

**INÉDITOS**

**Interviews with professor Ágnes Heller (II)\*\*  
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*C Recent theoretical Developments.*

*If we could pick up the story from when you were in Australia, how did you come to leave Australia for New York?*

In 1984 I was briefly in New York because my husband was teaching at the New School for Social Research and I was invited to the University of Madison, Wisconsin. I spent six weeks in Madison and I used occasionally to visit New York and on one of these visits someone from the New School, Eric Kastner who was Dean at that time, asked me to give a talk and I went to give a talk without knowing that it was in fact a job interview and after two weeks the Dean offered me a job. So that was a challenge and I had doubts about whether I should accept it or not for various reasons. I was not in love with New York and I liked living in Melbourne. But my husband wanted very much to get away from Australia and to come to New York so finally I told him that, though I liked my work and I had many friends in Australia, it is a challenge and I would accept the challenge. It was a new environment and had one great attraction which was the chance to teach in a philosophy department. At La Trobe I was in the department of sociology so though I was teaching philosophy, it was philosophy with an eye to the subject matter of the department. So for the first time in years I was asked to teach in a philosophy department. I hadn't even taught philosophy in Hungary because I had been appointed to an institute of sociology. The Party decided that sociology is my only option. Sociology is less dangerous so the Party made me a sociologist. I was never considered to be a sociologist but I worked for ten years in the Institute of Sociology in Hungary.

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Because of that I went to the Department of Sociology at La Trobe, but in New York I was offered a job in philosophy and this is why I left.

*So this is 1984?*

No because I waited for a year and a half to leave. I got the job in '84, but as an emigrant I didn't want to leave without a green card. So I worked on in my department and got a green card in 1986, but then I waited a little bit more before leaving because I needed to finish the semester. So I left with my husband in '86.

*And by that time you had written **A Theory of History, Dictatorship over Needs** and you'd presumably begun your trilogy on the philosophy of morals.*

Yes, I'd also written *General Ethics*, and *Beyond Justice*. Australia was a very fruitful period for my writing. All of these books were written in Australia. The first book I wrote in America was *The Philosophy of Morals*. Everything else was written in Australia.

*At this particular juncture you had two main interests. One was the philosophy of morals, justice and so on, and on the other was the development of a theory of modernity. I wonder if we could pick up on the theory of modernity because this is something you had been working on for some time. How would you summarise your theory of modernity now because it does seem to have changed from the time of **A Theory of History**.*

That is very difficult, I could have summarised it a year ago. But since I've written a new book on it [*A Theory of Modernity*], I cannot really summarise it.

*OK, can I ask some particular questions about aspects of it? Probably the core element of the work from the early 80s is the idea of the three «logics» of modernity: capitalism, industrialisation and democracy or civil society. One of the things which I puzzle over, and was the subject of one of John Grumley's papers is the idea of a «logic». Are you able to explain what you mean by the term «logic»?*

Yes by «logic» I mean the following: that it is a relatively independent tendency to develop. It is not a theory of progression. It means that if you are born a child you have the natural tendency to develop, to grow and become an adult. If a category is born in a Hegelian sense, it works out somehow its own possibilities. For example music starts to enter a period of tonality and all the possibilities are studied and then you try to break out of tonality. There is an in-built tendency for a category to develop and that was what I meant by a logic. It was not necessity, it was only the fact that if it develops it develops in this direction.

*Which is to assume that if you allow, say, industrialisation to develop you'll have particular results which are universal in that sense.*

Yes this is true, nowadays I do not use the term «industrialisation», I use the development of technology because technology is broader than industrialisation. It's better fitted to the present experience, but of course I mean the same and I include science.

*Is this partly a response to the problem of separating the development of capitalism and the development of industrialisation because the two are still very much bound up with each other in most regions of the world as they were in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.*

All three are related to each other; democratisation, capitalism and technological development, but none of them is directly dependent on the others, so I wanted to give a theory which allows the opportunity to think contingently; to think about a model where there is no base or superstructure, where none of these logics determines the other two, but there is an interplay among them; and where in one period one logic becomes overreaching, and in another period one of the others does so; and so you cannot foretell which one will determine the other two. So I wanted to open up the understanding of modernity, to loosen this description or way of predicting the future development of modern society.

*Two questions then. Have you abandoned the view of history as something which progresses in stages and, secondly, how does post-modernity, which you also write about, fit into the picture?*

I want to say something else about this logic question which is that I changed the three logics. I redefined them, not because I have changed my mind, but because I heard people say so many times that soviet societies aren't modern, but asiatic mode of production. In my mind they are all modern societies, so I needed to develop the theory of modernity to encompass soviet-type societies. So I do not speak any more about «capitalism» but about the «functional division of labour» and I could not speak any more about «democracy», but I speak instead about «the logic of statecraft», that is the constitution of the state as a separate logic of modernity in which democracy is a very important and decisive way of developing, but not the only way. I wanted to have a broader concept in which you can include all types of states including dictatorships as well.

*But would it be more useful to stick with Weber and say bureaucratisation is the trend or tendency of modernity rather than democracy?*

No, no certainly not. Certainly not because we have great bureaucracies in Oriental societies for example. But to repeat, democracy is not the only political form of modernity. Democracy describes the main institutions of political domination, but it is not the only political invention of modernity. There are others not described in the term democracy.

*You once mentioned that the Soviet model of modernity was completely different to that of western modernity.*

Yes it is, but I wanted finally to get a concept of modernity in which you could include them all. It's certainly different because the functional division of labour is different: one of them is through the market and the other was totally different, but both are modern political structures. Neither of them is traditional, both are constituted by men and both are based also on technological imaginations. In both people imagine that you can invent something political, you can implement something which you have invented. So the modern aspect is present in both, but they do it in different ways. I wanted to have a concept of the three logics of modernity which you can fit both options, and other options.

*Another point about the theory of modernity is in some of your recent works you said probably the most important facet of modernity is the transition from static to dynamic systems of justice. Is this related in any sense to the idea of logics? Or is the separate characterisation of modernity?*

I don't want to link everything to everything. I don't think that this society is a closed system and I don't want to describe it in these terms. I don't want a closed philosophical system. I don't think that everything clicks. I think there are heterogenous elements here. The dynamics of modernity are of course related to the structure of modernity and to modern social arrangements but there was a dynamics of society prior to modern social arrangements otherwise it could not have developed because it develops under the influence of already existing dynamics of modernity, so at the end you can have different versions of how the dynamics of modern society operate. In the Soviet Union the elite had the sole authority to tell you that this wrong and something else would be right. This society also changed and invented everything anew and they always wanted to transform the form of life, just like capitalism does. The difference is that these changes were dictated by a few with a bureaucratic machine to implement it. In western society it happens in a different way, but very similar things happened.

*So when you think about modernity, you think about it in different ways in different contexts. When you're thinking philosophically you want to categorise modernity in a different way to when*

*you're thinking in terms of developing a social theory. You have this heterogenous approach to answering questions about modernity.*

Yes very heterogenous approach, e.g. I distinguish between two basic kinds of imagination in modernity, the «technological imagination» on the one hand and the «historical imagination», on the other hand. The first I identify with the rationalistic Enlightenment, the second I identify with the romantic Enlightenment, but not entirely. Now you ask me which logic of modernity is bound to the technological imagination, which of them is bound to the historical imagination, and so on. I can tell you, for example, that the logic of technology is mainly bound up with the technological imagination. There are two other logics: sometimes it is bound up with one, sometimes with the other. In one respect with one, in one respect with the other. If you wage wars for example other possibilities are raised. Wars are now fought with means which are borne from technological imagination, so a total change in the technology of war is obvious. On the other hand, wars are more ideologically underpinned nowadays than ever before, and all these ideologies are related to the historical imagination so you cannot say this is the one and that is the one, both of them are operational.

*This idea of imaginations operating through modern society is something I'm not familiar with so presumably it must feature in the work you're currently completing. Can you tell me something more about the concept of imaginations?*

Yes. I developed these new parts as an answer to Heidegger, because in Heidegger's Gestell he basically identifies the modern imagination entirely with the technological imagination and when I started to think about it, I came to the conclusion that you cannot do that, not even the grounds of Verstehen as Heidegger puts it, because the historical imagination and the technological imagination operate simultaneously, and both are of equal importance in the imagination of the modern world.

*But are some societies more prone to privileging one of these imaginations over the other?*

Yes, but it depends more on the period one is talking about than the society in question.

*So what would happen if the technological imagination came to dominate in a particular modern society? What would the ramifications of that be?*

I don't think it ever happens. It would mean that this society would be without tradition. It would be without ideology. It would be without any kind of ideological imagination.

*So it wouldn't be able to function as a society?*

Perhaps, but I think only with great difficulty. But you also asked me about postmodernism. I never speak about the «post-modern period». I don't think there is such a thing as the post-modern period. In my mind, post-modern is a new way to think and understand modernity. I would say that there is a modernist and also a post-modernist modernity. That is, modernism and post-modernism—if these are «isms», which I doubt—are basically two kinds of historical imagination.

*I don't know whether this is you or Feher, but you have called yourself a «post-modernist». What would this mean in the light of what you have just said.*

I would not call myself a «post-modernist», because postmodernism is an «ism»; but I would agree that I look at modernity from a post-modern position, a post-modern perspective, because the modernist perspective regarded modernity as a transitory period thinking in terms of decadence, of progression or the end of alienation and constant reform. It was always believed that the present is either better or worse than previous historical periods and that the future will be a great improvement in contrast to the present or that it will be Doomsday. I think that this attitude to modernity is gone, or rather it is an exception, but it is not an overreaching element of our imagination. In what I call the post-modern perspective, modernity is now no longer seen as a

transitory period, but as a world in which we are born, in which we are going to die, in which we are going to live. That is, there is this idea which I have emphasised many times, that we cannot look or see anything beyond the horizon. We have our horizon and we no longer pretend that we can see something on the horizon or we that know that there is something on the horizon. It's linked to the post-modern perspective and this post-modern perspective is linked to 1968. 1968 was the period in which there was a switch, not from the modern to post-modern, but from the modernist perspective of modernity to the post-modern perspective of modernity. Modernity is seen in a different light, because in '68 for the first time people involved in the revolts did not want to transcend the existing social order but to establish a better life *within* the existing social order. That is a total switch of imagination, and it is this switch of imagination which I call post-modern, not because the post-moderns are like the people in 68, but because of this switch in the imagination which means that we regard the world as our world. It is not in the process of becoming, nor is it disappearing soon. It is a world which stays with us. I would add that as well as being the first capitalist state and the first democracy the imagination we find in the United States was always very close to what I call «post-modern».

*Since 1776?*

Yes, think about it. They've never had a grand narrative in the United States. When you listen to Lincoln's speeches he never promised progression; what he promises is a better standard of living for the next generation. It's a totally different kind of promise. They were never thinking about overcoming the existing order. Even the far left never thought about destroying the constitution or starting a proletarian revolution. The Americans did think in revolutionary terms, but of course about a traditional revolution to establish their country. That was always a post-modern position in the historical imagination, and in taking over this imagination we have become in this respect Americanised. The Western kind of modernity settles in and with it comes this kind of imagination. Of course things look quite different from a European rather than American perspective because Europeans understand how to make an intellectually interesting thing out of a new perspective.

