By way of an Introduction: These pages contain individual chapters from my 1990 book, Postmodern Sophistications. I have obtained the rights to the essays am making them available separately. The entire text of the book is also available on Research Gate.

The underlying aim of this collection of essays was to question the opposition between the Sophists and Plato. That classic dispute has been the model for many discussions of tensions within our society:: on the one hand you have the clever manipulative salesmen who care nothing about truth. On the other hand the rigorous scientific investigation that never quite makes contact with politics. Rootless nihilism vs. naturally grounded values. Anarchy vs. Rules.

In this book I developed a pragmatic middleground, using themes from Heidegger and Dewey; in later writings I rely more on Hegel. But the point remains the same: don't listen to the Straussians and others who try to force on our politics or art or philosophy a simple opposition between truth-loving traditionalists (Socrates) and flaky relativistic postmoderns (the Sophists). It was not so simple in Greece and it's not so simple today.

Part of the book deals with postmodern critiques of rational knowledge, with Lyotard and Habermas on center stage. Their opposition between postmodern and modern views remains relevant, although post-1990 developments in deconstruction and critical theory have widened and deepened the debate. The points made in these essays remain useful, if not complete.

The second part of the book deals with architecture. The word postmodern has gone out of fashion in architecture. But the earlier use of the term for an attempt to bring substantive content into formal modernity retains important.

My conclusions about postmodern architecture's failute to escape modern distance from history also remain true, as does my argument that that proclaimed modern distance from history is itself an illusion, that we are more embedded in history than the moderns wanted to think, although that embodiment is not as total and restrictive as we have imagined true of our ancestors.

If you find any of these ideas useful, true, provocative, let me know. If you

find them absurd or useless airy nothings, I'd still be delighted to learn from your reactions.

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This chapter introduces the themes of self-knowledg and self-criticisms. These will become crucial as the book develops.

Chapter 5. Self-Criticism in a Broken Mirror

If we are trying to make or remake places for ourselves, whether through city planning or cultural criticism, we need some idea who we are and what we want. But what can we know of ourselves?

Modern philosophers and social scientists tended to think of the self as able to capture reflectively the structure and conditions of its activity. At least in principle the self could become transparent to its inner gaze. Modern artists tended rather to find the self opaque and inaccessible to reflection. Now that oppositional trend is strengthened by postmodern thinkers influenced by Nietzsche and Freud.

From the Greeks on, "know yourself" has been a cardinal maxim, but its import has varied. In many ages the principal message was to know your station in life (in relation to your betters, to the gods, to your mortality). That station was individualized but was shared by members of your group or class. In modern times the emphasis has shifted to knowing special facts about yourself: to know yourself is to tell your own particular story, with its uniquely contingent history, its dreams, desires, aspirations, faults, and so on. Socrates would not have considered personal facts to be true self-knowledge; such a list would have formed only the starting point for the real quest that would take you from such particulars to the more universal conditions and goals common to all selves. For him, self-help begins when we can see beyond our individual particularities. Today's popular self-help books practice self-examination, but without suggesting a goal beyond our particular desires. In Foucault's disciplinary society we are all constantly checking our particular qualities; supposedly this helps us grow; mostly it just keeps us in line.

As modernity developed the self was treated both as more empty and as more filled with personal content than in earlier societies. According to modern theory, making

places together should be a matter of looking into ourselves to understand our individual needs and goals, then negotiating ways to coordinate with others according to general principles. It becomes important to overcome anything that blocks or distorts our access to our true selves or to true social needs. Where the ancients would have seen flaws of character, we see false consciousness.

But what if we *cannot* look into our individual or collective self-consciousness and read our desires and goals? If we doubt the ideal of transparent self-reflection, how do we assure enough space for discernment and self-criticism?

In this chapter I ask whether giving up modern self-transparency means we cannot criticize ourselves. In the next chapter I argue that not only the content but also the act of self-evaluation always stems from a particular context and tradition. Later I will try to provide examples of this kind of judgment as it might be involved in extending architectural vocabularies or building a city together.

What if there is some kind of influence on our selves or our community such that the influences can never be gathered up and examined "objectively"? Martin Jay reports that "Like Lyotard, Foucault would hold that power (and language) are prior to the self and could never be overcome in the name of perfectly transparent intersubjectivity" (Jay 1984, 51-52).

Among others the target here is Habermas, who insists on the ideal of a totally self-evaluated community. No factor or force is to be outside the reach of our critical activity. For the usual modern view, we must keep everything in view and get the total picture so that nothing will get behind our backs where we cannot see them coming. Society must look in all directions to make sure that nothing is surreptitiously affecting it. Habermas denies this subject-centered approach. He proposes instead an intersubjective method; it is not our vision that we must clear but our talk. Ideology is not a distortion of our vision but a blockage to our communication; it silences us on crucial topics and questions. We are to aim not so much for clear sight as for justified statement. The result will not be a total picture of our selves, but rather a total discourse that can encompass and evaluate everything about a society and all the factors shaping its activity.

