

# Value, Enchantment, and the Mentality of Democracy: Some Distant Perspectives from Gandhi

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This essay integrates metaphysics, science, politics, political economy, and moral philosophy in order to explore the ways in which some Gandhian ideas, when given a genealogical reading in the dissenting thought of Early Modernity in Europe, might provide a deep basis for (a) diagnosing the religiosity of our own time, (b) making our secular ideals grounded in a more democratic mentality and culture towards such religiosity than modern liberalism permits, and (c) more generally, theorising a much more radical set of Enlightenment ideas than is found in the widespread and dominant liberal orthodoxies of the last 200–300 years of political theory.

My hope, in this essay, is to bring to bear on the curious form of religiosity of our own time and place, some of Gandhi's deeply anti-vanguardist philosophical attitudes towards democracy as well as the instinctive genealogical method he deployed for understanding the society that was given to him in his own time and place.

The essay is not intended as an exposition of Gandhi's thought and I will only write of him in the brief initial philosophical frameworking of the first section; but it is his ideas and his method, to the extent that he had one, that drive the analysis throughout the paper.

## 1

Modern Life is beset with *distinctive* anxieties. That, if true, suggests that the *Early Modern* period of history and intellectual history is an appropriate focus for a *genealogical* diagnosis of the conditions in which and with which we now live and cope. This is a methodological instinct shared by thinkers and sensibilities as diverse as Rousseau, Marx, (T S) Eliot and Gandhi.

I will look to Gandhi among these for my initiating framework because the *seemingly miscellaneous* themes that I want to *integrate* in this paper are all present with something approximating the requisite integrity in Gandhi's ideas. By comparison, Eliot's interests are far too narrow, Rousseau has no real grasp of the colonial condition, and though all the conceptual elements are certainly there in Marx, the abiding disservice done by Althusser's distinction between an early and late Marx makes miscellaneous the very things I want eventually to integrate. But I am running ahead of myself – at this point I merely wanted to briefly motivate my interest in Gandhi's ideas and the urge in him to give them some genealogical depth.

In the first decade of the last century when he wrote his remarkable work *Hind Swaraj*<sup>1</sup> and then later in the next few decades during which he wrote countless substantial despatches to *Young India*, fortifying the ideas in that early work, he was convinced of one thing – that “modernist” ideological voices (like the Hindu ideologue Savarkar's, for instance) were wrong to think that there was something inevitable about the idea that India must go down the path of nationalist modernity that had been set by the post-Westphalian ideal in politics and, equally, that all the voices of the Right and Left around him in the Congress Party and beyond were wrong to think that there was something inevitable about the path in political economy that had been set in Europe in the

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late 17th century. There was passion in his scepticism regarding all these voices as well as a quiet desperation about not losing his people and his country to the future they envisioned.

All this makes poignant his intellectual efforts to understand the cast of mind that made such a future seem inevitable. He wished for an exorcism of such a cast of mind, but for that to happen we would first need to come to some genealogical understanding of it because, on his view, India in his time stood at the sort of cusp that an accurate genealogy would trace back to and properly identify with our term “Early Modernity”, if it was not so laden with the air of forward historical movement towards a teleological end. Were it possible to speak that term in an entirely innocuous and neutral tone, as a pure descriptor of a time in Europe that left it entirely up for grabs which way things would turn out to be, then Indian society was indeed properly describable by the term in the much later chronological time in which he lived.

His own approach to such a genealogy was to ask a question of profound importance, a question whose central theme, he thought, provided the metaphysical basis upon which his more specific economic and political themes were to be integrated. That question was: How and when did the concept of *nature* get transformed into the concept of *natural resources*?

The precise idiom in which I have posed this question is mine, not Gandhi’s. For complicated and ambitious intellectual reasons, he would ask it differently. Like Heidegger, he preferred to talk of the “world” rather than of “nature”. And though, like Heidegger, he must have known that the word “world” was a term of art, he did not want it to be much more abstract and rarefied than is found in our most *ordinary* talk about the world. That is to say, in a crucial commitment, perhaps more Wittgenstein’s than Heidegger’s, he was drawn to the idea of – as Wittgenstein would put it – “leaving the world alone”.

That last phrase (and thought) needs elaborate interpretation and in a way the rest of this essay will obliquely be devoted to it. At first sight, it might give the impression of quietism. That impression would be wrong. Quite apart from the fact that the (far from quietist) Gandhi was an *activist* of unique genius, his view of what the phrase might mean amounted to a wholesale resistance to many of the admired orthodoxies of the Enlightenment.

Let me explain.

It is well known that Gandhi showed a studied indifference<sup>2</sup> to the familiar principles and codes and rights that defined the Enlightenment. Commentators often ask why this was so and give a heart-sinkingly insufficient answer, drawn from a glancing look at some of his least interesting writings – the answer that those things are alien to Indian culture and society.

The real grounds for his indifference went much deeper because on his view all these principles and codes and rights stand supported by a much deeper and more *underlying* commitment that is usually unspoken. Indeed I would go so far as to say that it may be the deepest commitment of the Enlightenment. This is the commitment that though we are capable of bad things, the bad in us can be constrained by *good politics*. Gandhi simply did not believe this.<sup>3</sup>

It was the scepticism, really the pessimism, of an essentially religious person. He thought that it must be the passing of

something akin to religion, the relaxing of the rigours of devotion, that allowed us the false optimism by which we could believe that something as shallow as the political forms that were generated in Europe and America less than a couple of hundred years ago could be enough to make us better; to believe, in other words, that being good *citizens* would set us on a path to being good *people*. And it is not merely that he thought this form of politics to be inadequate in this way, he thought its very aspiration to shape us, hitherto merely people, into citizens of a nation state’s polity, is a form of intrusive impertinence, *inseparable* from the intrusions we have made into nature when we systematically transformed it in our conception into natural resources. This penetrating *conceptual linking* of the metaphysical transformation of the concept of nature and the political transformation of the concept of humanity was vital to his understanding of the distinctiveness of modernity.<sup>4</sup> That is why the slogan “Leaving the *world* alone” better captures the refusal of these transformations and that is why he puts the genealogical question that interested him slightly differently and more ambitiously than I have when I asked the question, how did the concept of nature transform itself into the concept of natural resources.

### Ghettoise Issues

Gandhi would have liked my question and he even implicitly sought an answer to it, but he would have worried that talk of “nature” would ghettoise the issues into merely ecological ones – the point being not to fasten on “nature” in some isolated, self-standing, sense but rather to speak with all the force of the repository that ordinary language provides about nature in a much broader sense that includes within its meaning something like: *nature in its whole range of relations with its inhabitants, and a tradition and history that grows out of these relations*. And to capture this much broader phenomenon of nature he, like Heidegger, spoke of the “world” and he wished for us to bring to the world, so conceived, an entire moral psychology that, I believe, Wittgenstein too gestures towards in that memorable phrase – as something to be “left alone”. His genealogical question, therefore, was not exactly the one I have posed but rather the much larger question: “When and by what conceptual transformation did the ‘world’ cease to be a place merely to live in and become instead a place to master and control?”

Why, then, have I insisted on formulating the question in my narrower and less ambitious way? Because I want now to present the genealogy that answers this question more gradually and patiently than Gandhi did, by situating him in a very specific tradition that illuminates his thought and helps to expound it. In that tradition, a metaphysics about nature in the narrower sense *led up to* – via very deliberate integrations – the larger political intrusions of making us over that made Gandhi anxious, and I want, however briefly, to display the details of the causeway by which this leading up was done in a way that Gandhi’s more encapsulated treatment in his unsystematic, instinctive remarks never really did.

So, finally: what was Gandhi’s answer to the question, as I have posed it? In its most immediate rhetoric the answer he gave put the blame on modern science. Some of the rhetoric by which he did so was crude and conflated, conflating in particular a very

specific *metaphysics* that grew around modern science with *science itself*, which he claimed had desacralised the natural world and thereby made it prey to a technological control that was completely alien to his *Vaishnavite* and ultimately *Bhakti* ideals in which the human soul flourished only because the human body it suffused was quite continuous with the *spiritually suffused natural environment* it inhabited.

I want to now rotate the angle of this thought to a quite distant place and intellectual history of which Gandhi had no detailed knowledge but with which he had extraordinarily detailed affinities. I make this shift because my eventual theme in this paper will be the democratic culture of the west, in particular the implications for democracy of the religiosity in the American heartland of the last several decades. To come to that subject, one needs a genealogical excavation at another site than India in the early 20th century when (and where) Gandhi wrote. We need to turn to Early Modernity in Europe that Gandhi thought was in fundamentals not dissimilar in its mentality and its materiality to Indian life around him, providing its people with the same crucial choices for their future as the choices that confronted his own people in his own time.

For the sake of focus, I will restrict myself to mid and late 17th century England.<sup>5</sup>

I repeat that on his lips and pen, the question and the anxiety about the transformation of the concept of nature into the concept of natural resources was an essentially religious person's question and anxiety. But my claims in this paper will aim for something more general in aspiration since I think it is a question that any of us might ask with no particular sympathy for the notion that religious people alone can feel a sense of anxious loss in that transformation. With this aim of generality in place, let me, then, turn to saying something to situate the *very issues* that Gandhi was raising in a more secular idiom and philosophy than his, stressing more the notion of *value* in nature than the notion of the *sacred* or the spiritual in nature, which was the dominant theme for Gandhi as well as his antecedents in 17th century English dissent in which I will situate him.

## 2

To motivate the more secular version of Gandhi's ideas about nature, I will appeal to a more abstract form of philosophical argument than anything found in Gandhi.

There is an acute philosophical insight – to be found more or less explicitly in Spinoza – that one cannot both *intend* to do something and *predict* that one will do it at the same time.<sup>6</sup> This insight generates, in its turn, a very basic philosophical distinction between two points of view. When one predicts that one will do something, one steps outside of oneself and looks at oneself in a detached way as the object of causal and motivational histories, just as someone else might look at one, and so this might be called a “third” person point of view. But when one intends to do something, one is not a *detached observer* of oneself, one is asking and responding to the question “what should I do?”, one is an *agent*, in the “first” person point of view. If this is so, then it is an implication of Spinoza's point that one cannot both intend and predict at the same time, that one cannot both take the first person point of view on oneself and the third person point of view on oneself

at the same time. We *can* occupy both points of view but we *cannot* occupy both points of view at once.