*America came out of the Enlightenment as well which rather implies that the Enlightenment needs re-categorising in terms of the modernity/post-modernity split. The Enlightenment gave us rights, the idea of universal freedom, it gives us the idea of the new order, which is also part of the American revolutionary tradition. Can we therefore see in the Enlightenment the first inklings of the post-modern imagination?*

Not yet, because in Europe the Enlightenment gives birth to the modernist rather than post-modernist imagination. Of course this is the period of revolutions and classes, and these things never existed in America. Also in Europe the historical imagination evolved differently because you have different nations with different histories and because there was war among these nations. There were no nations in America and there were no wars, so it was a totally different situation. America already offered us an ethnically very colourful situation, but there was no nation as such. They had different states, but the states differed constitutionally, and weren't nation states. This is a completely different scenario to the European scenario.

*There are certain aspects of post-modernist writings which I had imagined you would be quite hostile to, in other words the idea of *jouissance*, play, irony leading to scepticism. I remember someone making the point in a review of *Grandeur and Twilight* that in a sense you still posit problems which you expect to emit of some sort of resolution. In other words, there is still an Enlightenment preoccupation with finding answers, if only of a provisional nature. On the other*

*hand, I associate post-modernism with the avoidance of resolution and a deep scepticism towards the «Enlightenment project», however defined.*

So do I. I think that the world and life, particularly modern life, are not «problems» which can be solved. This is what makes my perspective also post-modern. I think that we're sitting on a paradox and it's a paradox of freedom. This freedom founds modernity, but freedom is a foundation which does not found. That's why modernity remains totally open; and from this fundamental paradox many other paradoxes are born so that we have no solid ground whatsoever. From the beginning there were two kinds of imagination, not exactly identical: technology, on the one hand, and historical on the other, there was the rationalistic Enlightenment and the romantic Enlightenment and they developed simultaneously. The romantic Enlightenment always had an historicist flavour, and if you think about *jouissance* this obviously has something to do with the romantic Enlightenment which itself accompanied the rationalistic Enlightenment. You can hardly have one without the other.

*But it's almost as if your post-modernism is a political statement above all else, in other words, what you are saying is you want to oppose the grand narrative, you want to oppose ideological thinking, redemptive thinking, teleological thinking, because of the ramifications of fetishising theory as a guide to practice. Your post-modernism therefore seems to have a particularly political sub-text.*

I think in other terms. I do not speak about anti-ideological thinking because I believe that in modernity, precisely because there are no traditions, but only ideologies, that if you speak even about the technological imagination then you are speaking about ideologies as well. The belief in science, for example, is a kind of ideology and of course the historical imagination contains several different kinds of ideologies. So I would not say it's the «end of ideology», absolutely not. I mean only that the belief and trust in science as the method that can give you absolute truth or knowledge is gone. I mean that the present is no longer understood as a transitory period which leads towards the future, but that we can still have quite opposite and different recommendations about how to treat the present. The technological imagination, or rather those who offer it, still regards the present and the world as a machine which can be set right. I am critical of this. I'm also critical of the historical imagination. Look at the modern world: the overarching imagination is the technological imagination, but you can regard the ecologist movement as a Domsday scenario which is entirely romantic. On the other hand there are those who understand progression and happiness as the satisfaction of all our needs. This is also an entirely romantic position given that the needs structure of everyone in the present is similar. The poor peasant in Brazil and the rich man in the United States want the same kind of thing. The children want to be doctors and actors etc. So everyone understands progress, but not everyone understands jouissance, but it speaks to a very similar thing, though at a different level.

*Those who develop a theory of modernity normally take a line on the «structure/agency» issue and about whether individuals or structures are the primary determinant of social development. Do you have a view on that?*

You can never answer the question «what comes first, the chicken or the egg?»; but you can always ask the question whether it was this chicken or this egg which was here first. So you cannot give an answer without knowing what exactly it is that you are talking about – give me an example.

*So the question always comes back to the historical circumstances that give us the structure?*

Yes this is a question which cannot be solved. It really cannot be solved. The structuralist position in which the individual has disappeared is just as ridiculous as a theory of existence in

which everything is starting from the individual and the world is constituted by consciousness. The question is, what are you talking about? If you are talking about context, of course no single consciousness will produce all the context from here, from your stomach. You need to encounter language, the psychic structure and even to have ideas of your own. Then you answer the question about the context. Obviously you are always entangled in the network of historical conditions; you are thrown into a world in which you have to learn how to live, and this world and context lives with you for ever. Ask the question differently – from the standpoint of *whom* do you look at the world, whether it is your world or the world as such. Every single person is a single person. You always have your own perspective on the world and every decision is made by you even if this is a matter of what we call free choice. There is such a thing. You are constantly confronted with alternatives, deciding whether to say «yes» or «no», whether it is about speech or action that's a different thing. The alternatives are present. But you say «yes» or «no», and you change the alternatives with saying «yes» or «no», so you need to ask the question concretely, what is constituted by language? What is constituted by consciousness, by the subject? That is why the whole question of «paradigms» is faulty. You understand everything under the paradigm of language, under the paradigm of communication and this is wrong, because, for example, no-one can answer a question about the source of emotions through the paradigm of communication. It's totally impossible. Nor will the concept of a language game answer a question about emotions. Wittgenstein knew this because he was not locked into a theory of language games. But if you ever speak about the theory of consciousness, then where do you get the thing which you are thinking about? Does it make sense to talk about consciousness without language. Of course not. So you cannot operate with one single paradigm which is also a post-metaphysical concept. To operate with one single paradigm always means that there are things slipping out from your position. You can use a paradigm, but you need to be aware that no paradigm grasps the whole experience of modern man.

*It sounds like you are against explanatory theories as such and that what you want is the historically situated analysis of particular events and particular periods and that any attempt to produce an overall theory of, say, social action would be one which inevitably missed something important in any given historical event.*

I think there is no problem in elaborating a theory of social action, of social structure. But you have to be aware that you've grasped only one aspect of this thing. You must never pretend that you have grasped everything which is essential. This is the problem, not that you are doing it. People who do philosophy or sociology look for a foundation because you cannot have any theory whatsoever without a foundation, but they need to know that this foundation is relative, that they chose this foundation so that they can offer an explanation for the other, but never a full explanation, never the «true» one. So I have no objection against action theory. I object if the action theory presents itself as true or the person presenting it thinks you can describe the full social reality of the present world. I think that that is a false claim, a false promise.

*OK, moving to your work from the 1980s and 1990s, there are certain motifs which we associate with your political philosophy like «symmetric reciprocity», «radical tolerance», «autonomy». What's your view of autonomy now? Is Kant still the major presence in your thinking on autonomy?*

I never use that term in a totally Kantian sense because since I wrote my first book on ethics, which was based on my lectures in Hungary in '58, I have always spoken about «relative autonomy». I have always said that there is no absolute autonomy. Absolute autonomy even in Kant is an idea, an idea of acting absolutely under the guidance of the moral law – but Kant adds that we



never know whether there was anyone, anytime who ever acted only exclusively under the moral law. So absolute autonomy is basically the centre but we approximate the centre. We never arrive at the centre which means that our autonomy is always relative.

*I suppose the subtext of the question is that 15 years ago your ideas about «symmetric reciprocity» led you to political radicalism; but I'm wondering how you see the relationship between autonomy and modernity now. What change would have to happen or occur to the basic structure of modern or capitalist society to enhance autonomy. Or are you saying that it is possible to be an autonomous being within a capitalist social structure?*

It is possible to be a relatively autonomous being in every structure, since morality is something which developed perhaps 2500 years ago. Since the development of the morality there is always the opportunity to act, to say in terms of relative autonomy that you are able to decide what to do, how to choose. In this respect we choose ourselves.

*But are there forms of society which are better able to bring about a position in which the individual is genuinely an end in him or herself?*

I don't think that any society was more able to do this than modern society. Different societies do it in different ways. In modernity you are thrown into the world as a totally contingent being; nothing is written on your cradle and you are an empty possibility. You suffer and you experience joy. You are thrown into freedom which basically means open possibility and also nothingness and then you can really choose your self. My ethics at least is based on the Kierkegaardian position that it is possible to choose yourself and the possibility is always there in the modern world, so the modern world contemplates this idea that you are able to choose yourself as such or such and you are also able to choose yourself as a decent person. My whole ethics is based on the position that you can choose yourself. One of the more fundamental issues in *The Philosophy of Morals* is that in order to talk about ethics you cannot turn any more to a specific social structure or social class to talk about «possibility». You need to talk to people assuming that they are not members of a class, and hence that they are contingent people.

*So autonomy is never a political project. You cannot bring about social structures, political structures which enhance or diminish autonomy because autonomy is a purely personal ethical relationship to the other.*

I would not say so. I know that Castoriadis believed in an «autonomous society» which enhances personal autonomy, but in this respect he was a progressivist. He believed that modern democracy is the autonomous society and that it enhances personal autonomy. Now if you apply the term autonomy to society, which I would not do but let's assume we can, then Castoriadis is right: democracy is an autonomous society given the fact that nothing is traditional any more, that the majority of the population has the right and the opportunity to elect its government and to govern itself, self-governance being the essence of modern democracy. Castoriadis of course believes in small groups, «real», direct democracy and that is what he calls an «autonomous society». Now as for whether it enhances individual autonomy, I think that there are some aspects in which it enhances it and some in which it does not. I don't think that it's easier to become an «autonomous society» today than yesterday just because there is democracy, because there is not only democracy. What kind of society is democracy? Democracy is not a society. Democracy is a form of institution, so what is democratically decided? What kind of people decide here? What is the decision about? So if you abstract from everything else you can talk about the autonomous society and the autonomous individual. But you cannot abstract from everything else. This is a capitalist society and a democratic society which has a very strong logic of industrialisation, of technology, with two

different imaginations, and so on. So you are never living a pure democratic society, because you are living in a society which is something else as well as being democratic. I don't think that we have a greater autonomy now because we are living in a liberal democracy than we had 200 years ago, but I don't think that we have less either. We don't have more as democratic theorists insist, and we don't have less as critics of globalisation insist. These are modernist conceptions. One is a progression scenario and the other a Domsday scenario. In one scenario we are closer and closer to an autonomous society and autonomous individuals, in the other society we get farther and farther away because we are endangered by multi-national companies and mass media and have no freedom left. I think that both are wrong because there are gains and there are losses and it is not a matter of indifference which gains are our gains and which losses are our losses. You can in a way optimise in a concrete situation gains and have fewer losses than in other periods and that we can call progression within the framework of one social situation that exists. You can work on progression within one social situation. That's not universal progression but you can operationalise.

*But isn't politics always about weighing gains and losses?*

Yes politics is always about weighing gains

*But ethics isn't, is that one of your suggestions? Are you saying that in your personal life you can evade weighing up the consequences of our action?*

No in our personal life we don't weigh losses and gains. I don't think we act so irrationally in our personal life. A lot of things are related in personal life which we can also introduce into our political decisions. We are also emotional beings. We are psychologically fragile because we lost the foundation of family. We are more neurotic and also more sophisticated. We are frequently in despair and there is some instability in the character of modern man. You therefore have to take into consideration that we are not entirely rational beings, and it's perhaps not a bad thing that we are not entirely rational things because in my view rationality is a good thing and also a bad thing. So the answer is I don't think it is necessarily interconnected with a concrete social situation whether the single person has greater or lesser autonomy. It is a concrete interplay between the person's psyche, the person's morality, the person's possibility to choose the social world, the concrete historical situation, time and space and lots of other things. We have to consider this egg or this chicken.