Prior Conditions

For postmodernists such as Foucault and Lyotard our language and tradition, our social relations and the power they present cannot be made transparently rational or encompassed by discourse even in the ideal limit. The self cannot dominate them either by individual reflection or by intersubjective discussion. Symbolic systems and language

games and power relations are prior to the self, constituting it in a way that cannot be gotten behind.

This notion of priority needs to be examined. I want to suggest that even when (and in part because) we give up the idea of complete self-reflection, even when we deny the possibility of a totalizing individual or social discourse about self or society, there is still nothing so "prior" that it cannot be talked about. Whether it can also be evaluated and changed will depend on the facts of the case, but nothing is in principle immune. The supposed opaque factors are conceptual twins of the idea of a totally transparent discourse, since it is only when all ways of talking and criticizing can be totalized under some unified principles that one can suggest there might be something outside the reach of any and all discourse constituted (and limited) by those principles. If there is less unity to the critical discourse, it has fewer limits.

There is an old argument in Greek philosophy that is relevant here because it shows us how not to think about these matters. We find the argument first in Anaxagoras:

> Other things all contain a part of everything, but mind is infinite and self-ruling, and is mixed with no thing, but is alone by itself. If it were not by itself, but were mixed with anything else . . . the things mixed would have prevented it from ruling over any thing in the same way as it can, being alone by itself. (Fragment 12)

Anaxagoras says that if the mind were mixed, it could not rule all things. The argument Jay reports accepts the connection Anaxagoras is making: because mind is mixed with something (constituted by social or linguistic or whatever factors) it cannot rule all things (cannot dominate those factors by self-reflection).

Aristotle makes the same connection when discussing the intellect.

> Since everything is a possible object of thought, mind, in order (as Anaxagoras says) to dominate, that is, to know, must be pure from all admixture. (On the Soul, III, 4, 429b16-20)

Aristotle starts with the assurance that the mind can know everything; this comes from his metaphysics of form and from his doctrine that the proper object of knowledge is the universal. Aristotle then affirms (and contraposes) Anaxagoras's connection: since the mind can dominate all things it must be unmixed and pure of any material admixture.

The opinion Jay reports restates Anaxagoras: since mind is *not* pure from all admixture it cannot dominate everything. The ancient quotations testify to an emphasis on

purity; for Anaxagoras it is a matter of keeping some foreign stuff out of the mind. For Aristotle the mind can have no qualitative shape; colored glass does not admit all colors of light. In the postmoderns the Greek emphasis on matter and form changes to a Kantian emphasis on the necessary conditions that let an activity be what it is. The influences in question shape the self not by being something alien mixed into it, but by being the conditions that make a certain kind of activity possible. In so doing they limit it to the definiteness of that kind. Language, social relations, power relations, and the other factors are not outside forces worming their way into the intimacy of an already existing self. They are forces and relations that by being in play in certain ways let there be a self at all. So the influence here is more subtle than the Greek argument conceives.

But just how are we to take the claim that the self cannot overcome the factors that make it a self in the first place? There are three progressively weaker ways of reading this claim. The first would be that the self cannot even know such factors, and therefore cannot overcome them in any way. The second would be that the self may know about the factors but cannot criticize or control them. The third would be that the self can know and to some degree change these factors in their particulars, but cannot do without them in general. Only on the third reading is the claim defensible.

If we interpret the claim reported by Jay as saying that we have no access to the factors that constitute the self, then we are still caught up with the ideal of pure self-presence. As long as the Greek connection between purity and domination is accepted, then any opaqueness in the self prevents full self-reflection. Or, in more postmodern terms, some dispersion and lack of center in the self prevents the self from recentering itself in full presence to itself. This presupposes that self-knowledge demands that the self coincide with itself, and that if such self-communion is impossible then self-criticism is impossible. To contend that there sulks behind all the aspects of the self we can talk about some un-trappable prior influence we can never escape raises a spectre akin to the un-locatable power of persuasion discussed earlier.

If we give up the Greek link between knowledge and transparency then claims of "priority" become less useful. In fact when the model of transparent self-presence is removed and all the necessary softenings and impurities are allowed into the notion of self-knowledge, we become even more able to talk about presuppositions and constituting factors. If the self cannot be seen in an overview or summed up in one total discourse, that does not mean that we cannot talk about ourselves.

Quite the contrary. Diversity and dispersion within the self increases our ability to

talk about ourselves. If we had to rely on a pure view or a special method we might worry about what was constituting and so limiting that one method, but if our ability to talk about ourselves is multiple, indirect, metaphorizing, and unregulated by any fixed principles or patterns, it is not limited a priori to any particular sphere.