Spinoza's interest in this distinction is in how it holds as two contrasting perspectives *on ourselves*. But I want to argue, by extension, that there is an *exactly similar distinction* that can be made, not on our perspective on ourselves, but on our perspective on the *world*. We can have a detached perspective on it, a perspective of study as is found in natural science, and we can have a perspective of agency on the world, one of responding to it with practical engagement rather than with detached observation and explanatory purpose. (The point is not that we are not agents when we are studying the world in a detached way, but that we are taking a perspective of detachment on it rather than one of practical engagement.)

An absolutely crucial question arises, then: what would the world have to be like for it to not merely be the object of detached study but something that *prompts* our practical *engagement*? What must the world contain such that it moves us to such engagement? One obvious answer is that it contains *values* and when we perceive them, we respond with our practical agency. Why should values prompt such a response rather than a response of detachment? Because values, by the sorts of things they are, make *normative* demands on our agency, demanding not explanation from us but action. So, this perceiving of evaluative properties in the world, given the sort of things they are, is always and *necessarily* perception from the first person perspective, not just as in Spinoza, where that is a perspective on ourselves, but a first person perspective on *the world*.

Thus, if we extend the implications of Spinoza's insight as I have, we get a picture of values in which values are not *merely* something *we* create and “project” onto the world (a favourite metaphor of David Hume's, implied also by the views of Adam Smith on the subject of values) but they are (or at any rate often are) things that are found *in the world* – as I said earlier, a world of nature, of others who inhabit nature with us, and of a history and tradition that accumulates in the relations among these, and within which value is understood as being “in the world”.

### Sanitised Ethical Picture

Such an extension of Spinoza's view gives an argument for a somewhat sanitised Aristotelian ethical picture as it is read by interesting recent scholars such as John McDowell,<sup>7</sup> and it allows one to finesse the interminable dispute of the last few centuries between the followers of Kantian conceptions of morality on the one hand and those of Adam Smith and Hume on the other, taking a stand against the former by placing values and agency squarely in the ordinary perceptible world of “phenomena” (rather than “noumena”) which we inhabit and perceive, and against the latter by insisting that values are not merely a matter of our desires and moral sentiments but are part of the world around us to which our desires and moral sentiments are formed as responses. And, if values are part of the world, including nature, it follows that the world, including nature, contains things that are not countenanced and explained by natural science – a secular re-articulation of the sacralisation of nature that Gandhi thought essential to resisting the universal reach and sway of the outlook of science upon nature and the world.<sup>8</sup>

We can now raise our version of the genealogical question that so interested Gandhi: why has this very natural way of thinking about values as being in the world, including nature, found so little place in the history of thought about value in the last few centuries of philosophy? The answer to this question, at its deepest, lies outside of philosophy itself, at least as it is understood narrowly and as I have done it in the last few paragraphs; it is found in one central intellectual strand in our *cultural* history, in a phenomenon that can be traced, using a term that Weber put into currency, to describe it: “disenchantment”. For many centuries this natural way of thinking about values as being in the world that I have presented within the secular terms of my own atheistic intellectual orientation, had its source in the presence of a divinity which was, in many a view, itself immanent in the world. And it is this source which was undermined in the modern period that Weber described (somewhat crudely and omnibusly) with that term and, as a result of its undermining, the very idea that value could be in the world was replaced by the idea *either* that values were grounded in and therefore, in the end, reducible to our desires and moral sentiments and could only by our projection be thought as being in the world (Hume and Adam Smith), *or* that they were not in the world at all but in a noumenal realm of pure will and practical reason (Kant).

### Widespread Tendency

There is a widespread tendency, which is understandable ever since Nietzsche’s celebrated slogan, to put this point about disenchantment in terms that summon the image of the “dead Father”. But there are pitfalls, if one does so without care. This carelessness is rampant in the current revival of tired Victorian debates about the irrationality of belief in a God and in his creation of the universe in six days a few thousand years ago. It is a common thread in the recent 400 page tree-killers<sup>9</sup> which pour scorn on such irrational beliefs that they view them in terms of one’s continuing immaturity, one’s persistence in an infantile reliance on a father, whose demise was registered by philosophers (Nietzsche, but Hegel before him) much more than a century ago, one’s abdication of responsibility and free agency in the humbling of oneself to an authority that is not intelligible to human concepts and scientific explanations.

What goes entirely missing in this simplistic picture is the intellectual as well as cultural and political *pre-history* of the demise of such an authority figure.

Well before his demise, brought about I suppose by the scientific outlook that we all now admire and which is rightly recommended by the authors of these tedious tomes, it was science itself and nothing less than science, which far from registering his demise, proposed instead in the late 17th century, a quite different kind of fate for the Father, a form of *migration*, an *exile* into inaccessibility from the visions of ordinary people to a place outside the universe, from where, in the now more familiar image of the clockwinder, he first set and then kept an inert universe in motion. And it is the theology and politics and political economy surrounding this de-ration of God from the world of matter and nature and human community and perception that is worth expounding in some detail so as to understand its large and abiding effects.

There is no Latin expression such as “Deus Deracinus” to express the thought I want to expound. The closest we have is “Deus Absconditus” which, though it is meant to convey the inaccessibility of God, conveys to the English speaker a fugitive fleeing rather than what I want to stress – the idea that it is from the roots of nature and ordinary perceptible life that God was quite assiduously removed. “Racine” or roots is the right description of his immanence in a conception of a sacralized universe, from which he was torn away by the exile to which the metaphysical outlook of early modern science (aligned with thoroughly mundane interests) ushered him.

There is no understanding the infantilism of our current religious yearnings that does not acknowledge the significance of these intellectual developments of that earlier period.

The world from which he was exiled, no longer, as result of that exile, an *anima mundi*, was then assiduously argued to also be no longer something to which we were answerable in our moral agency. All value came instead from us, it owed to nothing but our utilities and gain, and even when there was an acknowledgement of our capacity for sympathy and moral sentiments this was not seen as our responsiveness to the normative demands of a world suffused with value, but something that we (in Hume’s and Adam Smith’s metaphor) *projected* onto the world and which, as that idea was developed in the tradition that followed, we kept under the control of the demands of efficiency and consequence and utility.

Why one might ask, should the fact of the Father’s exile to an external place as a clockwinder have led to an understanding of the universe as wholly brute and altogether devoid of value? Why was it not possible to retain a world laden with values that were intelligible to all who inhabited it, despite the unintelligibility and inaccessibility of the figure of the Father? Why must value require a sacralized site for its station, without which it must be relegated to proxy, but hardly proximate, notions of desire and utility and gain?

### Sacred Source

It might seem that these questions are anachronistic, suited only to our own time when we might conceivably (though perhaps not with much optimism) seek *secular* forms of *re-enchanting* the world. One cannot put them, at least not without strain and artificiality, to a period in which value was so pervasively considered to have a sacred source. The removal of such a source in that period, to inaccessibility, was bound to leave the world configured in one’s conception as merely brute, subject to nothing but causal laws, bereft of value, reducing value itself to either utility or to subjective psychological dispositions summarised with such terms as “desire” or “utility”, or, when aspiring to the moral, as “sympathy”, and “sentiment”. But even if we cannot put these questions to a world view which was, by our thoroughly modern lights, restricted to fewer conceptual options, we can ask a diagnostic question about what forces prevented the *development* of, the coming to be of, the idea I have in my own brief sketch derived from Spinoza and extended onto the world: the idea that the world is *enchanted* with evaluative properties whose normative demands on us, even if now thought of in purely secular terms, move our first person point of view to a responsiveness

into moral agency? The diagnosis has many elements and needs more patient elaboration than I can give in a short paper, but here are some of its elements.

I have said that my (somewhat grotesque) neologism “Deus Deracinus” would have served the thought I want to express best, but the word we have “Deus *Absconditus*” in another respect suggests something of what I want to capture. The phrase, quite apart from standing for the inaccessibility of God that was insisted upon by the late 17th century ideologues of the Royal Society, conveys a certain anxiety that lay behind their insistence. “Conditus” means, “put away for *safeguarding*”, with the “abs”-reinforcing the “awayness” and separateness or inaccessibility of where God is safely placed. So, we must ask why should the authority figure need safeguarding in an inaccessibility, what dangers lay in his immanence, in his availability to the visionary temperaments and capacities of all those who inhabit his world? And why should the scientific establishment of *Early Modernity* seek this safekeeping in exile for a Father, whom its successor in *late*, more mature, modernity would properly describe as “dead”?

There are three things to observe at the very outset about this exile of the Father for some 200 years until Nietzsche announced his demise.

First, intellectual history of the Early Modern period records that there was a remarkable amount of dissent and very explicit dissent against the notions that produced the exile, dissent by a remarkable group of intellectuals, who were most vocal first in England which is my focus, and the Netherlands, and then elsewhere in Europe.<sup>10</sup> Second, there was absolutely nothing unscientific about these freethinkers or their dissent. They were themselves scientists, then, of course, called natural philosophers, fully on board with the new science and the Newtonian laws, and all its basic notions, such as gravity, for instance. They (who did not make the conflation that Gandhi did) were only objecting to the *metaphysical* outlook generated by official ideologues around the new science, who began to dominate the Royal Society, in which the neo-platonist Newton of his private study was given a quite different official face by people such as Boyle and Samuel Clarke, a public move in which Newton himself acquiesced. And third, the metaphysical outlook of the dissenters was suppressed and the Royal Society ideologues won out and their metaphysics became the orthodoxy, not because of any superiority, either metaphysical or scientific, but because of carefully cultivated *social factors*, that is to say, because of the alliances they formed with different groups such as the Anglicans on the one hand and the commercial and mercantile interests of the time, on the other.<sup>11</sup>

It is this exile of God, which had the effect of rendering the universe brute and inert, that implied the transformation of an ancient and spiritually informed conception of nature into the sort of thing that was available now for predatory extraction by commerce and the elites that grew around it. It is not that extraction (on a much smaller and less systematic scale and with a much lower profile) did not take place until then, but in a wide range of social worlds, such extracting as occurred was accompanied by rituals of reciprocation intended to restore the balance as well as show respect towards nature, rituals undertaken after cycles of planting and even hunting. From Weber, we are familiar

with the idea that capitalism was an outgrowth from certain attitudes towards work and economy, but of far greater transformational significance was the way in which a desecralized conception of the world made it prey to a scale of unthinkingly ruthless extraction in the form of mining, deforestation, and the kind of plantation agriculture which we today call agribusiness. I have written of this elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> What I want to stress now is not merely the predatory commercial attitudes towards nature that surfaced with these metaphysical changes, but other sorts of consequences that the exile of the Father had on the scope for a *democratic* culture that developed in that period.