*Going back to your views on democracy, the theme of the radicalisation of democracy was a very strong motif in your earlier work and, indeed, in that of the Budapest School more generally.*

*Do you still think democracy needs radicalising?*

No. I changed my mind since I was in America. Democracy was for me only an idea before I went to America, before I was confronted with de Tocqueville's world. It was always something which was unproblematic, not because I believed that in democracy they had full autonomy, I didn't believe that. That was too utopian. But I still believed that democracy is something which can only be an asset, only a gain and that you cannot lose anything by having more democracy. So when I talked about the radicalisation of democracy I meant making everything democratic. Democracy was not only for the political things, but also the factories, the economy, and also in the family. Now what I prefer is rather symmetric reciprocity, but I described symmetric reciprocity as democracy and I believed that democracy is about symmetric reciprocity. I see now that I was mistaken and that I was describing what is often referred to in America as «totalitarian democracy». This is because in a democracy the majority can dictate to the minority, and the minority can be psychologically or physically oppressed by the majority and all kinds of minorities need to be defended against the decision of the majority so that democracy is not just an asset. It has its own

internal problems. Once I saw this I stopped speaking about the radicalisation of democracy. I still speak about symmetric reciprocity, but symmetric reciprocity is either present or absent in a democracy.

*Symmetric reciprocity also seems to have become an ethical concept rather than a political one in your work.*

No I think it is political as well. Politically, symmetric reciprocity is a situation which people can step into where they want to make a decision. In a political institution, in democracy, it is assumed, almost fictionally, that the people who enter into discussion with each other are related to each other symmetrically, none of them has power as against the other and this is a reciprocal relationship and it is how the best political decisions are made. No one exercises power against the other and so this relationship is symmetrical. I don't think that in this respect there is a great difference between personal relationships and political relationships. If you look for example at friendship or love, people assume that there is no power relationship, but maybe the assumption is wrong. Maybe one loves the other more than the other which is already a difference in power, but symmetric reciprocity means that you maintain a fiction, that you assume that this relationship is not equal, as such, but symmetrical. What it means is that you exclude the dependency, you exclude personal dependency, you exclude social dependency and you exclude the relationships of over and under-determination. You don't determine the other, you don't let them determine you, and it's a fictitious relationship. I think the best decisions are made where people assume that this relationship exists.

*But can the relationship, say, between an employer and employee ever be one of equality in a modern society?*

No, because the one had a power as against the other, but you can also achieve here a situation of symmetric reciprocity, e.g. there is a strike in a factory then the capitalists and workers will in this fictitious manner discuss with each other on equal terms because they have equal power in their hands, because they are in symmetry. Everyone has to listen to the element of the other because they have to come to a decision together.

*This of course implies that you no longer believe that «economic democracy» can only be achieved through the socialisation of production, or the generalisation of ownership. The strike can act as a means of producing relations of equality.*

If you believe in the other option then you believe in a world in which there are no relationships of sub- and super-ordination, no hierarchy of relationships, that is no division of labour. I don't think that such a society can exist except in our heads. The modern world is not a world which is in essence better than the pre-modern world. It is different. It has a totally different function and structure and normally we describe it in the following terms: that in the pre-modern world it was the position which you occupied in the stratification [social structure] which determined the function you perform, whereas in the modern world the function you perform will determine your place in stratification, but there is stratification everywhere. In every society there are those who occupy the top of the hierarchy and those who occupy the bottom. In pre-modern societies you were born into the situation. One was born a slave, the other was born a female or a master. Aristotle describes very precisely what the situation was like. One was born a man and one was born a woman. It was not a matter of sex, it was not a matter of gender, it was not a social hierarchy and if you were born a woman you have to perform the function of a woman. If you were born a slave you performed the function of a slave and everything was settled in everyday life. That was the foundation. A modern society has no foundation because you are a contingent person, because it is

not what you are born into which determines what you are going to do. It is the opposite: the function you perform is going to determine where you are in society. I was on Fiji and one day I asked a little girl what she wanted to be and she said either a doctor or a pilot. This is the modern world. It's not a question of will or won't. She might be one. She has the option. That is what is called «opportunity».

*You seem therefore to derive a normative validity for modern society from that sense of contingency. What I mean by that is the fact that the American Dream says that every American can become President at the same time normatively validates that particular social structure because it offers the possibility, whereas we know that the vast majority of people born in America have no such prospect or possibility.*

I think that what is very important is that what is in the head is the norm of a world, it is the idea of a world in which we are living. The fact is there is an empirical reality. We are «born free, but everywhere in chains» as Rousseau describes, and this is the description of the modern world, and the modern world is dynamic because there is always a gap between the idea and the reality. The pre-modern world was not dynamic because there was no gap between idea and reality. God placed you here in your miserable condition and that is the «veil of tears» - so what? You were born here because God happened to put you in this world in this position. What's the problem? But now the gap is here everyone has this idea of equal opportunity, but of course there is no equal opportunity. That's why the modern world lives on dynamism, because we think about how can we get closer to the empirical reality, get closer to the idea. That is what dynamic justice is all about. Without the difference, without the schism between idea and reality you have no modernity. Modernity is about the schism; both belong to this schism and this schism is not just something which is a lie but it is how modernity functions because it is the function you perform which puts you on top of the hierarchy. If not every American can be the President because there are millions of Americans and you can only have one President, then that's too bad.

*But we're still talking about systems in which this opportunity available to some is much greater than that available to others. We are still talking about hierarchy and privilege, it is just that now it is wealth rather than position at birth which dictates the opportunity.*

This is something you change. This is what changes. Someone like Reagan could never have become President fifty years ago. Tomorrow we have a black president or a woman president. This can happen. This is modernity and it pushes towards equal opportunity in some things and then some other thing is left unequal and we will want to enter that thing into the model. Then of course you reproduce unequal opportunity through the model of equal opportunity, but through the function you perform. You are a skilled worker or unskilled worker, or you are a director of a factory or you work in the office. This will determine your position in stratification, but you can change function, you can go to school and learn something and you have an entirely different function from the one you had beforehand or your parents had before you. That is called social mobility. Not everyone is mobile but there is social mobility. The possibility is there. This is a different model and that's why modern society is dissatisfied because it's just a possibility, and reality and possibility are far away for many. Many young women want to be actresses, so they go on diets because they want to look like these beautiful ladies. That's exactly the same thing. If an ordinary girl diets she cannot be as beautiful as those girls. That's not social, not directly any way, because they are not prevented from being beautiful, but the point is not everyone can be as beautiful as the girls on the screen and there will be the frustration as she tries hard to diet and to look at her face every day, and do her make-up etc., she will not be as beautiful as the girl on the screen. Everything is frustrating.

Everyone can be as beautiful, everyone can be a President. Everyone can be rich, everyone can be an actor, everyone can be a singer, everyone can be everything but you cannot be because there is no social possibility, or because you have no talent —both can be the case— still this is the model and the model works.

*In a fashion*

Yes, it works in a fashion. I would say is it better or worse than traditional society?

*Well the left radical traditionally regarded this idea of the possibility that you might yourself rise to the top of the heap as the legitimating fiction of modern society and as the ideology which sustains liberal-capitalist society. You seem to be saying that there is no outside of this model because it is what modernity is – or rather produces.*

But you see the traditional left which operates with this idea fulfils the function of modernity, because they are the ones to claim injustice and they are the ones who keep the dynamics of modernity in motion. They belong to the world, but they deny the world and in denying the world they reproduce the world which they deny.

*To take you back to democracy again, in your writings, the idea of democracy embraces the notion of openness and possibility. It's the contingent institution for a contingent age. What I find curious is that those who were the first to defend liberal-democracy such as the Founding Fathers and, indeed, de Tocqueville, did so because they thought that it would provide a bulwark against collectivist radicalism. They pointed to the manner in which negative rights are enshrined in the constitution, the separation of powers, checks and balances and argued that it was effectively impossible for any individual or party to change the fundamentals of the society. In short, they saw democracy as a mechanism of closure, whereas your vision of democracy is very much one of openness and possibility. I wonder if these two positions can be reconciled.*

I think it's openness and possibility, and I think it's also a closure. This is a post-modern perspective. If you say there is a world in which we are born, we cannot radically transcend this world. That's not possible, that's a false dream which leads only to despair and catastrophes and makes this world only worse. So if you believe that you cannot transcend this world then you will say that what the Americans do is not particularly beautiful and that I don't particularly like this kind of world. You don't need to like a world, you need to like your friends and lovers. Why should you love a society, why should you love a party? I think that it is a European tradition that we have to love our country, our nation, our party, and not our friends. Love is not less political. In politics you basically do your best to make fewer people suffer and give greater opportunity to many, not greater happiness because you are incapable of doing that, but more opportunity. Where happiness is concerned, that's your private business and it's something you provide for yourself and love you offer to those who love you and not institutions. I think that's the post-modern perspective and in this way when you speak about America, America was already the representative of the post-modern perspective from the time of this conception and that's why there was no radicalism. It's not a false ideology. This is what we will all have now. You already have it after '68. That's why I said '68 is the turning point. Of course there are always radicals, always people who want to transcend this existing social order. You cannot have these existing social orders without people who want to transcend them because they provide the dynamism. But now these people are very few, at least in the centre. But it's not excluded because in 20-30 years this kind of options or desires can reappear. I told you I don't think it's excluded that the margin can for a few days or a few months, get to the centre. I think it can rejuvenate the world but I don't think it can remain in the centre because now that technological development underpins social stability we cannot think in terms of the radical

transcendence of this social order. Of course in one sense this is unfortunate, but I think that the impudence and arrogance of the modern man was really out of pattern. The modern world was so arrogant. We have a history of different people and nations which I think is 3-4.000 years old. Why did we believe that only *we* have the possibility to introduce earthly paradise, why? What specificity has our age in the histories of the human race, why this arrogance? Why don't we admit that we're going to suffer like everyone else, but suffer in a different way, and also that we can be happy and that we can in this short life make other people happy and that that's a great present. Life is a great present, but we haven't got another present, we haven't got a privileged position because we are also members of the human race and we have no privileged position in the stories of the human race. That insight will help people not to despair about the fact that there's no radical transformation and there is no radical democracy and we have not established the final solution to our problems. What we believe is that we are human beings and we live in conflict and unhappiness. We are fragile. These are the facts.

*It sounds therefore that you are happy to dispute the claim of radical critics of liberal democracies, like Chomsky, Carol Pateman, that «possibility» and «openness» are at best relative and hence that any real challenge to the system would naturally be rebuffed by those who wield economic power.*

The problem with Chomsky is that he is a man of *mauvaise foi*. He is into all kinds of radicalism without thinking five minutes about whether it makes sense or not, whether it is liberating or enslaving, whether it is true or false. When I first came to America the first thing I heard was Chomsky's talk on the Soviet Union as the peaceful nation and the United States as the great warrior. This man does not know what he is talking about or what his radicalism involves. This radicalism is a sickness. I would not say every radicalism is like this, and I exclude some. I think only radical thinking or radical philosophy is interesting because liberal thinking is uninteresting; it's boring. It can be decent, but it is boring. Radical thinking is interesting. Why? Because it asks new questions. Liberal thinking never asks new questions, it only goes over the old ones; but radical thinking is like Socrates, it makes people angry and irritated. I love very much radical thinking. I'm still in favour of radical philosophy but doing radical philosophy does not mean that I am a professional radical. Chomsky is a professional radical. In any situation, for any agenda he comes up with a radical answer without asking about the relevance of his answer. I am against professional radicals who always know the answer before they think about the question.

*One of things that seems valuable about Chomsky is there are so few professional radicals in America. There are a great many special interest radicals and so on, but there aren't very many people who are prepared to poke the system with a sharp stick if you like and test its rationality.*

But this is a *nice* feature of America. You have so have few universal radicals by profession, because to be one you have to be a person of *mauvaise foi*. You see there are a lot of very decent radicals, Irving Howe for example, was my model of an American radical. He was always thinking about the nature of justice and injustice. He was really a very radical man because he was the living critic of American society, of inequalities, oppression, everything which you found there; but he never experimented with things which require *mauvaise foi* because he always looked into the matter. Howe was really my model of a good American liberal and radical.

