marx's very famous phrase, Ricoeur wonders, "can we change without interpreting?" (Ricoeur 1986, 70). For Ricoeur, the answer is a resounding no. The two terms are so connected that to even think of them as separate projects is not simply unhelpful, but unrealistic. Ricoeur writes, "Is not the process of interpretation so primitive that in fact it is constitutive of the dimension of praxis" (Ricoeur 1986, 10). Ultimately, my project here is an attempt to do justice Ricoeurs very claim about the nature of interpretation and praxis. By showing how a concern (however hidden) for interpretation, or the connection between memory, tradition, and politics can be seen running though the major political theorists in this dissertation, or, in the case of Castoriadis, severing that connection proves fatal, I hope to draw our attention to just how an interpretive project and a political project can be seen as one in the same. By opening up Machiavelli, Weber, and Wolin to these hermeneutic-interpretive concerns I hope to have demonstrated that our concern for citizens as interpreting beings is essential to our ongoing concern for citizens as political beings, and perhaps, as democratic beings.

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