### Thinking about the Corporeal Realm

In the great revolutionary decade of the 1640s in England, almost half a century prior to our scientific dissenters, Gerard Winstanley, the most well known among the radicals had declared that “God is in all motion” and “the truth is in every *body*”.<sup>13</sup> This way of thinking about the corporeal realm had for Winstanley, as he puts it, “a great levelling purpose”. It allowed one to lay the ground, first of all, for a democratisation of religion. If God was everywhere, then anyone may perceive the divine or find the divine within him or her, and therefore may be just as able to preach as a university-trained divine. The significance of this is not to be run together with the cliché about the Protestant reformation’s sustained opposition to the priest craft enshrined in popery. That opposition was chiefly generative of a pious and possessive individualism via its demand for an individualistic relation to God, finessing institutional demands of Catholic forms of piety, whereas the resistance of the radical sectaries was a resistance precisely to the orthodox Protestantism that had emerged out of that opposition to popery; and this radical resistance came from a desire not to join these orthodoxies in their individualism but rather out of a desire to allow for the democratic availability of the knowledges of value by which *governance* could be as collective as possible so as to match their ideal of possessing and cultivating the common collectively. Winstanley’s opposition to the monopoly of so-called experts was, therefore, by no means restricted to the religious sphere. Through their myriad polemical and instructional pamphlets, he and a host of other radicals had reached out and created a radical rank and file population which began to demand a variety of other things, including an elimination of tithes, a levelling of the legal sphere by a decentralising of the courts and the elimination of fee lawyers, as well as the democratisation of medicine by drastically reducing, if not eliminating, the costs of medicine, and disallowing canonical and monopoly status to the College of Physicians.

The later scientific dissenters were very clear too that these were the very monopolies and undemocratic practices and institutions which would get entrenched if science, conceived in terms of the metaphysics of the Newtonianism of the Royal Society, had its ideological victory.

Equally, that is to say, conversely, the Newtonian ideologues of the Royal Society around the Boyle lectures administered by Samuel Clarke saw themselves – without remorse – in just these conservative terms that the dissenters portrayed them in. They explicitly called Toland (to name just one) and a range of other scientific

dissenters, “enthusiasts”, a term of opprobrium at the time, and feared that their alternative picture of nature and matter was an intellectual ground for the social unrest of the pre-Restoration period when the radical sectaries had such great, if brief and aborted, popular reach. They were effective in creating with the Anglican establishment a general conviction that the entire polity would require orderly rule by a state apparatus around a monarch serving the propertied classes and that this was just a mundane reflection, indeed a mundane *version*, of an *externally* imposed divine authority which kept a universe of brute matter in orderly motion, rather than an *immanently* present God in all matter and in all persons, inspiring them with the “enthusiasms” to turn the “world upside down”, in Christopher Hill’s memorable, eponymous phrase. To see God in every body and piece of matter, they anxiously argued, was to lay oneself open to a polity and a set of civic and religious institutions that were beholden to popular rather than learned and scriptural judgment. So the frontal attack in the late 17th century on the scientific dissenters’ metaphysics of a sacralized world was motivated not just out of the consideration I have already discussed in my work elsewhere on Gandhi – freeing nature for the extraction by newly emerging capital – it was motivated by an anxiety to prevent at all costs this epistemic or *cognitive* democratisation that had made the revolution of some decades earlier such a threat to this newly emerging alliance of interests between the scientific establishment, the Anglican church, the commercial interests and the oligarchies developing the statecraft needed to pursue these interests together.

It is these alliances brought together by these anxieties, which ensured that the exile of the Father from his immanent presence strictly entailed that a desacralized world would contain no residual evaluative properties that might provide alternative, more secular sources of enchantment.

### Metaphysical Origins

To repeat, it did so first with the argument that ideas of enchantment would prove an obstacle to taking what one could with impunity from nature’s bounty. Not merely the seemingly ineradicable inequalities but the cultural detritus and psychological desolation of the economic culture that emerged from this over the centuries are with us everywhere, and I bring no news in saying so – except in having insisted that it had its metaphysical origins in an early modern exile of the Father, long prior to his death, a point which makes a great difference to how we should understand the charges of infantilism that are made against our current religiosity that still seeks reliance on the authority of the Father. And second it braided this economic culture inseparably with a political outcome supported by the quite different argument that I am stressing in this paper, the argument that the priestcraft emerging from scripturally trained and learned divines from the universities that were needed to comprehend an exiled deity, unavailable to the perception and comprehension of ordinary people, was to be integrated – by the very same alliances – with the elite possession of the *cognitive and informational* sources of power *quite generally*, whether in matters of law or medicine or the offices of government and administration. The idea that values to live by are available in the ordinary perceptions of a desacralized world we inhabit

would demote these knowledges to something more arcane, by making the sources of political morality much more democratic, an anti-vanguardist conception of value that in a global tradition of radical dissent goes from Winstanley to Gandhi.

It was precisely the threat of the democratisation of value that was arrested in the Early Modern developments I have been stressing, and it was replaced instead by the ideals of civility generated by the courts of a monarch and the propertied classes, a phenomenon well studied by Norbert Elias, though I would add one crucial functional gloss – part Freudian and part Nietzschean – to his illuminating survey of their historical importance.<sup>14</sup> These courtly civilities did not merely contrast with the rude social turmoil of a brute populace, they formed themselves into a screen that had the function of hiding from the early modern European courts themselves, the cruelties of their own perpetration, recognising cruelty as the sort of thing that can only really occur in the lifestyles and the behaviour of the rude populace. And, as I have argued elsewhere, this screening function morphed from its site in the ideals of civility in the Early Modern period into the site of the codifications of rights and constitutions in the orthodox liberal frameworks of late western modernity, which, despite all the great good they have done and are deservedly admired for, similarly hide from the west the cruelties of its own perpetration on distant lands, allowing the west to recognise cruelties only in those distant societies (Saddam’s Iraq, the Ayatollahs’ Iran, Mugabe’s Zimbabwe...) where they are unaccompanied by the concealing formalities of such liberal codifications. This was partly at least the source of Gandhi’s indifference to what is widely cherished in liberal doctrine.

### 3

Once the full detail and scope of this combination of elements of a disenchanting world brought about by the exile of the Father are fully understood, it is worth looking at some of the reactions in our own times to its cumulative effects, which in some parts of the world might rightly be described as having the proportions of a backlash and in which, as the point is often made at length by our contemporary atheists, there is an infantile regression to and submission to a dead father. An appreciation of the analysis of the detailed effects of his *exile* in an *earlier* period should, I am claiming, make no small difference to how we are to understand this “irrational” failure in our own times to acknowledge his subsequent death. So, I want to now to address not something that everyone seems to be obsessed by – the Islamist rage against what is perceived by it to be a pernicious modernism of western society – but to the pervasively conservative religious ethos in the heartland of America about which, given this long historical analysis, it ought, at least as a *first thought*, be utterly natural to say that it is (at least partly) a reaction to this slowly accumulated disenchantment, a way of seeking solidarities and community in a disenchanting world.

Two protests will be made to this natural thought – no doubt by a shrill liberal orthodoxy which seems these days perpetually poised to defend its own self-congratulatory ideals.

First, it will be said, that it is nothing of the sort because the phenomenon has to a considerable extent been carefully

engineered by the Republican Party ever since the Goldwater defeat, as a way of building a constituency for its own success. But the rightness of this protest does not refute the claim that there was something for such an engineered phenomenon to tap, something in the yearnings of people, and it is those yearnings, I am claiming, that are natural to see as a reaction to the cumulative effects of disenchantment.

Second, it will be protested, again with some justification, that western Europe is part of that disenchanted world, as you have described it, and it has nothing like the same kind of pervasive religiosity. To this a plausible rejoinder might be to observe that in Europe, the natural human yearnings for solidarities and community had long found measurable fulfilment in an entrenched social democratic tradition of labour politics and the active presence of unions in the everyday lives of ordinary people, something only fitfully present and present only in some parts of America and at present faded almost to non-existence, even where they once had life.

I do not intend this rejoinder to the second protest to be offering the sort of explanation offered in President Barack Obama's remark during his presidential campaign that got him into all that trouble – that working people in America have turned to religion out of poverty and deprivation. That remark, put as simply as that, seemed to deny genuine agency to working people and their religious commitments. What I am saying instead is this: human beings have a natural tendency to seek substantial bonds that make for an unalienated life. Family life is not always sufficient to satisfy this tendency, nor are bowling alleys, as some American social scientists have claimed, since the needs, as Thoreau pointed out long ago, are for something which is socially substantial as well as politically central and significant, rather than merely recreational.<sup>15</sup> What the church and its pulpit offered in Early Modern Europe transformed itself there into a social democratic labour politics in Late Modernity, a politics that itself grew out of non-conformist religious traditions. For reasons that may have something to do with the fact that predominantly immigrant populations seek not social activism but assimilation in the political economy and the political establishment, such a tradition of politics never developed to the same extent and with the same depth in America. As a result the church continued to provide the chief source of satisfaction for such a substantial human need.