*Was he ever arrested?*

I don't know whether he was arrested, but I know that he was singled out as a black sheep of American radicalism in the conflict between Trotskyists and communists. But the important thing is that he was a radical and I like radicalism. That's why I like the French philosophers more than

Rawls or Dworkin, because liberalism is flat when it comes to theory and it doesn't ask new questions. But I don't like professional radicals and there were some in France as well. For a while Sartre was playing the role of a professional radical, also in Italy, a lot of people were playing the role of professional radical, but this professional radicalism is not just a matter of thinking, it's also a sickness of intellectuals. Who are the professional radicals? They are intellectuals who are not satisfied with being professors or playing a modest part. They want to dance at the top of the world, be on TV because they are professional radicals. This is also showing off, this belongs to the modern show to be a professional radical and people love this modern show. Howe is not so well known as Noam Chomsky because he was just a decent man. This is also a kind of showing off and playing the part, playing the great role. Bertrand Russell was another professional radical. There were such types, now there are fewer and fewer. Now we can concentrate on the thinking. About Pateman, I liked her and had a good relationship with her, but I had always great disagreements with her position. For example, when I was in Sydney I heard her say that if a woman claims to be raped then her word should be enough for the court of justice and I told her «look, then there is no justice». You should be careful. There is a kind of radicalism which is not careful.

*One other aspect about your views on your democracy which I'm interested in is that you have always defended the Declaration of Independence and the idea of formal rights and liberties as being absolutely integral to freedom. Again, radical critics of liberal-democracy have been wary of accommodating a conception of rights within their views on how society should be organised, arguing that the invocation of such rights has been used to block social democratic proposals, as for example during the New Deal period. Is there any plausibility in the suggestion?*

There is no social democratic programme which would deny that these so-called negative rights or liberties are fundamental for the existence of the modern state. I haven't seen such a programme in my life. You are speaking about something else. No one should question the relevance of these rights. Whether a right can conflict with another right is another question, because they can conflict. In America it is recognised that conflicts exist, and in such cases you have to give priority to one right against another right. In abortion there is a conflict between the right to life and a right to decide. That's a most simple issue whether you decide for a right against another right, but this does not speak about rights. It speaks about the situation in which rights can be in conflict. And if there are no rights, rights cannot be in conflict because there are no rights, full stop. So I don't think that a normal social democratic government ever spoke up against human rights, and this is basically one of the greatest merits of one of the very greatest radicals of Western socialism, Rosa Luxemburg. She too defended human rights. She was a great revolutionary radical socialist, and she defended human rights. The question is of rights for what? Rights are abstractions, you defend human rights and you define the right of citizens which are not identical, and you defend the rights of minorities which are neither identical with the rights of individuals nor with the rights of citizens. There are different kinds of rights and these rights can collide with each other. Your right as a citizen can collide with your right to belong to a group, an ethnic group. I prefer normally to speak about individual rights even if you speak about the right of a group to possess land, etc. But there are so-called traditional rights, acquired rights which were abolished once upon a time for example, the land ownership of aborigines. In this case you can say that there are traditional rights and in this particular case because certain injustices happened, you can put them right in granting these kinds of special rights to special human groups. Everything is possible in this case. What should not happen is to curtail rights.

*So for you rights are not «natural» but emanate positively from constitutions. How would you stand on international rights or rights as between states or regions, say the North versus the South?*

This is another matter. Rights are normally rights within the framework of a state. A state has a liberal democratic constitution and in this constitution there are certain human rights, the rights of man and the rights of citizens for the members of this society, or citizens of this state. These are granted. However, whether you can grant human rights for the members of another society is a different question. In principle you can do it according to the principles enshrined in the United Nations. But the question is, what measures can you take if this right has been breached? Because to secure rights means that there will be measures taken if someone takes away this right, so if someone doesn't allow free speech in public then your right of free speech is infringed and then you have the right to remedies and the other will be sanctioned. But what can you do if someone else in another country is not allowed to do this? Do we have the opportunity to employ sanctions? That's an entirely different question because nations have the right not to be interfered with.

*How adequate is international law for these purposes?*

My simplest example is the right of emigration and the right of immigration. They do not cover each. America would be ready to take Chinese dissidents, but the Chinese won't let them out. However, they are not ready to take those people who are escaping poverty though they have been let out by their own government. Sometimes you let people emigrate but you do not let them immigrate. Or they would like to immigrate and they won't let them emigrate. You cannot interfere in another state's laws because of democracy. Liberalism and democracy are contradicting each other. I always say that if the majority of the population could decide whether to let people immigrate into their country that there would be no immigration whatsoever, because no majority of any population would allow others to immigrate freely, certainly not. Then comes not only the leftist but also the liberal claims that we have to allow free immigration. Free immigration cannot be allowed because it is anti-democratic. But even if you take only democracy then there will be no immigration. We must have a compromise between liberal principles and democratic principles; some immigration, yes, but not everyone. These are conflicts and conflicts cannot be solved. By the way conflicts between democracy and liberalism are always re-emerging and they cannot be solved because a conflict will occur in different places and different times and be about different issues. It cannot be solved.

*To go back to the issue of equality, do you now take equality to be a universal value like freedom and life? If so, what does the pursuit of equality entail in terms of basic social structure?*

In a modern society, equality is a universal value but in America, interestingly, they believe that equality is the main value. If you ask an American what the main value is they will answer equality.

*«Equality» shifts quite a bit through your work of the last 15 years, you have for example in «equality of life chances» in **Beyond Justice** you also recently talked about «equality of opportunity» and so on.*

That's the same thing.

*Equality of life chances is normally thought to be a more radical concept in that what it basically entails is attempting to raise every individual to the position where they have equal prospects for realising their talents, abilities and so on whereas equality of opportunity is normally interpreted as making sure that individuals aren't discriminated against.*

No, not necessarily, because equality of opportunity is equality of life chances. It's a social equivalent. It does not include the development of personal capacity and neither does it depend on individual decisions, but rather on the structure of the society.



*So in America or Britain, to what extent do we see an equality of life chances?*

That's the idea. It doesn't exist. There is no equality of life chances, certainly not, absolutely not. There is here a very great inequality of life chances but equality of life chances is the model which lives in the heads. What happens is that people find it is unjust and that there is no equality of life chances. This characterises all the lobby groups, the ethnic lobbies and the women's movement included. You need equality of life chances and what does the equality of life chances entail? It does not entail only equal rights or equal access to work, or equal pay for equal work. It desires something more or something else. It desires that men should be disciplined, that they do not sexually harass us. It desires lots of things which are nothing to do with the social structure of the society. That's why I said that this kind of equal opportunity at least in the case of America includes equality of life chances.

*Just to bring Marx back into the discussion, you could say that in talking about the development of a many-sided individual, an individual who to quote **The German ideology** is a hunter in the morning, fisherman, artist, critical critic, was only talking about the full development of «life chances», yet he regarded that goal as necessitating wholesale change to the basic fabric of social life. Who's closer to the truth, Marx or American liberal egalitarians like Dworkin and Raz who argue that this goal can be pursued from within a liberal-capitalist framework?*

You cannot ask the question who is right because first of all you compare the lion with the mouse and I think that is unfair. Marx was a radical philosopher with a great concept and his great concept did not include «equality» because Marx knew very well that equality is a category of quantity not a category of quality, and in a free society—he spoke about «freedom»—there is no such a thing as equality because every single person is an *ipseity*, an individual on his or her own, develops himself/herself on his own, and thus cannot be compared with anyone else. Marx was hostile to the term «equality» particularly «substantive equality» which he called «generalised envy». He was hostile to the idea of equality because equality is democracy and Marx did not like democracy. Marx was a romantic and had the universal romantic idea of every human person becoming a whole, a totality and living out his or her life according to his/her desires which are always high and dignified desires. Marx was very optimistic about human nature and about the human condition as well. But that was at least a grand vision which was certainly utopian in the sense that it's beyond our reach and not beyond our reach relatively, not now, not yet, but beyond our reach absolutely. It is earthly redemption. It is very Messianic. Certainly Derrida was right when he says that this is a Messianic conception.

*Does that mean that we're stuck then with the models of Dworkin, Raz and Rawls as a basis for the discussion of social justice?*

Here and now under our limited circumstances. They of course speak about social justice normally from one point of view and they are liberals in a contemporary sense, not in the sense I prefer liberalism. They are liberals in a procedural way which was spelt out by Rawls, rather than Raz and Dworkin and for them, liberalism is basically the procedure for freeing uninhibited argumentation. Liberals believe that whoever has the best argument will win the argument which is ridiculous. I think it is a naive liberalism, although they do address themselves to the concrete problems, to the distribution of social goods and services, and to the issue of how unequal opportunities can be put right. They are I repeat very much involved in a merely procedural, formal discourse on liberalism. On the other hand, they share the kind of position Marx despised which is the position of egalitarianism.

*Where do we find, if you like, the more inspirational liberalism?*

My example is Rawls – the concept that no-one should get higher remuneration or even acknowledgement because he has talents which are so to speak won on the national lottery. If someone is a manifestation of «generalised envy» it is him. Marx would have asked whether the Rawls, the beautiful Rawls which we enjoy has a merit, whether it deserves to be enjoyed. That's such a terribly substantive egalitarian conception which is basically generalised envy. But as a character he's a very decent person.

*But have you read a liberal who inspired hope if you like that liberalism can come out of this rather some narrow procedural discourse and actually give us an image of the human individual which is compelling and inspiring.*

For the time I don't see such a liberal thinker. That's why I think radical thinking is more exciting. It can make you develop something more interesting, something more adequate even something through which you can see something better in the world, whereas these kind of procedural liberals are very down to earth in this respect, but down to earth without making you enthusiastic about anything else. They have their truths, but their truths are commonsensical truths and sometimes they have the untruth as well because they are so keen to be procedural that they forget about the substance of liberalism which in its original form put an emphasis on the freedom and the self-development of the single individual which was once a substantive liberal value. This has all been entirely lost in this discussion about rights and particularly rights without duties. This is the modern liberal conception in America, that you have rights without duties. I find it ridiculous to talk about rights without duties, but this is the modern way. Now we talk about ethnic claims and group claims and lobby claims which are all just power games beside these other relevant claims. I do not deny that they are relevant claims but at the same time they are power games, and they make no illusion about it. There are also these opinion leaders, ethnocracies I call them, whose vested interest is in ensuring this and that and the third kind of ethnic or group rights for their people which is a bonus for them and gives them greater power. Of course it's all a power game. I'm not saying this in order to say something terrible, only to put it right, that you should not claim that this is just about justice. It's also about power.

*So I suppose this would be part of the communitarian critique of liberalism as well, that they are operating with a very thin description of the individual. They would say that we need to build up an idea of the individual as social actor, as member of a community and so on before isolating this naked individual.*

There is a lot of truth in the communitarian argument against merely procedural justice and procedural liberalism. On the other hand, these liberals have justified claims against communitarians because communitarians are relying upon very partial particularistic traditions. Communitarian values are also based on an American tradition which is not the liberal democratic tradition, but the local tradition of local communities, religious communities, town communities etc. embracing a very limited kind of internal symmetric reciprocity. They have very strong substantive values, very strong substantive virtues which are the territories of neo-fundamentalism. So you have here neo-fundamentalism coupled with justified claims of communitarianism and you have sometimes a very empty discourse on human rights which is merely procedural and which does not rely upon any existing community or existing human group whatsoever not even on the self development of individuals, and they are two extremes. They discuss with each other and sometimes you see I would say this argument sounds better than the other. The main thing is everything depends on arguments. I don't like merely argumentative philosophy or philosophies

only about arguments, and the false pretence that the best argument wins the day. I don't know where they got this idea because there is no empirical evidence. There is greater evidence for equal opportunity than for the fact that the best argument wins the day. I do not know which is the best argument, for what? You can say the best argument wins the day, and that's that. It's a circular argument.