### Lack of Self-knowledge?

But I want to worry a little more about my rejoinder, which sees this conservative religiosity as really a yearning for something that could just as easily have secular outlets too, as in Europe (but given what is available in middle America, is provided not at sites such as labour unions, but rather the church). Though I do think the rejoinder, properly placed in agency-unthreatening context, is plausible, it has to be carefully formulated because one does not want to withhold transparency or self-knowledge from the actors one is discussing; and saying that their religiously formulated convictions are really a front for something else, yearnings and values of a much more general kind that could have just as easily been fulfilled in entirely secular forms, as in Europe, comes close to just such a denial of self-knowledge (and therefore full agency) to

them. This point is of some importance to what I want to say later. What I mean by lack of self-knowledge and transparency is this. If, as I am suggesting, the European case is different from America because of the availability to ordinary people of a tradition of different sources and sites than religion to fulfil the yearnings for solidarity and community, then one is in danger of saying that ordinary people in America, even though they do not know this about themselves, have the same yearnings as those of ordinary people in Europe, yearnings that are not transparent to themselves, because the only sites available to them to fulfil these yearnings are religious sites, and so all they acknowledge are the more religiously formulated yearnings they explicitly avow. This will seem to many to be analogous to saying what has also often been said, viz, that even the most bourgeois of working class populations really have revolutionary yearnings, even though they have no explicit consciousness (that is to say, no *self-knowledge*) of these yearnings of theirs, since what they explicitly avow is only their economic or bourgeois aspirations. I give this example deliberately to bring into focus the crudest and perhaps the most implausible version of the idea of false consciousness. The issues here are complicated and my task for most of what follows in this section will be to find a way of making the points I want to make about the democratic mentality so that no such transparency-threatening or self-knowledge-denying and therefore, in the end, agency-threatening version of false consciousness is being assumed – but even so something is being acknowledged about these deeper longings of ordinary people.

To explore how this balance might be achieved, let us focus on the hardest case, a particularly egregious manifestation of the reactionary aspects of the religiosity we are discussing. It is well known that in polls until fairly recently, a large majority of Americans were in favour of waging wars against both Afghanistan and Iraq, and a lot of these warmongering attitudes were voiced within an overall conservative religiosity in so-called “red states” America. How shall we think of this?

Well, I have to say, I was struck by how a lot of people on the liberal left were thinking about it, which can be summed up by a closing remark of an op-ed I recall reading in some magazine of progressive politics after the presidential election of 2004, which described the electorate of the red states as “vile and stupid”. I cannot now lay my hands on this piece but I am sure I have conveyed its meaning correctly and sure even that I have each of the three words I cite from my recollection perfectly correct. The casualness of my reference hardly matters since anyone who was alert to what was being written and said in the aftermath of those elections would know that similar remarks were an absolutely pervasive response to their outcome, not only among the liberal pundits but quite generally among the chattering metropolitan liberal and “progressive” elites. I say I was struck by this response because, on the face of it, such an attitude is simply incompatible with a belief in democracy. You cannot believe in democracy and dismiss the electorate of more than half of the country as a moral abomination. Winston Churchill, whose thinking on civil, rather than military, matters was feeble, is said to have pronounced that democracy was a terrible form for a polity to adopt and the only reason to adopt it was that all other forms were more terrible. But

I do not get it. Why would one choose democracy over, say, enlightened monarchy, if one thought ordinary people of the electorate to be vile and stupid, and thought a single man or woman to be of great moral judgment and worth? Perhaps Churchill and others who say things like that have in mind that at least democracy allows people the autonomy to choose their government, even if they consistently choose with their vileness and stupidity, governments which wage wars, cut taxes for the rich, create a large handful of billionaires at the expense of millions of ordinary, working people...But why should we fetishise such a species of autonomy that reduces to a mere formal property if it should turn out that it will always, given the moral weaknesses of the electorate which exercises it, result in, what by our own lights, are morally deplorable verdicts?

### Central Paradox in Idea of Democracy

We are faced, then, with a central paradox in the very idea of democracy, at least as central as the more familiar paradox of majoritarian tyranny, the paradox of how one can both believe in democracy and the indescribable moral badness of the electorate.

How might we address such a paradox?

When “progressive” responses find it natural to blame people before they examine and criticise the institutions that affect them, there has been a measurable departure from the great traditions of democratic dissent that gave rise to some of the more radical ideals of the Enlightenment. Those traditions allowed no such chasm between “progressive” ideals and the mentality of democracy, that is to say a mentality of *trust in the judgment of ordinary people* – and by “ordinary people” I mean people away from the centres of power and privilege (I have no desire to underestimate the vileness of those who are close to centres of power). How can that trust be *genuinely felt* by progressive opinion towards an electorate whose decisions they deplore and whose conservative religiosity we often find at odds with our most basic political commitments? Much can turn on the answer to this question.

The issues here are in a sense very obvious and I have already hinted at what they are in describing the details of the alliances that first formed the process of disenchantment, but we can approach the obvious by looking at a case far away. Take Saudi Arabia, in which even just five or six years ago, there was hardly any explicit conflict within a docile population. Many factors no doubt were responsible for recent changes, but one most salient and dramatic factor was without a doubt the extraordinary impact of one television station on ordinary citizens, injecting conflict into Saudi Arabian society by the most basic service of providing information of just how much the country was run by a corrupt and self-serving state and its power elites. And this impact is by no means restricted to Saudi Arabia.

The implications of this for how to diagnose the situation in the us should now be obvious. By contrast with Al Jazeera, the mainstream media in America (that is, the media which is read and viewed by ordinary people, who are too busy making a basic living to seek information out at non-standard sites), is cravenly unwilling to provide the most basic information about their government’s actions, and the consequences of those actions, not to mention the actions and consequences of the governments

elsewhere that it supports. And the point is not just about media and information but much more broadly and pervasively about subtle forms of internalisation of pervasively orthodox and uncritical thinking on public matters from very early on in the mainstream educational institutions. I am focusing on the institutions of media and education in my diagnosis, but the point goes really much deeper and further, indeed all the way back to such elements as the codifications of civilities into liberal form which conceal from ourselves the effects of our policies on distant lands, the deliberate failure to remove epistemic deficits by allowing for a more democratised *cognitive* public sphere, etc, that the radical sectaries and the scientific dissenters had foreseen when they predicted the disastrous effects of the scientific, religious, and mercantile alliances that were forming all around them to corner all the cognitive and commercial bases of power for the propertied elites.

All this suggests the obvious point that ordinary Americans have all the moral strengths that ordinary people in Europe or any other place have, its weakness in comparison to other people, is rather *epistemic*, not moral. In fact, I think one can state it as something like the First Law of Political Psychology that “One cannot exercise such moral strengths that one has, if one is pervasively epistemically weak”, weak on information, and information, not just in the narrow sense, though that is bad enough, but also in the broader sense of having easily available in one’s education and cognitive lives generally, alternative frameworks for thinking about politics, political economy, and public life.<sup>16</sup>

### Conceptual and Methodological Issues

But it is precisely here that a question will be raised about whether I am not, in attributing moral strengths to the very electorate whose moral and political verdicts I find wholly wrong, assuming a discredited notion of false consciousness, somewhat akin to historical materialism’s dismissal of the proletariat’s bourgeois aspirations as a spurious state of mind on the grounds that such a class by its objective historical status in a particular economic formation in a particular period of history, had revolutionary consciousness, its true consciousness, which was screened off from it by thick layers of falsifying ideology. The conceptual and methodological issues here are delicate and have to be handled with some care. First of all, I want to insist that I am making a conditional claim: *if* you believe in democracy, you must have confidence in the underlying strengths of ordinary people, over and above respecting their autonomy of choice. But quite apart from the conditional modesty of the claim, what is needed to make the claim grounded in a plausible argument is not merely to say that I am possessed of some objective theory of the moral judgment and capacities of ordinary people, *no matter what they say or do*. I do not believe in that form of objectivity, and it is not even so obvious that Marx consistently believed that he possessed an objective theory of history and class (“historical materialism”) such that the proletariat must be said to have an underlying true revolutionary consciousness no matter what bourgeois aspirations were reflected in their sayings and doings.

I think that a proper understanding of Marx’s ideas about false consciousness can only be had by a proper placing of them in a

Hegelian dialectic which, of course, he explicitly endorsed and made his own, and which makes central appeal to the notion of *internal conflict* – a point that I have been stressing for many years now in my writing on secularism. Some of the misleading commentary on Marx, which has made it more and more difficult to situate him in this methodology, is due to a spurious distinction often made between the early and late Marx. I do not want to get into the detail of such Marxian exegesis, more than just registering the disservice done to Marxian interpretation by Althusser's move in making that distinction so central to such interpretation. Rather than focusing on the details of such disputation in the reading of Marx, let me present the analysis I want to make by exploiting the more Hegelian method I want to stress in Marx's elaboration of the notion of false consciousness. Having mentioned Hegel, I will say immediately that his method will be most clearly and briefly displayed if I invoke ideas of internal conflict not via an exposition of Hegel himself, in whose work the ideas are buried in a gratuitous ontology, but quite another kind of thinker, Freud; and in doing so, the goal will be to make explicit how I think we can, within Marx's general ideas about their false consciousness, *preserve* the transparency and self-knowledge and agency in the attitudes of ordinary people.

This may seem perverse. How, it might be asked, can I appeal to Freud to preserve the idea that there is nothing unconscious and opaque or non-transparent about the attitudes that amount to the moral strengths I am attributing to ordinary people?

In response, what I would like to bring to the centre stage is a distinction within the Freudian framework between two quite different aspects of its overall understanding of the mind and its pathologies.<sup>17</sup>

The first is a *structural* hypothesis that is presupposed in the very idea of the explanation of "irrational" behaviour, in one sense of that term.

The second is a series of *empirical* hypotheses about these hypothesised structures. This broad methodological distinction between the structural and empirical side of the framework is so elementary and basic that it tends to get lost in the much more interesting and exciting detail of Freud's more substantive psychological claims.