*Do you think the same argument applies to Habermas as well?*

That is a great flaw of Habermas. He believes that stronger arguments win the day, but he knows at the same time the counter-factual which is that the best argument *should* win the day; but why should it? Whether our life together is just thinking about arguments and what is an argument? An argument is always verbal. Can life experience be an argument, for you at least?

*One of the authors who obviously drew your attention quite strongly was, surprisingly, Robert Nozick who of course comes out of the American libertarian rights tradition, and whose work is said to have influenced the development of «Reaganism». One of the things which you took from Nozick is the idea of the «utopia of utopias» as an attractive idea to play with. Despite the criticisms often made of this notion, I get the impression that you think that he's speaking to an important part of modern consciousness, specifically to the fact that we think of ourselves as being atoms with our own discrete plans, projects, hopes, aspirations. You seem to be saying that the sooner political philosophers woke up to this fact about who we are as modern individuals, the closer we can get to the kind of society which suits us as modern individuals.*

I like this utopia of Nozick, the real utopia in which all utopias can be actualised. It is a utopia. It's an absolute utopia and this needs to be stated. Why do I like it? Because of course I criticised liberal thinkers for neglecting the development of the human individual and rights as positive rights. I would admit that a person can develop his own capacities together with others. We are always sharing a way of life, and different persons have a different kind of affinity to one way of life, but what we accept is that there should be different forms of life and that each and every individual should be able to find the form of life in which he/she feels more satisfied or his or her capacities more actualised. There is a variety of human lives and this means that we actualise something which is a promise of modernity. The promise of modernity is that we are all thrown into the world as a contingent being and we are no longer obliged to live according to the exact requirements of the community into which we were thrown. From this the utopia follows, that we can have a community, we can live together with people, living together in a form most adequate to my capacities, my own feelings, my own desires and my own way of thinking. So the plurality of utopias means a plurality of forms of life in which each and every person can find a world in which he or she wants to live most and which would be the utopia of modernity itself, of the original contingency of each and every person, and that as a way of life is a matter of choice.

*The other thinker who sounds close to this conception is Max Stirner, the 19<sup>th</sup> anarchist who was of course criticised for his individualistic nihilism or egoism.*

Yes Stirner is one of them, Fourier is the other earlier example without the egoistic aspect of Stirner. There were many who were thinking in these terms and of course Fourier and Stirner were very close in time and in way shared a similar starting point.

*I think Stirner is a fascinating and neglected figure.*

Yes, very neglected. Marx attacked him. That was Marx's style. He normally attacked the Other too viciously.

*In that particular regard, I think Marx's viciousness was a sign of his nervousness, because usually Marx dealt with his critics in a matter pages and yet he spends 200 pages thrashing about*

in *The German Ideology* trying to pin down Stirner, trying to upset Stirner, trying to accuse Stirner. I suppose the interesting point about Stirner is that he shares or articulates at least some of your assumptions about contingency, thrownness, «ownness» as he calls it and takes them, arguably, to their logical end point. He can also sound like Kierkegaard. I'm just wondering therefore if you feel any sense of affinity with that kind of radical individualist strain in 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy?

It's very difficult. First of all it was a long time ago since I read Stirner, and I haven't thought about him since 1958-'59. I cannot really answer this very important question about Stirner. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, was not a radical individualist. Again, there are different things. To start philosophically from the existing individual and then to go on to speak about the relationship of existing individuals to each other, and to place the existing individual in concrete forms of life as Kierkegaard did, whether this can be called individualism, I don't think so. Individualism is basically an evaluation of an individual, not just an individual standpoint and an evaluation of the satisfaction of desires. It's basically an aggressive way of thinking because it means that the individual needs to be in power, that is the power of the individual needs to be exercised. It is a way of life, and maybe also one exercised against other individuals. The limit of individualism is liberalism of course, because liberalism states that you can follow your power, the power of your individuality only as long as, and to the extent that, you do not prevent other persons doing the same. Liberalism limits individualism. So I don't think that I would propose an absolute individualism. The development of the capacities and powers of the individual is not individualism. It can be collectivism. There are people who prefer ways of life in which they live together, in which the monk's choice is also an individual choice. Now this way of life is certainly individual, but certainly not individualistic.

*So you would like to reinforce the distinction between individualism and existentialism, that the politics of **Existenz** can still be open to collectivist suggestions, whereas individualism always leads down the road to a harsh form of libertarian minimalism.*

Whether the form is harsh depends on the individual, and how he exercises his power. I think that the philosophy of *Existenz* puts the emphasis on the existing individual. He or she can be thought together with different forms of life and in this way fits very well into a utopia in which all forms of life can exist simultaneously.

*You were obviously inspired by Kierkegaard who is a very pervasive figure in your recent work and yet other existentialists don't get that much attention, thinkers like Camus, Sartre, even Heidegger. What is it particularly about Kierkegaard's philosophy that attracts you?*

I can't answer this question. There are certain things which impact on a person. You read certain things and you cannot always explain why there is a great impact on you, you just accept that there is something in what you read which influenced you in certain ways. I read Kierkegaard when I was a very young girl of 18 or 19. His work struck me in the sense in which I thought it told me something about life, something important about the possibility of my choices, about the different ways of life and about love because the first book I read was *Either/Or* and this is about the three types of love: erotic love, friendship and love of God. So someone tells me about love and about personal relationships which basically accompanies me for my whole life. Also ethically, morally the idea of the choice, the existential choice of ourselves is something which illuminated a lot of things for me about the individual which is not necessarily individualistic. I can choose myself without being individualistic and that was important for me because, to confess, I am personally very much inclined to collectivism. If I look at my person, I always like to be together with others. I like communities. The best parts of my life were when I lived together with other people, where I

felt that there was a community of people, not of communitarians, but communities that were freely chosen, communities in which the others are in some way my friends, and where we can think together. I always wanted to have a form of life in which I chose together with others. I never wanted to live a very individualistic way of life because I don't particularly like it. I live it now because now there are no communities and we are all individuals and you have fame or this or that, and it's not to my liking. I prefer to live together with others. I prefer to have a movement in which I can find myself at home, but I would not join any movement because I learnt how to distinguish between those I want to be with and those I don't want to be with only in order to liberate myself from the unsatisfied desire for a movement. I am not an individualist in this sense, but I am an individual and that means that I look with a critical eye on the communities in which I participate. I cannot absorb myself entirely without asking the question whether something is right or wrong, whether it is ethically right or ethically dangerous or problematic, so I cannot lose the capacity which Kant identified with the Enlightenment to substitute your own mind for that of another, and I think this is what the individual is. An individual is someone who thinks with his or her own mind irrespective of whether he or she is an individualist or not.

*It sounds therefore like you might accept the welfare state as giving us the best balance between individual freedom and collective security.*

The welfare state is the best way of redistributing social goods and services among those who are underprivileged and who are the losers in the battle. However, it is not a collectivist thing. I have very rarely seen more individualistic social arrangements than the welfare state. Look at Sweden and Austria, they are absolutely individualistic countries because redistribution is always to individuals. The social worker comes and visits you, looks around, decides whether you should get money or not. Everything goes to individuals or rather to certain individuals who are measurably «poor». It means that everything is quantified and that individuals are regarded according to quantified criteria. There is no collectivity and no collective decisions whatsoever. An Israeli friend once told me a story about a father and son living in Sweden which shows the nature of the welfare state very well. One day the father had a heart attack and the son took him by car to the hospital. The son then went immediately to the social security and claimed back the money he paid for the petrol. This is the welfare state. You take someone to hospital, but you claim back the money because that is your social right. He should have been carried in a public vehicle so he claimed back the money. This is the welfare state and it has nothing to do with collectivism. There is social justice as far as redistribution is concerned, but nowhere have I seen a greater amount of loneliness.

*If someone gave you a blank sheet of paper and said «could you draw what you now consider to be the best way of marrying individual and social needs», which society in the world would you draw inspiration from, or which political philosopher or which movement would you be able to say I identify with that?*

That's very difficult to answer because it depends on the period in which I live, the way social justice is practised in one country or the other country. I cannot accept one single model because if you ask me to say what kind of model I would accept for Hungary then I could probably answer the question, but in all countries it is a citizen's right and duty to think about the model which is suitable for this particular country and this particular time. I don't believe in the Marxist tradition that we can have a model, a pattern, which is the best for all countries everywhere. I think it is a matter of contestation and, furthermore, it is a matter for the people in a given country to decide what is most suitable at this time, in this place. Only they have the knowledge to take into consideration the available resources at a given time, the traditions, and imagination and a lot of other things because

they can be entirely different. But community life certainly does not depend entirely on how you distribute goods and services, because these communities either exist or they don't exist. In America where the redistribution of goods and services is very low —it's not a «Swedish» society— there are a lot of communities there. It's a very communitarian country. In Sweden, on the other hand, they have the oldest, most powerful social democratic tradition, but the communitarian tradition is much weaker. It is very individualistic and there is a lot of loneliness. Of course there are also differences between town and country and in a great metropolis people normally become very lonely and it's very difficult to be in a community. In the country it is easier but then it is also more repressive. You can't have everything you see.

#### **D. Contemporary Issues**

*One of the things you wrote a lot about whilst in Australia was the prospects for Central and Eastern Europe. I'd like to ask your opinion about what the prospects currently are for Hungary and for the central European region more generally. How do you see things developing there?*

Yes I know Hungary well. I don't really know Russia, nor do I know Ukraine or White Russia. I have visited these countries but I only know as much as everyone else who reads newspapers and watches the news. As regards central/eastern Europe, I follow closely the politics of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland and of course the main feature they share is the desire to join the EU even though they know that this could cause trouble economically. There is such an ancient desire to belong to the West, particularly in Hungary. This is a story that started during the Enlightenment when the most radical Hungarian poet was thrown in prison for writing a poem urging Hungarians to look at Paris. All writers looked West then. For the aristocracy it was London; for radicals it was Paris. But the West was always the model. We always wanted to belong to this part of the world. The East was reactionary, old-fashioned, underdeveloped. This view remains strong and something else is added to this story. We should not forget that Hungary was the last ally of Hitler, and all the other countries, including the Czech Republic and Poland were considered as both the victors and the victims of the Second World War. Even after communism, Hungary was treated differently by the US and Great Britain because they were one time allies and we were the enemy. This is now the first time that Hungary has been accepted together with Czechoslovakia and Poland and now perhaps the second world war is forgotten. This is extremely important for Hungary.

*Does Hungary have then a rather romantic view of the EU, that the EU represents the West, the Enlightenment?*

This might be the Czech or Polish view – not the Hungarian. Hungarians are sceptics. They don't believe it's a paradise. They don't have many illusions about it. They just want to say «we want to take their burdens and their conflicts because we belong to them». Before the revolution in '56 we showed that we belonged to the West and not the East. We sacrificed blood and we want you to recognise this. It's not paradise We want to enter another world with the conflicts which belong to these old West European nations.