### Form of Irrational Behaviour

If one begins with the basic datum of our psychological lives that is central to Freud – the fact of irrational behaviour – a question arises as to what form it must be taken to have. The word "irrational" is widely and loosely used but what is clear is that Freud is not primarily interested in its usage to mark behaviour that is anomalous. That is, it is not behaviour that runs afoul of social norms. Such anomalousness of behaviour does not amount to irrationality in any sense that is of interest to psychoanalysis, unless it is *also* a source of anxiety or neurosis in the agent himself. Hence to the extent that we have a relevant form of irrational behaviour for psychoanalysis, it must in some sense seem to be irrational by the lights of, or the point of view of, *the agent himself*. He or she must in some sense feel the anxiety or the neurosis and therefore there must be some sense in which by his or her own lights (lights, that is, which are to be found in his or her own

attitudes and aspirations and commitments), the behaviour is irrational and needs psychoanalytic attention. And, as Freud says in Part III of his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, when the irrationality is a repeated and sustained one, lasting in time (which it must be if the anxiety and neurosis generated is one which a subject wishes to bring to treatment in psychoanalysis) these mental states do not come just by themselves as isolated elements in the mind. He argues explicitly that the mental states that are (1) causing the irrational behaviour and the mental states (2) by the lights of which one oneself considers the behaviour irrational, amount to two separate psychological profiles which are "at war" within a single subject. For the purposes that I want to deploy these very basic ideas in Freud, they seem to provide just the right sort of frameworking – and as will emerge, I mean that word *frameworking* to do some serious work.

What needs stressing, then, is that in Freud's overall conception of the mind in his study of its pathologies, there is *first* a conceptual claim made on what he himself conceives as a priori grounds. This is the claim that given (a) irrationality of a kind that is not mere anomalousness from social norms, and given (b) that it is sustained enough to warrant seeking psychoanalytic treatment, then the mind *must* – as if by logic – be seen as divided into two structures or segments or frames (Freud's metaphor is two "chambers"), which are in conflict with one another. And *then second*, once these structures or frames are well in place as a conceptual and structural prior, we can *further* go on to add a quite distinct claim that is *not* structural and conceptual and not made on a priori grounds, but rather made as a subsequent *empirical* hypothesis, viz, that one of these segments of the mind is *unconscious* – and then even more specific empirical hypotheses about the sorts of states that populate this unconscious segment of the mind, empirical hypotheses about the sexual aetiologies of our neuroses which we summarise with such omnibus terms as "Oedipus", "Narcissus" and so on.

Now, if the position *conceptually prior* to these specifically empirical claims is that the relevant behaviour can only make sense if we think of the mind as often being framed in two segments, then we are allowed scope sometimes to construct quite *other* empirical hypotheses as to what accounts for these different frames that characterise the mind and explain our seemingly irrational behaviour, without even requiring that one of the segments be unconscious, even if the conflict between the two segments is unconscious. (As I said, Freud described the structural idea of their being two frames or segments with the metaphor of "chambers" and he presented the further empirical hypotheses of one of them being unconscious with the further metaphor that the door between the chambers functioned as a "censor".)

This distinctness of the structural and the empirical hypotheses in the understanding of irrationality is highly relevant to the particular question about false consciousness, we are concerned with in the populations we are discussing. One can assert the structural idea of two different frames and then look for empirical evidence, indeed the most routine forms of evidence that one seeks in social understanding, to understand the *conflicted* behaviour of the population in the heartland of America as issuing from these two different frames. There are widely detectable

grounds in the behaviour of ordinary people in the electorate of the red states to attribute moral strengths to them and therefore to see them as being in a state of at least *latent* internal conflict with some of their attitudes and responses we find morally deplorable. There are many such grounds, not least some of the inconsistencies that show up in polls. Thus, for instance, it is quite commonly the case that when questions in polls are put in terms of values that individuals hold, the answers go overwhelmingly in a humane and compassionate direction, but if formulated in terms of economic or foreign policy jargon, on the very same issues, it goes in the opposite direction.

Of course, it could be said that the answer to the second sort of question is a sign that the answer to the first sort of question was *insincere* and, therefore, there is no internal conflict in these agents. But that sort of cynical interpretation (to which many on the liberal left are prone) is quite premature. It takes no account of what I have just posited as a conceptual prior of two frames or segments that account for social behaviour, which is of obvious relevance here, because how one might think in different ways in different frames can help to explain the seeming inconsistency in these responses. And then looking to the second aspect of the distinction in Freud that I mentioned, the empirical hypotheses rather than the a priori detection of frames and structures, it seems perfectly apt to invoke the notion of epistemic weakness rather than of moral depravity to empirically explain why people are often landed with different frames and also of what populates one of those frames. Their answers in these polls suggest that when these people think (and indeed act) as individuals responding to normative promptings made on their individual moral agency, they are not, at least not typically, inhumane and destructive, and this is the side that is being addressed when the first sort of question in the polls is presented. And furthermore, a point of crucial importance for the challenge I had set myself, much of this tendency to give humane answers may well be prompted in many or most of them by a basically *religious* cast of thought and value. So it is not as if one is deracinating them from their religiosity and claiming that their values are at their deepest to be thought of as no different from the humanity of those who are not religious at all and who give the same answers. Call this the first frame. But the second sort of question presents itself to them *in a quite different frame*, one that addresses their minds and even their religions (thus making clear that their religiosity surfaces quite differently in each frame), not as individuals responding to the perceived demands of individual values and ideals, but as their minds have been subordinated to institutional structures of state, corporations, and to the media and educational system that presents these structures to them, and in this frame (shaped by these epistemic deficits) the answers are quite different, indeed quite inconsistent with the other answers given in the other frame. (Examples of such inconsistency are pervasive in polls.)<sup>18</sup> But being in different frames the inconsistency or conflict is not apparent to them, a quite clear and unmistakable attribution, then, of an *unconscious conflict*, even though *each frame* is entirely *within consciousness*.

It is this last point, that *both* frames are entirely within consciousness, which staves off the agency-threatening and

self-knowledge threatening version of false-consciousness that I am trying to disavow on behalf of Marx. There is nothing – no value, no belief, no attitude, no commitment – in either frame that is not self-known to the agents. There is, of course, inconsistency between the thoughts and commitments of the two frames and that inconsistency is, of course, not self-known to the agent, precisely because the inconsistent thoughts and commitments are in *two different* frames. It is only when the border between the two frames (in Freud's metaphors the "door" between the two chambers) is removed (and there is only one frame or chamber) that the agent will be able to see the inconsistency between his thoughts and commitments, and do something (deliberative and reflective) to get out of the inconsistency.

So, finding such internal conflict or inconsistency in subjects, as I have, is crucial to distinguishing the moral psychology involved in my analysis from notions of false consciousness attributed to the so-called *late* Marx, which in its implausible scientific versions, appeals to no evidence of conflict *within* the minds of agents as the more Hegelian Marx does and which my appeal to Freud was intended to make vivid. It appeals instead to an objective and ultra-scientific theory of history and mind, independent of what the subject thinks and knows about his own states of mind (self-knowledge) as well as independent of a subject's agency and his or her motivations and conceptions of things.

### 'Epistemic Weakness'

An essential element in my analysis was to appeal to a quite different empirical hypothesis from Freud's regarding what makes for the two frames in the populations I am discussing. Rather than to appeal to the unconscious generated by self-censor mechanisms, my appeal was to evidence of "epistemic weakness" that were responsible for the responses to questions in polls issuing from one of the frames. These are weaknesses in the *cognitive* realm generated by a political and economic culture and institutions deriving from the metaphysical shifts that I had genealogically traced to the late 17th century, which in their entrenchment over the centuries ensures that ordinary people have the epistemic deficits I am stressing. It is the longstanding institutional causes of these deficits that should be the real target of our criticism and contempt, not the ordinary people who are its victims.

The theoretical analysis provided here implies that the boundary or border between these two frames that govern the mentality of ordinary people needs erasing, so that there is no segmented division in their mentality and they can explicitly recognise the conflict that is only latently present to them when the border between the segments is in place. If they are able to grasp the conflict within themselves and if the epistemic deficits that afflict them are removed so that the attitudes and outlook of one of the erstwhile segments shaped by those deficits is subject to critical scrutiny by the humane instincts of the other erstwhile segment, then there is scope to expect that such internal deliberation will enable the full flowering of the mentality of the electorate that we count on when we believe in democracy. In such an outcome, there can be hopes for a genuine and substantive democratic culture.

So, if there is an urgent task for radical politics today it might well be described as one of helping to erase that cognitive border

in the minds of the electorate. And in my view, given how deeply entrenched and, as I tried to convey in the last section, *genealogically fortified*, this longstanding political and economic culture that erects the border in their mentality, is in all the sites they are exposed to (their homes and upbringing, the media and educational institutions, etc), public education of the sort that would remove the border and remove their epistemic deficits cannot any longer be realistically expected to occur on those sites. It can only really happen on the sites of *popular movements*, as it did in the labour movements in the 1930s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. That, however, must remain the theme for another occasion. (I should preempt a certain kind of careless response – of which there have been many among the liberal orthodoxies that emerged out of the spook generated by the Jacobin aftermath of the French Revolution – who will point to the tyrannical character of some mass movements. My point here obviously has only been to say that popular movements are a *necessary* site and condition for such public education that will remove cognitive deficits and remove the mental and frames-configuring boundary I have identified. They are *not* – obviously not – a *sufficient* condition. So no one needs to deny the fact that there have been dangerous outcomes of some mass movements, and I certainly myself do not deny it.)<sup>19</sup>

The analytic points I have struggled to articulate in this section were intended to defend the idea, often dismissed by the high-minded liberal mentality, that the deeply conservative religiosity in the heartland of the United States may be, in its way, an honourable expression of something very deep which is *reacting* to something very deep and longstanding described – too summarily and crudely – with terms such as “disenchantment” and “instrumental rationality”. Though my remarks have merely scratched the surface of the issues of alienation in contemporary democratic politics, I hope I have conveyed something of the historical depth that is needed to understand the theoretical issues at stake and the analytical clarity we need to protect ourselves from the growing and undemocratic contempt we have ourselves come to feel towards the ordinary people who react to a phenomenon of such historical depth with the only resources that are available to them.

#### 4

If, as I have argued, the process of disenchantment that led to familiar forms of alienation began with the deracination of value from nature and the world, leaving the world brute and bereft of anything that would present us with normative constraints or that would make any normative calling upon us, then something, however brief and general, needs to be said, as I conclude this essay, about what it is that makes the idea of values *in the world* a fundamental source of an unalienated life.

I have been at pains to say that there existed highly active dissenting voices that spoke with prescient alarm and protest in Early Modern Europe against the consequences they foresaw in the opportunistic tendencies developing around the metaphysics being forged around the new science. The orthodox liberal frameworks that theoretically consolidated these tendencies is what we have inherited from the defeat and silencing of the radical

freethinking dissent of the late 17th century. These cramped frameworks have left little room for us to develop the potential in some of the most genuinely radical elements of the Enlightenment – often dismissed by the orthodoxy as “irrationalist” criticisms emanating from a “counter”-Enlightenment.<sup>20</sup> (The sleight of hand that exploits ambiguities in the terms “rational” and “irrational” in this context needs patient unravelling, which I have presented in the prequel to this paper, and will not rehearse here.)<sup>21</sup>

The defeat of the dissenters in that earlier period preempted any meaningful construction of the Enlightenment’s own most idealistic commitments and slogans over the next century or more. The familiar slogan of the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, in particular, was disallowed any significant *integrated* role in the polities that emerged in European nations; and, quite apart from the failure to apply those ideals in practice in some genuinely integrated way, we do not even have any serious *theoretical* understanding of their deep interrelations. The promise that was held out in Marx’s work for such an understanding lies fractured partly as a result of the influential distinction between the early and late Marx, and what we have left of that trio of ideals in the orthodox liberal framework, as a result, is an interminable and seemingly irresolvable zero-sum tension between the values of liberty and equality, with an endless bickering about how much to stress the value of one over the other.<sup>22</sup>

#### Notions of Alienation and Disenchantment

The notions of alienation and disenchantment are – surprisingly, perhaps – key notions to invoke here because this tension can have no resolution and the bickering can have no end, without the realisation that there is no justification for either equality or liberty that does not see them *both* as required for an *unalienated* life, for a life, that is, in which the value of *fraternity* informs the value of both equality and liberty, such that there is no equality nor liberty (autonomy) that is genuine which does not also show that the lack of liberty or equality is intolerable by *the lights of fraternity itself*. Fraternity is, in this sense, the cement for liberty and equality, and without some such cementing there is no scope for an unalienated life, no resolution of the zero-sum tension I mentioned that has dominated the political assumptions of the last two centuries. The slogan’s trio of ideals has never been genuinely *triangulated* in this way in the liberal theorising that congealed around them in the high European Enlightenment. Admittedly, the idea of such a theorised triangulation is not an argument, only a sketch or schema of how an argument should proceed, but should one be able to construct such an argument, there would be very large theoretical possibilities to be plumbed. There is no space to do that here (though I say a word more about it in the closing remarks in footnote 19). But even without such an argument fully in place, we can at least lay the ground with the conceptual ingredients I have presented briefly in this paper, for the claim that no such ideal of an unalienated life, in which notions of liberty and equality are *not* at odds, can find its soil without some form of secular re-enchantment of a world lost to the social and cultural forces that exiled the Father, as I said, well before his death. This is because the ideal of a world enchanted with value is the basic condition for the very

possibility of human agency, which, in turn, is the most elementary and fundamental element in the promise of an unalienated and fraternal social life.

In situating my claims in the Spinozist point I began with, I had already suggested that the idea of values being *in the world* is in some important sense *of a piece* with the fact that *we* possess freedom or agency. To put it flamboyantly, for subjects who do not possess agency (or abdicate it), there is darkness in the world, at just the points where agents can perceive values in it, and it is the darkness of something alien that makes one want to “master” it and “conquer” it, a rhetoric to which Freud too was often prone in describing our early psychic development. With this rhetoric, we lose sight of the more relaxed ideal of *merely* “living” in the world (and we should note with some despondency how revealing it is that we are driven to use the qualifier “merely” to describe something so basic as living), an ideal that reaches towards the kind of agency and engagement that make possible an unalienated life. And I want to claim that if you take the position that Hume and Adam Smith and their widespread intellectual legacies, i.e., that values lie not in the world but in our desires and moral sentiments, you make it quite difficult to see how we can so much as possess the full fledged form of agency they uncritically assume we do possess.

This may seem like a tall claim, since surely they can insist that acting on our desires and moral sentiments is an expression of our agency. But that is a superficial understanding of what it takes to be an agent. Let me show why this is so by giving a crucial and concluding argument that links the very possibility of our agency with the notion of enchantment that I have been trying to explore. The argument will build on the insight in Spinoza with which I began.

Before I do, some confusing ground needs to be cleared. I have said that to see the world as enchanted is a pre-condition for possessing agency and therefore for living an unalienated life. And to see the world as enchanted in a sense that we can accept in our own secular frameworks, is to see it as suffused with values. Though such a notion of enchantment sits more comfortably with our more self-conscious secular commitments than previous more sacralized notions such as Gandhi’s (or the 17th century dissidents), it is still highly discomfiting to a familiar conviction of our time. It brazenly contradicts the widely-held view that there is nothing in nature (and the world) that is not countenanced by natural science. So it is a notion that is bound to be dismissed as unscientific. I will not pause too long to confront this confused prejudice in detail except to say this. All that asserting the presence of value in nature (and the world) does is to imply that science does not have full coverage of nature (and the world). How on earth can this be unscientific? Something is only unscientific if it contradicts a proposition in some science. But *no science* contains the proposition that science has comprehensive coverage of nature. Only a philosopher (or scientists and journalists, like Dawkins and Hitchens, playing at being philosophers)<sup>23</sup> would assert such a proposition. And one can find the assertion to be bad philosophy, without being told, in turn, that one is doing bad science since it is not doing science at all. The point – surely a simple one – is that it is only unscientific to give unscientific

responses to science’s themes (as “creationism” or “intelligent design” do to the scientific theme of the origins of the universe), it is not unscientific to assert that not all themes regarding nature are scientific themes (and that is all that is asserted by asserting the presence of values in nature and the world).

### Picture of Values

Unlike this confused objection to enchantment, the picture of value found in Hume and Adam Smith,<sup>24</sup> which also opposes the idea that values are perceptible properties of the world, is not so easily dismissible. There is no simple confusion in their picture, and if it is wrong, it is wrong for very deep and significant reasons. On their picture of values, values are constructed out of our psychological states such as our desires and sympathies and so are ontologically reducible to them. By contrast, the picture of values that is being presented in this paper claims that our *desires* are *responses to desirabilities* (or values) in the world (where “world” is to be understood in the broad sense that I attributed to Gandhi at the very outset), a quite different ontology of value. This ontology may be resisted because of a fear that it aspires to some sort of implausible *objectification* of value. That is a fear that quite misses the point of this ontology. This paper’s interest in such an ontology and in finding the Humean picture wrong, its interest, that is, in seeking a secular enchantment of the world, is only to secure one of the most basic metaphysical sources of an unalienated life. Its interest is *not* to mount an objectivist resistance to ethical relativism by making values part of the external world and therefore the same for all human beings capable of a clear and unmyopic perception of the world.

To say something is part of the perceptible world cannot, in any case, be sufficient to repudiate relativism. Even natural science recognises that many of the objects and properties of the perceptible world that it studies are observed through the lens of theories, so if observation of even physical properties is theory-laden, differing from theory to theory, it is hardly likely that the value properties in the world will not be differentially perceived by different cultures and even, often, by different individual subjects. Though, I have general opinions on the subject of relativism, and am not a relativist in politics or morals,<sup>25</sup> those opinions are of no relevance in the pursuit of my present preoccupations in this paper. In opposing the Humean picture, I am far from denying that the human subject and human agency are an essential part of the idea that values are in the world. Indeed I insist on their essential part and am about to give an argument for it. What I deny is that to say that values and human agency are of a piece with our agency in this way amounts to saying that values are in some sense created by us and projected onto the world rather than perceived by us as being in the world. That would be a confusion and philosophy is sometimes prone to it. To sum it up again in a sentence or two, the confusion is this. No one is tempted to say, on the basis of variable perception of physical properties in the world owing to the theory-ladenness of observation, that we create physical properties and project them on the world. Yet, we are constantly being told by the picture of value that I am opposing, that we must say this of value properties on the basis of variable perception of these value properties.

What, finally then, is my argument for the idea that we cannot understand the very idea of our agency without also seeing values as properties in the perceptible world around us? To answer this, we need to look a little harder at the relationship between desires and agency that I first presented in my earlier discussion of a distinction derived from Spinoza.

The philosopher Gareth Evans had once said illuminatingly that questions put to one about whether one believes something, say whether it is raining outside, do not prompt us to scan our mental interiority, they prompt us to look outside and see whether it is raining.<sup>26</sup> That is to say, one not only looks outside when one is asked, “Is it raining?” but also when one is asked, “Do you believe it is raining?”

Now, let us ask: Is this true of questions put to one about whether one *desires* something? When someone asks one, “Do you desire x?”, are we prompted to ponder our own minds or are we prompted to consider whether x is desirable? There may be special sorts of substitutions for x where we might ponder our own minds, but for most substitutions, I think, we would consider x’s desirability. This suggests that our desires are presented to us as having desirabilities in the world as their objects.

Am I right to have extended the point that Evans makes about beliefs to desires as well, and to have argued on that basis that the world contains desirabilities or values? Suppose for a moment that I am wrong to have done so. What would that imply? That is, what would be implied if one thought that when asked “Do you desire x”, one did not look to the *desirability* of x itself, but instead scanned our own interiors to see if one possessed that desire of x. It would imply that our desires were presented to us in a way such that *what they were desires for* was available to us only as something that we could have access to when we stepped back and pondered our own minds in a detached way – in the *third* person. But now, if the presupposition of Spinoza’s point is right and if agency is present in the possession and exercise of the *first* person rather than the third person point of view, that makes it a question as to how this conception of our desires could possibly square with the fact of our agency. By contrast, a conception of desires as reaching down all the way to desirabilities in the world *requires* us to be agents because *what we desire* is presented to us in the experiencing of the desiring itself, rather than presented to us when we stepped back to observe our desires – thereby abdicating our agency.

Compare two utterances I might make “This is desirable” and this is desired”. In the latter, I am *reporting* something about myself, reporting what I desire, having stepped outside of myself and perceived myself and my mind from the outside, as if a third person, scanning it for what I desire. It is precisely, in the Spinozist distinction I began with, a detached conception of oneself as an object rather than an agent. By contrast, in the former, I *express*, not report, what I desire, I make an utterance conceiving myself fully as an agent or subject rather than object – but notice that, in doing so, I necessarily see what I desire to be in the world, a desirability, a value property of something in the world. Thus it makes all the difference to being an agent that we, in being so, possess states of mind such as desires that are responding to value properties in the world.