*Isn't there a fear that Hungary might become Europe's sweatshop or is it that by joining the EU Hungary will be protected against global forces?*

Central and Eastern Europe is already the sweatshop of Europe, first and foremost of Germany. In Hungary, German investment is very great. It is very traditional, far greater than American investment. There are also a lot of Japanese firms. Because of the low wage system in Hungary, Hungary is in an economically dependent situation. This is a fact that everyone knows and is why the standard of living

is low and why the differences in income and wealth are extremely wide in Hungary. The situation is one I am not very happy about. In this respect Hungary expects a kind of protection from belonging to Europe. I think the economic aspect of the story is important but it's not the overarching factor. The overarching reason is sentimental. It is about culture. Ask Hungarians about Europe and they will talk about European culture. I was invited to a conference on Europe and to talk about whether there is a unified European culture. We never hear about these things in the West, but we speak about Europe, we speak about our culture, our literature, our music, our singers, our way of thinking about things as belonging to the European tradition and this is as important as the economic aspect.

*So there isn't a central European identity as such which other people hostile to the EU might draw upon as a way of saying look we have a distinct identity, which is not the same as either Britain or France or Spain or whatever, but which we can use to build relations with the other countries within the region?*

During and immediately after the transition I believed that there might be a Central and Eastern European project or consciousness, but this was entirely lost. Hungary is not thinking in terms of Czechoslovakia or Poland, but in terms of Germany, France, Holland, Italy, even Spain, without having close interest in our own region which is also very problematic. We only have an interest in other countries of the region where there are Hungarian minorities. Hungary is sceptical. It knows that we are now poor but it also believes it is the most intelligent country, most cultured nation in the whole world – we win Nobel Prizes etc. We have nuclear physicists, mathematics, physics, etc. etc. all Hungarians.

*Is there also a sense derived from the linguistic difference that Hungary is unique and distinct from other central European cultures and so it's part of a broader European entity than simply being a central European country?*

I think the fact that we do not speak a Slavic language might possibly play a role, but the Czechs have no interest either in the Poles and vice versa although they all speak the same language. They all look to the West, not towards each other. It's a common feature here.

*One of your concerns also in the 1980s was about the security and defence of the region and about the prospects of being threatened by Russia. Is there any fear in Hungary at the moment about what might happen in the breakdown of Russia/Ukraine into warring nationalistic factions. Are there any significant defence issues?*

No we are not afraid of Russia. Certainly Hungarians are not afraid of Russia. This is another difference we have from the Czechs and the Poles, particularly the Poles. The Poles were always afraid of Russia because they have this historical animosity and they are anti-Russian and anti-Soviet. The Hungarians were never anti-Russian. They were anti-Soviets. They are not afraid of Russia. We have no borders with Russia, but only with Ukraine. Russia is not a real threat, but Hungarians know that the nearer we get to Nato the more we are protected from possible threats from outside, but Hungary is not afraid of war, Russia etc.

*Is there any fear of a violent black market spinning out from Russia, Ukraine?*

You see what happened now. There was a bomb yesterday. There is a large mafia operating on Hungarian territory, smuggling drugs, alcohol and the rest, and there's also the Russian mafia, the Serbian mafia, Slovakian mafia, and of course the professional killers come from these mafia people. That's what we saw here yesterday. There are many hired guns from outside and I think very serious measures will have to be taken against them in the near future. Hungary wanted to open its borders because they were closed for such a long time and because that was a sign of liberal-democracy; that you open borders and everyone can get out. It turned out that everyone can get in

because we were very liberal and this has now come to threaten the security of Hungary. No other country did this but Hungary was so liberal in these regulations, not asking for visas, etc. I think something is going to happen now.

*And what's your assessment of the way in which the Hungarian people are taking to being liberal-democratic citizens. One of the features of the transition has been a nostalgia for old times, for certainty and so on. Does this feature at all in Hungarian political culture?*

There was a nostalgia for certainties. There is no nostalgia towards the old political order.

*Even amongst old people?*

You cannot really speak about individuals. I'm sure that there are old people who want to go back to the old political order, but I doubt whether there are many and those who speak about the restoration of the public means of production occupy the extreme right and the extreme left and I think the extreme right is the only one which really wants to have a socialist state. Even the extreme left does not want this.

*How do you explain that paradox? What does «right» mean in that context?*

Nationalistic, protectionist, anti-globalism, anti-West, anti-semitic, anti-gypsy, the traditional fascist scenario. The socialist party of Hungary introduced the free market and privatisation, so for the far right we have to defend Hungary from the foreigners – that's the slogan. It means for immigrants but also for visitors and foreign capital. Hungarian capital must be in the hands of Hungarians etc. – very extreme nationalistic demagoguery and these are the socialists. Even in the Hungarian labour party, which is to the left of the Hungarian socialist party which is the old communist party, even they do not want to restore nationalisation.

*One of the other features of transitions which countries in the region have found difficult—East Germany is the classic example—is the legacy of communism in terms of the penetration of civil society by informers, various other members of the old apparatus. Is that a feature at all of the Hungarian context? Is there a lack of trust or suspicion of individuals?*

No not at all. Even the opposite. People here are sceptical and a little bit indifferent. They say things have changed.

*Moving on, one of the big issues of the moment is globalisation and the fears which many have that globalisation undermines the state and the capacity of the political to produce just outcomes. What are the prospects for social justice in a context of globalisation? Does it have a bearing on your thinking about the political?*

This is a very concrete question about an issue which is just developing. At the present moment globalisation is first and foremost an economic phenomenon which has brought very drastic changes in the last few years. First we speak about globalisation in terms of the question of capital and now we also think about globalisation in terms of working capital. At the present moment, the difficulty is that the bigger international companies don't pay any taxes and so there is less and less money in the country for redistribution because of tax evasion. It is therefore very difficult not to raise the question of social justice. Redistribution cannot really underpin social justice if the money is not available because people don't pay taxes; but this is a burning issue which has already been raised and I don't know what the consequences will be. One consequence might be that globalisation will not be endless but that there will be some breaks here too.

*Does your intuition tell you that globalisation is a force for integration, culturally, or for disintegration?*

It depends where you are. In Latin America, people tell you not that globalisation is wrong but that it needs to be controlled. They are not against globalisation because they think that they profit



from globalisation, it just needs to be done in another manner. There are social complaints that globalisation penalises the worst off nations because Africa is left out of globalisation. Not everyone can win. There are other voices which say that the most developed countries are worse off under globalisation because in the last few years working capital has become more and more mobile and mobilised. The most developed countries have to cope with the greatest and increasing unemployment because capitalists are fleeing for example Germany and there is high unemployment in Germany, and the US decided precisely because of globalisation that you had to abandon the high wage system and you have a low wage system in order not to let unemployment increase, so that basically the losers will be the best developers. There is also this theory that America, which was basically the centre for globalisation, will be the greatest loser from globalisation and that the poor regions will be the winners because the low wage system brings in capital and they will develop whilst we will have to cope with social unrest and the fact that for the first time the standard of living will decrease rather than increase. In short there are those who think America will be the losers and not the winners of globalisation. You can take different standpoints on this, because it is not clear what will happen.

*But something concrete if you like, yesterday I was in Pizza Hut and I asked the manager how much his unit labour cost was. He said it was in the order of 50p an hour, and yet when you go around the shops of Budapest, the prices are fairly similar to the UK. I just wonder if a situation in which people don't earn enough to afford the now bountiful goods placed before them isn't doomed to fail.*

That is very true. Of course Pizza Hut is an extreme thing. They are unusual. They hire young people, underage people, not full-time workers. They play with this thing. They are the worst, but even if I don't speak about Burger King and Pizza Hut, even the salaries paid by investors and new capital is very low. Only the wage and salary earners are the fixed payers of taxes. The others don't pay tax, or they pay very few taxes such as capital gains tax; but this is maybe an intermediary period because they want private investors to come to Hungary and to invest here in order to avoid a huge increase in unemployment. We should not forget that Hungary is a low wage system, but unemployment is less than the European average now and Hungary wants to increase employment because the greatest danger is if people remain unemployed for a long time. That is the worst. Constant unemployment is awful and must be avoided. So on the ground of this ideology they are paid less, but there should be more work. This is the idea. I don't know how it's going to work out here. So globalisation and capitalism is again revolutionising everything and you don't know *pre bono* who will win and who will lose, but in great probability there will be a counter-tendency against globalisation. I don't know whether they will introduce import/export taxes. Maybe they will abandon the absolute free market position.

*Is globalisation therefore something to be resisted or regarded as simply part of modernity and so better left alone as a political issue?*

You cannot say that globalisation is part of modernity. It is a possibility offered by modernity. In modernity there are a lots of possibilities which are not realised. I think rather that there is always in modernity a kind of pendulum movement between an entirely free market situation on the one hand, and a limited market situation on the other. People also tend to think that the economy is somehow a public thing, that it needs to be publicly controlled; but it cannot be entirely under public control and the global economy is basically not under public control whatsoever so that might help the development of a counter-tendency. There will of course be very great inequalities in the well-developed countries, unemployment, etc. as jobs transfer to cheaper wage systems. I think they will make a bigger noise than the under-developed countries.

*What about the resistance to cultural globalisation? You have the Academy Francaise which stands rather Canute-like trying to protect the French language. Does that make sense to you: the idea of trying to resist global brands, global ideologies, global concepts, a global language from eroding national cultures and local sensitivities?*

I don't think that there's a cultural aspect to globalisation. Of course you can speak about mass culture. You can speak about the TV shows.

*What about the Internet for example, the way that it lifts boundaries between people. If you have the English language you can live in a completely virtual world.*

Yes, but it's an esperanto, not the English language. It's not Shakespeare and you cannot write a poem with this form of English language. You can have bare communication, that's all. It's like the Morse Code. You can say «SOS», but that's not a language.

*But if everyone spoke this esperanto would that constitute a uniting force?*

Already now a second internet is in operation, that is, this universal free access is being paralleled by another Internet to which not everyone will have access, and of course there are national internets. You never know. It's happening so fast, but the information is too much. You cannot really swallow this information. We are overpowered by information. We are overbombed with information and our mind is selective and so is the national mind. It cannot take all the information in. There will be a selection of this information which is more important, one place for the other, for one community, from one nation to another. I don't think you can go on *ad infinitum* with this exponential growth of information because of our limitedness. Life is limited, and we want also to live.

*Do you think people in the near future will think of themselves as radically situated individuals in the sense that they will feel themselves Hungarian from Budapest with these particular local concerns? Or do you think that the degree to which the communications technology penetrates people's lives will produce either a disorientated subjectivity or, on the other hand, some sort of globalised citizen?*

I don't think that the Internet will produce global citizens because the Internet is not about establishing citizenship. People enter into correspondence with others about personal problems, about sex, but not in order to establish citizenship. They regard it as a personal place for relationships, for communication, and for getting information. It's also about business. On the other hand I've just been reading an article which argues that the best decisions are taken by those who don't take any information into consideration. If you listen to everything then you make bad decisions. It's better not to listen to any advice when jumping into the darkness and then you have a greater chance to make a good decision. Whether it's true or not true, I don't know.

*An equally worrying aspect of globalisation is environmental degradation. Green issues don't feature very largely in your work and what you do say about green matters philosophically is usually uncharitable because you lump greens in with the politics of life, «bio-politics» as you call it which you describe as intolerant.*

But they are intolerant aren't they? I have no objection against green concerns because I used to swim in the Danube and I've seen how it has become so polluted that you would never dream of doing it now. So I always understand the concern about protecting nature against the intrusion of industry, of neglect and everything else. But I think that full time ecologists are fundamentalists, and that for them only life has a value and that nothing else is important, and sometimes they do not make the distinction between human life and the life of an insect. Of course this is only a matter of attitude. In Indian culture, a cow's life is as important as a human life, more important in fact

because a cow is sacred and human life is not sacred, but here in Europe we have a tradition in which human life is taken to be almost sacred, more so than the life of a flower or the life of an insect. We make choices, if you take penicillin, for example, you make a choice for the life of man against the life of a bacteria. So you always make choices and the issue is that sometimes ecologists pretend that you do not need to make these choices, and that you have to defend nature as a whole, but against what?