## The World as Value Laden

To experience ourselves as agents we must *in the very experience itself*, also perceive the world as value laden. The agent *within* cannot be what it is, it cannot have the experience of its agency and its states of mind such as its desires upon which it acts, without that experience itself also being the perceptible experience of values making demands on it from *without*. That *experiential identification* of agency within with value without is what – at the most general level – makes us (our inner world) unalienated in the (outer) world we inhabit. This equation or identification (*to experience yourself* as an agent is nothing other than to be *engaged with value in the world*) is due to a conception of desires that disallows us from being subjects who are merely the *passive* or detached receptacle of our desires and their fulfillments. And to disallow that, to see our desires and moral sentiments as *active* engagements with a world enchanted with values that normatively demand our desires and moral sentiments as responses, is the first and most abstract precondition for living an unalienated life.

One no doubt needs *other things* too in order to be unalienated, things about which Marx wrote with depth and insight and which bear more directly on resolving the tension between liberty and equality in orthodox liberalism, but without this more fundamental and underlying condition that makes agency possible, one does not have, as it were, the *first thing*. In this sense, for all their differences, Gandhi’s ideas were quite continuous with Marx, not something we should be surprised by, if we even so much as glance at his remarks on capitalism in *Hind Swaraj* or his account of the effects of the Lancashire cotton industry on India. “Continuous” may be the wrong word, however. The idea of value and alienation he probed within a conception of “the world” as I have been expounding it, did not develop as much as it underlay and provided the more basic backdrop for Marx’s more detailed social and economic analysis of those ideas. Without such a conception of the world in which value *without* us is just the other side of agency *within* us, one would live in a quite real sense as aliens in the world; the world around us, in such a case, would be alien to our own sensibility and we could have no angle on it but one of *either* detached study on the one hand or conquest and control of something alien on the other – an impoverishing disjunction that pretty much describes the dominant tendencies of the modern period and the distinctive anxieties they have generated.

Gandhi, like Wittgenstein, saw that it is this alienation from the world, so conceived, that thwarts the “natural” and the “ordinary”, both prompting us to construct a whole metaphysics around the detached outlook of science (a quite different thing than merely doing science), and prompting our practical agency to intrude into nature and into our own ordinariness, transforming each. No doubt, given their differences, each is transformed by different methods, the first is made over by systematically extractive forms of political economy, the latter by the politics of codes and principles that emerged in tandem with those economies. But the point is that both methods are a fallout of the same systematic attitude of alienated detachment generated by the Early Modern exile of the father, which produces the wrong understanding of practical agency, one that undermines the

practical temperament that “leaves the world alone” and that allows “us” (by which, as I said, he meant mere people, not citizens) to be *at home* in the “world”.<sup>27</sup>

The phrase “at home in the world” is a cliché that marks the most fundamental form of an unalienated life, which was, in Gandhi’s understanding the most cherished ideal that politics, in

the end, must strive for. The effort of much of this essay has been to integrate – through a somewhat non-standard genealogical reading of Gandhi linking him to an early dissenting tradition of the Radical Enlightenment – a whole range of seemingly miscellaneous themes from metaphysics, science, politics, and morals, so as to give some substance and point to that cliché.

## NOTES

- 1 M K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, edited by Anthony Parel (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 2 I have used the phrase “studied indifference” frequently to describe Gandhi’s attitudes towards the political Enlightenment and since they have fetched some misleading responses, I should perhaps be clearer about what I mean. By “studied” I have had in mind to talk of a very *deliberate* position he took based on a quite *careful and diagnostic understanding* of the modernity that Enlightenment ideals ushered in. Not being a philosopher, he did not trace these ideas, as Nietzsche and Heidegger did, to their roots as early as the turn that is said to have taken place in the period after the pre-Socratics; nor did he explicitly situate them, as Foucault did, in the specific institutions and discursive formations that were said to have formed after the collapse of Old Regime France. Still, his diagnosis understood very well the ideas and the institutions and the discourse around them that came with the modernity that the British introduced into Indian society; and, though it takes a lot of abstraction away from detail to see similarities between his critique of colonial modernity and the philosophical attack on the “logocentrism” that was introduced by the Platonic Socrates or the Foucauldian critical scrutiny of the institutions and discourse of the French (and generally European) Enlightenment, the similarities are there and are not hard for the alert reader to unearth. “Studied” is therefore a perfectly good word with which to describe the deliberately worked out nature of this critique. The term “indifference” is also apt because it should be emphasised that Gandhi was *not hostile* to the principles and codes and rights that define the political Enlightenment. He was too undogmatic and politically intelligent to fail to see their instrumental value in winning advantages for the disadvantaged in specific contexts of modern society. But, as I shall argue, he doubted that they had the power to make us better with respect to our humanity, and he refused to join the cheerleading he heard and read in the self-congratulatory rhetoric with which the Enlightenment was described because he saw in that the source of a distinctive form of complacency, a complacency which, as I say below in the text, issued from an earlier development in the notion of “civility” in Early Modern Europe. “Indifference” seems to me a good term to describe this general scepticism on his part.
- 3 At the very end of my essay, “Gandhi, The Philosopher” (published in *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 38, No 39, 27 September 2003), I had made the claim that Gandhi did not believe in politics. This claim was very cryptically made and much of the present essay tries to spell out what I intended by it, something I am particularly keen to do since others who have since then been writing on Gandhi are now interpreting that cryptically made claim in ways that I think are quite misleading as an understanding of Gandhi.
- 4 It is worth noting a very interesting and, at least at first sight, a mildly paradoxical point here. I will be arguing that Gandhi made appeal in his own way and in his own words to the idea of “leaving the world alone” rather than transforming it via capital (in its aspect of nature) and via the orthodoxies in political principles and codes that capital generated (in its aspect of humanity). But, for him, these *rude transformations* came as a result of an increasingly *detached* attitude towards the world, in its aspect of nature and of humanity. His view, as I will expound further

below, was that transformation (rather than leaving alone) of the wrong kind came from increasing intellectualisation and detachment. So the quick thought that “surely leaving something alone requires detachment from it” is shown to be too quick. It is *engagement* with the world that allows one to leave it alone. That is the mild paradox, at first sight. But, as I argue (most explicitly in the last section, but really through this section and the next as well), there is no paradox here at all. For the explicit *semantic* disentangling with the term “detachment” needed to remove this air of paradox, see the last footnote in this paper.

- 5 The present essay is a sequel to my essay, “Occidentalism, The Very Idea: An Essay on the Enlightenment and Enchantment” (*Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 41, No 33, 19 August 2006), where I had pledged to elaborate themes that I had only very briefly hinted at in its closing pages. In that prequel, I had tried to demonstrate the detailed affinities between elements in Gandhi’s thought and the thought of the radical sectaries in mid-17th century England as well as the somewhat later scientific dissenters such as John Toland and Anthony Collins in late 17th and early 18th century England. See also my “Gandhi, Newton, and the Enlightenment” in *The Social Scientist* (2006) (reprinted in *Values and Violence* edited by Karawan, McCormack, and Reynolds, published by Springer 2008 and in *Contemporary Indian Political Thought* (edited by Aakash Singh Rathore, forthcoming by Routledge) for an elaboration of these affinities. I will repeat those points briefly here but with a slightly different emphasis. In those essays, I had stressed the dissent against the links being forged between the metaphysics around the new science and the newly emerging commercial interests. In the present essay, given its eventual theme of what constitutes a democratic mentality, I want to stress the links between that metaphysics and the emergence of an ideal of political governance. There is more of substance on these themes in my “Reply To Bruce Robbins” in *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2007, Vol 33, No 3 and in a web symposium on my essay “Occidentalism, The Very Idea: An Essay on the Enlightenment and Enchantment” at the web site: <http://3quarksdaily.blogspot.com/2008/09/introduction-to.html>
- 6 Spinoza, *Ethics, The Collected Writings*, Vol 1, edited by E Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985). For a good exposition of this distinction, see Stuart Hampshire’s *Freedom of the Individual*, Harper and Row, 1965. Hampshire’s eventual understanding of Spinoza’s insight is somewhat different from the use to which I will put it. He had in mind to ask the question: to what extent can one predict things about oneself without, in fact, implicitly at least, intending them? This Sartrean question may be a good one to eventually ask, but I will not ask it here. My interest is in the distinction between prediction and intention and the initial insightful instinct that to the extent that one can predict things about oneself, one cannot do so at the same time as intending to do them.
- 7 See McDowell’s pioneering essay, “Values and Secondary Qualities” in *Morality and Objectivity* edited by Ted Honderich, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- 8 I should say immediately that to claim values are properties in the world (including nature) is not to populate the world and nature with extravagant forms of teleology (which is why I referred to the claim above as a *sanitised* Aristotelian view.) No vitalism, for instance, is implied by the claim.

And though I use the metaphor of values in the world *making* normative demands on us and our agency, this is mere metaphor, and there is no implication that the value properties in the world external to human beings are intentional properties. The reason for this is simple. Where there are intentional properties it makes sense to criticise them and those who possess them. Thus human beings criticise each other’s intentional states, i.e., each other’s intentions, beliefs, desires, hopes... But it makes no sense to say that we criticise nature and the world, except in the quite irrelevant sense in which one might say, “That was a lousy sunset this evening”. So, though it is controversial to claim that values are in the world, including nature (controversial because it denies that natural science has full coverage of nature), it is not controversial in the way that vitalism and other such extravagant ontological doctrines are.

- 9 To name just two, Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006) and Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (Warner Books, 2007).
- 10 The most vocal was perhaps John Toland, a mercurial and brilliant figure of his time. These issues of the metaphysics of nature and the new science can be found in a series of works, starting with *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696, more explicitly pantheistic in statement in the discussion of Spinoza in *Letters to Serena* (1704), and then in the late work *Pantheisticon* (1724). It is widely thought that he coined the term “pantheism”.
- 11 The best book on these themes remains Margaret Jacob’s *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London, 1981).
- 12 See all the references in Footnote 5.
- 13 Quoted in Christopher Hill’s, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London, 1972), which remains the locus classicus as an account of the radical sectaries of England in this period.
- 14 Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process*, 2 vols, translated by E. Jephcott (Oxford, 1978, 1982); and *The Court Society*, translated by E. Jephcott (Oxford, 1983).
- 15 The well-known example of bowling alleys is given in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* by Robert D Putnam (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). Its shallowness is evident when you place it aside the following remark by Thoreau in the section entitled “Economy” in *Walden* (The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1960): “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. ... A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.”
- 16 In fact, my sense is that we live in a time when the very subject of Ethics should now undergo a reorientation so that the question “What ought we to know?” becomes just as primary as the traditional ethical question “What ought we to do?”. The braiding of the cognitive with the political (and therefore the ethical) is so detailed in our times that the latter question is idle without prior attention to the former question. So, just to give an example of the relevance of the cognitive to our ethical assessments of people that is pertinent to what I have been saying in the text above: If someone in Kansas, working long hours all day of the week to earn \$50,000 a year with a wife and three children to support, fails to spend his time on non-standard media sites to find out what forms of wrong his government has been up to on the international stage for the last 40 years and more,

his failure to know is far less culpable than such a failure to know on the part of someone with a great deal of time and privileges available to him or her to find these things out – a colleague of mine at Columbia University, say, or a comfortably off, wilfully unemployed, house husband or housewife on the Upper West or Upper East side. The latter failure of knowledge, it would be right to say, unlike the former, is a far greater form of dishonesty of the moral intellect.

- 17 I rely here primarily on his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* but the assumption of this distinction is peppered all over many other writings.
- 18 Here is just one very common and uncomplicated sort of example of inconsistency of response in polls, there are literally scores of others. “Yes, the conditions of the poor in Harlem are wretched and must be improved” (this is a response to a question put in the first frame, i.e., a question about what would be their individual response to what are perceptible conditions of great poverty around them making immediate normative demands on their moral agency). But then in the same poll, “No, we must not raise taxes and government spending” (this is a response to a question put in the second frame, i.e., a question put in economic jargon and thus addressing their minds as they have been cognitively shaped by what I was calling “epistemic deficits” determined in upbringing in homes, then fortified in educational institutions, in the media...)
- 19 In the last four decades of his life, Gandhi himself worked strenuously to reorient the very ideal of mass politics away from the Jacobin stigma, towards a quite different ideal of mass solidarity – through strategies of non-violence, through the ideal of the “exemplary” in satyagrahi public action, and most deeply of all through a phenomenology of mutual understanding among people derived from the idea of value being external to us in the world – the world of nature and of others. (I say a bit more about this last at the end of this footnote). There was great generosity in these efforts on his part and at the same time a great watchful insistence on it against constant resistance from a line-up of middle class Indian elites who were threatened by mass politics and who continue to this day to resist it, often affecting faux-aristocratic Burkean ideals. The genuine aristocrat of his time, Nehru, had no doubt whatever that Gandhi was a mass politician of unparalleled commitment and ability, and embraced that politics with matching commitment. There are those who have denied Gandhi’s commitment to the masses on the grounds that he called off movements when the masses turned violent. This interpretation is shallow and it relies on a too-quick Burkean reading of Gandhi. Burke, as we well know, was reacting with instinct as well as reason against a range of familiar developments in the France of his time. His reactions on matters of detail have always been rejected by the Liberal Left who have, in a by now familiar form of debate, counted him, in many ways rightly, as a conservative (though the sense in which he was also a radical is well worth studying). But detail apart, at a level of generality, on the broad subject of mass politics, many on the Liberal Left, certainly everyone on the Liberal and orthodox side of the Enlightenment, have exploited Burke’s anxiety about the Jacobin aftermath of the French revolution to stigmatise the very idea of mass politics. That move has no point or place in a reading of Gandhi. One can, of course, call off a movement if one is indifferent to mass politics, just as one can say “the masses deserve the government (or the art, or the media) they get” out of a contempt for the masses. Gandhi did and said such things but with the very opposite attitude. He called off movements when the masses turned violent because he had the highest belief and hope in what the masses of India were capable of and this belief and hope was abundantly displayed by him when he repeatedly turned to them in order to expose the high-sounding but low-meaning rhetoric of a

manipulative mainstream political class and their intellectual mandarins. So also he often said “the masses deserve the government they get” not with any contempt for the masses but with a conviction of their capacity to insist on governments that would aspire to public and private virtue. If you take away the fact that Gandhi was a mass politician, you take away the most elementary commitment of his politics and his philosophy. David Bromwich, who has a shrewd understanding of Burke, pointed out to me that though Burke is often celebrated by some for his anti-democratic stances, he was so consistently anti-tyrannical that his stance could not possibly have been perfectly anti-democratic. I like this way of putting things and it leads me to suggest that when someone says of Gandhi that he did not believe in mass democracy because he called off mass movements when they turned violent, they can at best be suggesting that Gandhi was not perfectly democratic. And since the idea of being “perfectly” democratic is high nonsense anyway, the pointlessness of this interpretation of Gandhi becomes obvious. What is (on the whole) true is that Gandhi did not understand class struggle and so he certainly did not equate mass politics with class struggle. (This, broadly Marxist, criticism of him does not by any means present him as a Burkean though. I believe the criticism is correct and it is a failing of Gandhi that he did not, in the end, quite understand the role of class in mass politics. That role is, of course, itself shifting with the shifting nature of capital in the last few decades, something to be expected given the mutually defining relationship between notions of “class” and “capital”. What relevance Gandhian ideas of an anti-imperialist mass politics bear to current relations between an imperialist form of global finance capital and the notion of class that it will and has generated, is a large and fascinating question that we do not have any clear grip on at all.) What is also true, as I have argued in earlier papers on Gandhi (see the reference in Footnote 3), is that he emphatically did not conceive of mass politics in terms of an equation of the masses with a vanguard party. (But this, broadly Leninist Left, criticism of him, does not present him as a Burkean either. Even if we do not accept this Leninist criticism of him, it is a correct understanding of Gandhi and it is an understanding that is essential to my own efforts to steer his thought toward broadly Left Anarchist ideals that emerged first in what may rightly be called “The Radical Enlightenment”.) So, the Burkean Gandhi only really emerges by lining him up squarely with the fears generated by Jacobinism, but which I am arguing are the very fears that Gandhi tried to soothe by developing an alternative ideal of mass solidarity (and nothing less). In other recent writing on Gandhi, mentioned in Footnote 5, I have tried to develop an understanding of the phenomenology of mass solidarity that Gandhi aspired to via an analogy with the mutual understanding that two people might come to have in a conversation, carrying the thought that they have come to understand mutually, together. Such a notion of solidarity that is based on the phenomenology of mutual understanding (where I stress the experience both of the “mutual” and of “understanding”) prevents mass politics from degenerating into the very thing that allows us to say of the Jacobin ideal of the collective that it is describable by the substitution of “mob” for “mass”, that is to say, where individual mentality and creativity is lost as a cog in a (mass) wheel. To conceive mass solidarity on the model of the phenomenology of the more primal two-person form of mutuality is what Gandhi thought allowed for the retention of individuality in larger solidarities. Indeed, it allows for much more, if properly theorised. I had said earlier that there is no way out of the zero-sum tension and bickering between liberty and equality that was generated by the orthodoxies of the Enlightenment, unless we see both liberty and equality as conditions for fraternity and therefore for a richly unalienated life. In my reading of him, Gandhi’s

entire philosophy was a striving for such a triangulation of those three ideals into an integrated political vision. I have not had the space to develop that theoretical argument in this paper, an argument essential to theorising away from the orthodox to the “radical” Enlightenment. All I am trying to do in this final section of the paper is to present a more underlying condition for an unalienated life in which the ideas of the earlier sections that appeal to a world enchanted by value play a central role. This yields a more minimal removal of alienation than fraternity would, but a more basic one upon which the notion of fraternity must build. How exactly it must build on it, what exactly are the relations that this more basic condition of enchantment has to the notion of fraternity, cannot be developed without a detailed focus on the sort of solidarity that turns on the model of the primal scene of two person mutuality of understanding that I have mentioned above. That model itself is the first step towards a social extension of the idea of our responsiveness to value in the world. These are all themes for another occasion, developing ideas only briefly presented here and in some of the other papers mentioned in Footnote 5.

- 20 As, for instance, in the writing of Isaiah Berlin, who first introduced to English-speaking philosophers and political theorists, a range of Romantic thinkers whose ideas were quite continuous with some of the ideas of the early radical dissent I have focused on. Berlin, though he was clearly fascinated by these Romanticist ideas, was also made very nervous by them and, assuming an orthodox understanding of the Enlightenment, dubbed them the “Counter-Enlightenment. (The term may not have been his invention, but he made much of it.) See particularly his essay “The Counter-Enlightenment” in *The Proper Study of Mankind* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2000).
- 21 For the reference, see Footnote 5.
- 22 As is well known, this famous (infamous) and influential distinction between the early and late Marx became central to Althusser’s reading of Marx (see some of the essays in *For Marx*, first published in 1965 and republished by Verso in 1996). For Marx’s most explicit and well-known discussion of issues of alienation, see his *Economics and Political Manuscripts of 1844* (International Publishers, 1964). Something of a proof that Marx’s ideas on these subjects were not restricted to the early works is that Lukacs seems to have reconstructed them at a time when those works were not yet available, that is to say, he reconstructed them from a reading of his late works.
- 23 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006) and Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (Warner Books, 2007)
- 24 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by Selby-Bigge (Oxford University Press, 1978) and Adam Smith, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by Knud Hakonssen (Cambridge University, 2002)
- 25 See my essay “Secularism and Relativism” in *Boundary 2* (2006), reprinted in *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations* edited by Virendra Raj Mehta and Thomas Pantham (Sage, 2004)
- 26 Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 225.
- 27 The word “detachment” has been variously used by philosophers to mean different things. Gandhi too talked with admiration of detachment but what he meant by that is quite significantly at odds with the detachment generated by a disenchanting conception of nature and the world. Indeed, leaving the world (of nature and of its inhabitants) alone rather than making it over requires a detachment from the drives to master and control it. Such detachment Gandhi urged on us and himself. But to achieve it meant eschewing the other kind of alienated detachment that follows upon disenchantment. So, there is much semantic disentangling that is necessary with that word.