*Aren't many of our assumptions about equality of life chances, for example, and the need for a constantly rising standard of living predicated on an ideology of growth, of industrialisation and hence of environmental degradation. Don't we need to reformulate the basic questions by which we live our lives in terms which make life sustainable?*

You can say that. I have no objection against rethinking the way of life we conduct as persons but I'm afraid that there are two strong imaginations, the technological and the historical, which are so strong that they define the way we live and we cannot lose their influence unless there is a catastrophe. *You* have to change *your* life. You can go and become monks as individuals, but the whole modern world cannot decide that we will all become vegetarians, because we won't.

*But I suppose the lighter green response is that we don't have to change our perception of life because many people do actually recognise how life is being undermined by industry, but what it does demand is a basic rethinking of our expectations as human beings. We cannot survive if we keep on ourselves craving an ever-greater variety of new objects whose very being is dependent on the mass industrialisation which feeds it.*

That is very true; but another aspect is also true, which is that there are too many people on Earth. If for a moment you imagine everyone changing form of life, half of human kind would die out because without industry you cannot support mere survival. We are too many. Maybe it's too late. Mere survival cannot be maintained without this crazy, greedy madness. There are two things now in common, you have to produce the medicines, you have to produce the technical means in order to support those already living.

*So the politics of natality is more important than the politics of nature? It's more important to attend to the basic question of how we will support the world.*

Politics of natality, politics of mortality, because of course your life expectancy is now twice as long as it used to be – should we change that? Is it in the interest of life to change this? Or to change the possibility of men to be born?

*Well it's a basic problem that in western society we have rapidly ageing populations whereas in developing worlds we have very young populations.*

The question is not life or not-life. The question is what kind of life: good life, not good life, life of old, life of young, life of many, life of few. Life is pitted against life, not just freedom is pitted against life.

*Some of your most recent publications have been about the dangers of identity politics dominating basic questions about liberty, rights and so on. You evidently see a threat coming from the penetration of politics by questions of gender, race, and ethnicity. I'm not clear whether you see this is a distinctly American problem or as something universal.*

I think it is broader than America. It takes on a different shape in America, but if you look at Europe these ethnic identities which now develop in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia follows the same tendency. Every ethnicity wants to live on its own, and wants to separate from the broader body of citizenship. The nations of very few are created under the guidance of this ethnic purity. This kind of ethnic identity is also based on the concept of purity: you don't mix your pure

blood. There's a kind of racism in all of them, because constitutional nations are not interested in blood and ancestry and not even in the language which is traditionally spoken in this environment. So this American way of «identity politics» is the American way to deal with this identity but it is everywhere. It is there in the movements of the Skits in India and it is there in the Slovenian or the Bosnian case and it was there in the Irish case. Against the nationalism of nations there is now a form of ethnic identity seeking the unity of a smaller group. On the one hand, you have globalisation and on the other the smaller groups want to be tied together and have their own identity. It's based on this race language, the principle of *Blut und Boden*, blood and territory, and it is two ideas very strictly tied together with this new identity politics. It is not just America.

*You are also quite critical of the contemporary feminist movement. Why, to be clear, do you see a threat in the advancement of the feminist agenda?*

I don't think there is danger in advancing the case of women's liberation because I think that it is a conclusion of modernity that there is equal opportunity and women's liberation belongs to the drive for equal opportunity. The idea of modernity already includes the equal opportunity of women. Equal life chances for women is also included here. There is a gap between the life chances of women and the life chances of men and we will never allow this to be forgotten. It is an idea of modernity so it is an absolutely necessary movement. My objection against feminism is not women's liberation, but just that very frequently radical feminists defend an agenda which is intolerant, fundamentalist and very much determined by a faulty and ideologically flawed historical imagination. I don't have to say «look we are modern people, there is equal opportunity. We are women and we can take equal opportunity», that's alright; but if it is coupled with a new grand narrative of women's suffering from the time of Creation with Eve and the apple to the present day we have a whole story, a fantasy, which never existed in history. I think it is too ideological. It is also false and it is certainly not needed; but it is needed for something, because you cannot have feminist departments in universities without this grand narrative. You need to teach feminism. You don't need only to claim that we need jobs and equal concern. No, that's not enough. You need university departments, professorships, high salaries, power, and all these ideologies support this power, support lobbyists' power, support the opinion leaders' power. They are very hard men these feminists, and they are advancing themselves not the position of women. Let me tell you why. At the university we had a wonderful woman historian who could not get a job. She had published a lot and she was even a lesbian, but she could not get the job because she was not ready to teach women's studies, or women's history, she was a just an historian. She wanted to tell the history of freemasonry, not the history of women. Women are now employed in American universities under the condition that they are feminists and under the condition that they teach feminism and women's studies. You cannot have a woman who is a good philosopher or a good historian. We have become unequal with men through the setting up of departments of women's studies. All this means is that we have been sent back to the kitchen by ourselves, or rather by our representatives because women's studies is a kitchen, feminist studies is a kitchen. When they asked me why I'm against women's studies I said I will be happy to see the teaching of women's studies on one condition, that only men should teach it, because I think that it is basically set against the emancipation of women. Also this whole Victorianism of sexual harassment hampers the emancipation of women. If we cannot defend ourselves, if you need someone to defend you, then you show your weakness; and why do we make the relationship of men and women, this intimate relationship, a matter of constant discussion, of constant legal intervention? I know there is rape and it should be punished because it's violence.

*But the problem is that harassment isn't always «violent» in this conventional sense.*

If someone says that I have beautiful breasts, so what? I say «go to hell», or I like it, or I don't like it. So why do we introduce everywhere these kinds of measures making human life absolutely intolerable? No man can have confidence with his wife or daughter because tomorrow they will go to the court and say that he said this and that and that he made me make love to him, and this was violence. Oh come on! No human relationship remains in place.

*Are there then any important non-biological differences between men and women which might explain patriarchy or the domination of women by men?*

Men and women are entirely different. The biological difference is a difference because we have a different history and different traditions and we have a certain emotional, psychological heritage which —I'm not a Lamarckian and would not say that it is «inherited» because it's acquired— is mediated thoroughly in your life, in your childhood, and through that we become different. I don't want certain features of women to be lost. I don't like very manly women. I don't like women who are so tough and cruel. Why should we be cruel? Cruelty is not a beautiful human quality.

*So there are distinct feminine qualities?*

I like distinct feminine qualities. I like men with distinct feminine qualities, very much so. I don't like men who are cowards and I don't like men who are infantile and that's the next thing which happens in America, that men remain infantile. American men are extremely infantile; they never grow up. They are no more than 13 years of age. That's why American feminism is so successful because men are so childish.

*Should men be «feminised»?*

No, I don't think so. Everyone should be him or herself.

*But we have a structural problem in western society with the self-image of young men who play to a model of masculinity which is outdated and which prevents them actually taking part in society as civilised human beings.*

That's true, they have a pattern which is outdated. Women also have a bad feminine pattern which is outdated. They are outdated, but they can be treated with humour and can be transformed slowly. The slower the better. Very violent transformations are dangerous if it comes to intimate relationships. It's a difficult period as far as sexual relations are concerned because not to live according to traditional patterns mean you will have problems with your life and with your psychology. It's very difficult for you to deal with a new situation. Women were happier when they were only housewives and mothers. Now they are unhappier because they have to satisfy different kinds of requirements and live according to different models and it's psychologically problematic. It leads to nervous imbalance and so also for men. They don't know what to do either; but the worse thing is to increase hostility among the sexes. That is the worst, because you can talk about this matter but if you make Strindberg a social norm, then men and women will hate each other. Where does this lead us? I don't think that it leads us anywhere. It's better to develop pluralised models of men and women: you can do it this way, you can do it that way. People will find their way with suffering and conflicts which you cannot avoid. Only Americans believe you can avoid suffering. I think that the cause of Americans remaining infantile is that they run to the psychoanalyst when the first lover doesn't turn up. They run to the therapist, the analyst — everyone does. I don't know one American who hasn't seen a psychoanalyst. I feel myself totally deserted. I'm the only person who doesn't go. They all want to find a remedy. They want to symbolise their mothers and fathers. They all have this general way of explanation and then they take Prozac. That's not a beautiful world. I

have in my heart a deep scepticism about the way this modern world develops, but you see I would not say this is a final tendency – no tendency is final.

### Notes for a biographer

*In the last section I'd like you to ask some questions about how you work – «notes for a biographer» if you like. My first question is about your working relationship with Feher. I'm curious about the joint pieces, how you wrote together.*

Different ways. There were a few things that we in fact wrote together, like «Forms of Equality» which we literally wrote together, sitting side by side. Then there were works in which one chapter was written by me and one chapter by him as, for example, for *The Pendulum of Modernity*; but mostly we discussed the matters previously many times and I wrote the draft and he wrote the book. That is, I wrote the draft and he went through it and through it and he accepted the structure and I presented the structure and then he wrote it down and afterwards we discussed it and sometimes I found it doesn't match my ideas, and we changed it, etc. It was quite different.

*It sounds like you had general agreement on most areas of politics, particularly as regards you analysis of Eastern Europe, of the region and so on. Were there any major philosophical differences between you?*

Oh yes, first of all he remained far more of a socialist than myself.

*That doesn't show interestingly enough. I would have put it the other way around.*

And the other thing is that he hated my anthropological pessimism. He really believed that mankind would be better in the future and that we will improve. I was always very sceptical about this.

*I'm curious about this because in his later works he draws inspiration from thinkers like de Tocqueville who are part of the sceptical liberal tradition and he is also deeply affected by the disastrous outcome of the French Revolution which of course, he had tremendous scholarly interest in. So I'm surprised that you actually say that he retained a core optimism.*

But this belongs together, because Feher believed that contemporary humankind is very simple and this is why you needed the image of total betterment in the future. I did not think that contemporary humankind is very simple. We are what we are. I do not need to believe that there will be a betterment in the future. I think the two things belong together. His Messianic belief in the betterment of humankind, and his distrust in the human race as it happens to be now.

*Are you saying that he was able to marry satisfactorily Messianism, as you put it, and hostility towards and scepticism about redemption, and «redemptive politics»?*

That was common between us that politics should not be redemptive; but he believed in the redemption of the human race because we are sinners. I did not believe in the redemption of the human race because I don't think we are sinners. Some of us are, but not so many. So our anthropology was different. Anyway, he had a very specific talent for history which I never had. So he had a talent to read the text of history, to pay attention to the text of history. I was always impatient, so we needed each other for these common books because as I told you I was always too lazy to read the documents, because I was never interested in documents and he was never lazy. He was keen to read everything that was documented and held the view that you draw conclusions only from the facts.

*Has Feher's death affected your work in any way in the sense that not having someone to discuss and share ideas on a daily basis and to read over manuscripts and drafts which you have been working on might affect your work?*

I don't write any more books on politics. After Feher's death, I never wrote and I will not write a book on politics. I intervene politically in my country through articles, etc. but everything that I write about politics is on a general theoretical level and never on this concrete level because I know I have no talent for this. Of course I missed the discussion with him, but as far as my other works are concerned I continued writing.

*To go back to an issue raised previously, is there any sense in which we can talk about the phases of your work reflecting the locations in which you were living. Is there any sense in which your concerns or the development of your philosophy was affected in a tangible fashion by these shifts in location?*

Not very much. Basically everything I was thinking about yesterday is already in my first books, but I get new inspiration. If you live in a world your eye is opened up to a kind of perspective you haven't seen formally. That is, I in a way acquired certain kinds of sensitivities to certain issues which my sensitivities haven't developed, but since I am a very theoretical animal and a philosophical animal, not a sociological animal in fact, basically I write always on autobiography and whatever I write is always in a way a kind of autobiography and in this respect not very much influenced by the location in which I write. Look at *General Ethics*, in its essence, not in its language, it is basically the same as *From the Intention to the Consequences*, a book I wrote in 1957.

*Some of your writings about justice and so on do seem to be heavily influenced by the American context. The way things are phrased, the references, the sense of where a debate is going, the issues you address have an American flavour.*

You have to be clear that every topic has its style. I cannot write two books in the same style and I cannot write about general ethics in the same style as I write about justice, and I can't write about the beautiful in the same style as I write about modernity. I think that the question of justice requires a style which is closest to analytical philosophy because this is the main topic. The whole topic as such of the modern concept of justice is embedded in the discourse which starts with Hume and this is really taken up most sincerely by analytical philosophy. So when you write about justice your style has to accommodate a kind of discourse which is a very typically modern discourse, that of universal pragmatism, of analytical philosophy more generally. Even if I wrote a chapter on the «traditional concept of justice» this is a modern discourse and I have to accommodate this fact. I would never do the same in a book on the philosophy of history, as for a theory of history, not at all. This is an entirely different language. The theory of history has a different language from the philosophy of history because I cannot use the same genre twice.

*But I would say that you are essentially a continental thinker writing in an anglo-saxon mode, and I can't help thinking that perhaps part of that is due to your thinking about your readership and about who it is you're addressing, so I'm wondering whether your view of who reads your books has shifted, say, since the writing of *Everyday Life* which is quite a dense piece of work in a very continental post-Hegelian style to your recent works like *Beyond Justice*, or *General Ethics* or *A Theory of Modernity*, which are written in a very accessible, very clear, analytical style. Is part of this shift of style down to a shift in your view of who you are writing for?*

Not necessarily, because I think *A Theory of History* has no analytical style, neither has my concept of the beautiful. It depends on the subject matter which style I use, not the audience. By the way my audience is changing all the time because my books are translated into many languages, so the question of the audience has become irrelevant. *Beyond Justice* is very popular in Argentina. It's popular in Italy; so it's not just an anglo-saxon book in this way. My audience has changed because my earlier books were really written for a broad leftist audience, neither English nor German, but

the international left audience. I know that in Spain they have just reissued a collection of my work from 1968 to 1973. They are still interested in these things. I am no longer interested in these things, but they are, and I do not prevent my books being published. I learned this lesson from the example of Lukacs. Lukacs always wanted to prevent his books from being republished because he did not identify himself with these works. I learnt something from Lukacs. It's not for me to decide which of my books are interesting. There's a Hungarian writing about my work and she finishes her book with my work on instincts. Who likes what? That's not my business. Nowadays what I write is not for a leftist audience because this discourse no longer exists. *General Ethics* is very popular and is used on some ethics courses. I never wanted to publish anything for ethics courses but since it was reviewed in *Choice* magazine it is popular for ethics. So I don't know who reads what. I don't turn to a specific audience except in my works from the first part of my life. Then I really turned to the left audience and I would do so still, but the audience doesn't exist. There is no international leftist audience. Leftist discourse is also split into bits and pieces in different countries.

*Does the issue of translation concern you: who is translating, how things are being translated. Do you try to keep control over, or tabs on, what's happening?*

I'm lazy. Unfortunately, sometimes I cast a glance at a German or French translation and I'm really disappointed; but I am happy that some books have been published in Chinese or Japanese or Turkish and I have no access to the translation. You have no idea what the translation is like.

*Has it given rise to any difficulties, for example, when you've been to a conference and someone has quoted something at you which is a translation of your work and you think «well, I don't think I wrote that»?*

This happens, but not just because of the translation. People read texts in certain ways and nothing is to be blamed. You read what you read, and not what has been written.

*You are an extremely prolific author and so my guess would be, just thinking about my own more modest output, is that you're somebody who must always be writing. You're reading, discussing, but also always writing. Would that be a fair assessment? Is writing a daily activity for you?*

Not during the semester. During the semester, particularly during the semester in America I have no real time to write. Papers for conferences I write at the conference. I never write books when I'm teaching, because I teach one and a half semesters in one semester which is heavy work. Every year I teach three new courses – never repetition, and you need to be involved in your teaching and I only use a little part of my teaching for my books. Sometimes the things I teach go into my books, for example my course on Nietzsche went into my book *The Ethics of Personality*, and now I am teaching Shakespeare I know that I will write something about this. I had a course on modernity as well which had some input into the work on modernity, but very rarely do these things happen. Normally I concentrate on teaching and I can draw on this only indirectly. The teaching here in Hungary is more superficial. I don't get involved for a long time so I can write in Hungary, but you need time for reading as well as for writing. I write from 8 til 12 and then I do my reading.

*So I'm taking up your reading time?*

No you take up my writing time! I don't mind. I am very pleased to talk to you anyway. Certainly do not apologise.

*You have so many calls on your time and many requests for interviews, conferences and so on, how do you manage to carve out enough time for yourself, for your reading and for contemplation and for writing?*

Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes I don't have enough time to listen to music. I still go to the theatre with my daughter and I also have obligations. I have started to write about the theatre and



this takes time; but usually I write regularly. I listen to music a lot less than I would like to. I miss this. I still go on excursions; but I have a lot time. A woman always has a lot of time because you get used to having children and having a household. I had to cook, I had to do shopping, my husbands were working, I was alone at home and I had to take care of the housework, so a lot of time went on the house. Now I feel that I have plenty of time on my hands. I have no obligations. I cook for myself.

*Time management is a woman's burden?*

Yes, I think that I have plenty of time on my hands because my children are grown up. I do not need to cook for my grandchildren, it's for enjoyment and there is no housework here. I have a cleaning lady once a week. Its OK, I don't need to do much shopping.

*You mentioned earlier how your role as the intellectual changes from culture to culture, and from society to society. Do you have a view on what the role of the intellectual should be?*

I don't think I can speak about this because I'm not a teacher and I have no authority to say what the role of intellectuals should be. It's a very strong normative statement. I think the question is about who is an intellectual, whether there are intellectuals, whom do I call an intellectual? Certainly you don't call an intellectual a professional academic. This is not an intellectual. I call an intellectual only a person who participates in transcontextual discourse, who is speaking up not only about the thing he or she is doing but on other things as well, the things he or she is not doing. It is someone who has authority in a society and this is not only the choice of an intellectual but the expectation of the public as well. In France there is an expectation that these people who are good at writing have the authority to speak about many other things. They are intellectuals as long as they do so and are not simply good craftsmen.

*Part of that seems to be that the intellectual of a sufficient stature should be a political figure almost, should be commentating, should be involved in public life in the broadest possible conception of that term.*

Again I would not speak about «should». I speak about the question of responsibility. Everyone has different responsibilities. I don't speak about retroactive responsibilities, but a prospective responsibility; the responsibility of the teacher for his or her class. Now if you go to a class the teacher has a responsibility to ensure that these students are learning and keep up. So you have some responsibility for your students. Now if you are an intellectual, and not just an academic, then you take up some other responsibilities. You take up the responsibilities, you talk about public issues in a way that you will say «this is what I think, this is my opinion. It has to be considered as my opinion. I take responsibility for it and when I give advice or make a proposition, then I think I am in charge of this proposition. I am as responsible for this as a teacher is for his students». So I do not make a recommendation about what intellectuals should do because every intellectual, if he or she is an intellectual —it is also a matter of decision— has to decide what s/he is taking responsibility for.

*Do you feel any affinity at all with contemporary public political intellectuals such as Arendt, Derrida, Habermas, Edward Said. These are people who have transcended academic life in the very narrow sense, and in some senses your life and your work seem to have that same quality about having a concern for the world as well as wanting just to write about it.*

Yes, you are right. They are intellectuals in my understanding because they are discussing transcontextually and what they say can and does have an impact on politics. Whether they write directly about politics or not they have a political impact. In this respect an intellectual is a public figure, not a private figure, but a public figure, and then it's true what Kant says about the difference

between private and public discourses. If you speak privately it's a different genre. So they are public figures and they speak in public discourse all the time, whether they speak up in a political matter or an unpolitical matter. They can speak up in the case whether there should be a national theatre which is not an entirely political matter, but it still has a political impact. They can speak about human rights issues which may have a directly political impact; but matters which concern the public not just them and not just his profession, not the concern of philosophy, or of the sociology, but matters which concern the public and in this respect they take responsibility for what they are saying, what they are recommending, what they are standing for. In this respect all these persons you mentioned are intellectuals of this kind. Now intellectuals, precisely because of this, have to be very careful about what they are taking responsibility for, because for a very long time intellectuals liked very much to talk to tyrants, that is, they believe that if they advise a tyrants, they would cease to be tyrants because they would be listening to the good advice of the intellectuals. This is I think a surviving element of an aristocratic attitude: that you love to be a good counsel for the bad king, and the bad king will become the good king if he has good counsel. That's why intellectuals need to talk to the public, not to «special» individuals, particularly not to tyrants. An intellectual is a public figure.

*A final question, you recently wrote a paper called «where are we at home?» in which you reflect on the character of modern consciousness, but I'm just wondering as someone who has by force of necessity lived all around the world if you feel a special kind of affinity with that question. Do you know where «home» is?*

I wrote this paper on the basis of two meetings, one with a man who is still living in Italy and the other with a lady on the plane. These were real experiences. I really started to think about this matter and to think over this problem of home for the modern man through these two stories. In a way, this was also a little bit about me, but not at the time when I wrote this. When I wrote this it was after the changes in 1989-90 and I knew I would definitely be here at home, and I had not the slightest doubt in my mind where home was; but looking back to previous experiences, when I left Hungary, I believed I left it for good and I wanted to find a home somewhere else where I was not «at home». Then I really felt these issues on my own skin, but when I wrote this paper I was thinking about it as an existential issue, about existential experience, about modern man and time experience, space experience. It's part and parcel of the philosophy of modernity because whether we are at home anywhere is one of the crucial issues of the experience of modern man and woman.

*Should we worry about the phenomenon of existential homelessness?*

There is positive and negative homelessness. There is a kind of homelessness that is really chosen. There is a kind of person who doesn't want to be at home because to have a home is basically a case of being bound to something and modern man sometimes wants to be entirely «free from», and not to have a home is a kind of negative freedom, just like not having a wife or not having a family can be a kind of freedom. You can choose not to have family. You can choose not to have a home, but if you happen not to have a home without having chosen it, this is one of the great burdens of modern man. This is really a very difficult psychological state, and extremely difficult to cope with. That's like you want to have a family but you can't have one; you want to have someone with whom you can share your life, but somehow you never succeeded in finding someone. So with modern man very frequently they do not succeed at feeling at home anywhere and then they want to escape this place and want to have a family somewhere else and then try to have something else. This is a source of greatest unhappiness. It is totally different from freely chosen homelessness.

*So is loneliness the modern condition because it corresponds with our notion of what it means to be free?*

Arendt was right when she discussed the difference between solitude and loneliness. Solitude is what you freely choose. Loneliness is superimposed upon you by accident or fate. Modernity allows both possibilities.

*It's unfortunate to end on such a melancholy note, but I notice that I have reached the end of my time so perhaps we should end there. Professor Heller, many thanks. It's been a great privilege for me.*

And for me.