Could we know in general that our activities were influenced by factors such as unconscious motives without knowing in particular what specific influences were working on us? This depends on the strength of the claim that we could not know the details. The claim that we as a matter of fact may not know what is influencing us at the moment can be accepted with the proviso that new methods and ways of talking may alter our abilities. A stronger claim would be that it is always impossible to know in detail what is influencing us in our current acts; this, however, depends either on the suspect Greek connection mentioned above, or on a definition of "current acts" that is too restrictive.

The opinion Jay reports is open to a second reading: that we can know but not influence the factors constituting our selfhood. It is ruefully true that merely being able to talk about something does not mean we can criticize and change it, especially our own habits and dispositions. But this commonplace does not justify the claim that we can in no way change. To recognize the possibility of change requires that we be able to recognize alternatives. It is this, rather than some supposed self-transparency, which is the crucial issue. Even if we agree with the many thinkers who argue that there is no way of conceiving a self without language, history, culture, and the like, that does not mean that we cannot recognize possible alternative ways of language or culture.

We can distinguish two ways of questioning. One is a wonder at our condition, without any particular alternative in mind, a wonderment that things are the way they are, but without any definite doubt about them. We can wonder about something that we take for granted, or some standard, or some self-evident practice. Such wonder is a source of philosophy but it is not yet a definite question. In Plato's dialogues that wonderment is taken up and given a name and a direction in the Socratic quest. The move is graceful, but it is a move; the prior wonderment could be specified in other ways.

Epistemological scepticism probably fascinates us most when it is kept as a wonder that avoids any specific challenges. Just wondering "maybe we are completely mistaken" produces a thrill that does not give any direction to discourse. As soon as sceptics actually offer alternatives (the world is a mental representation, we are brains in a vat, there is an Evil Genius deceiving us) then arguments begin and critical decisions get made. The same is true for ethical scepticism.

We might roughly distinguish two kinds of descriptions, one that suffices to identify an item in question, and another that locates it in a way that has some consequences. Scepticism might identify its topic as "all our beliefs" or "all our experience" and ask vaguely whether these were "true." But the discussion would really begin once some meaning had been given to the notion that our beliefs could be false, by locating them on one side of a powerful duality such as mental/external or spontaneous/imposed.

Again, someone in a traditional society might wonder at its hierarchical distribution of power, without really envisioning alternatives. Then later the traditional hierarchy could be located on one side of a duality such as just/unjust or equitable/inequitable, with some description of what a society on the other side might be like. With the availability of alternatives the initial disquiet could become a force for change.

Self-criticism demands that we be able to delimit some area of our life and describe it with concepts that have implications we can argue about. If this is so, then we can see one sense in which Habermas is right to consider postmodern irony to be a conservative move. Irony locates some practice and distances itself from that practice, but does not necessarily insert it within a network of other concepts that provide critical leverage.

Thus the third reading of the opinion reported by Jay seems to be the correct one. Even if there are factors constitutive of our selfhood, we are not blocked from considering changes in their particulars. Even if we cannot conceive a self without language and history, we may envision different languages and histories.

True, this provides at best a strategy for piecemeal self-awareness. We cannot be sure we will come to know all the factors conditioning us. (Obviously there can be no argument that will prove that we can never know some particular factor; the fact that we could make the argument would refute the argument.) The fear remains that in criticizing our situation we appeal to standards that themselves are effects on us of some as yet undiscerned particular influence.

How can we be sure this is not happening? I think there is no way we can be sure, but is this so bad? If our fear of being influenced stays general and provides no indication what kind of factors we should worry about, then it is no different from the generalized fear of the Sophist I spoke about earlier, or the vague scepticism mentioned above. If the fear has some specific focus, then we can examine it.

Besides conceiving alternatives, we have to be able to actually effect changes. These do not always go together. We can conceive of spaces of more than three

dimensions, but no one has suggested a way of adding a dimension to our space in order to provide more real estate. Still, we do not know the limits of our power to effect changes in nature or society. It is not clear that social and economic "laws" are as fixed as our current analogies with natural science make them seen. We have all experienced being aware of how we are shaped by cultural or historical influences but finding ourselves unable to change as we think we should. The women's movement has afforded both men and women many occasions for being aware of influences that seem difficult to escape. There is no single answer this predicament any more than there is a single weapon to be used against Sophistic persuasion, but once there is awareness and a vision of alternatives we can work at changing.

Traits of character and historical conditioning can be changed only with difficulty. They cannot be altered by merely willing them to be different, yet in many cases we could change over time by being alert for their effects and by developing new habits. Aristotle's *Ethics* describes the process for cases where drastic social change is not needed. Achieving such a re-habituation we would not have escaped language and culture but we would have somewhat altered their particular constellations.

Discipline and Appropriate Judgment

If we are going to build together, criticisms and changes must be agreed on by many people. Unless we want to reduce communal dialogue to nothing but strategic bargaining on the part of individual interests, some communal criticism and discernment will be necessary. If we have trouble understanding ourselves individually, won't that be even more difficult in society? And what kind of "we" do we want to make a place for? Is our goal to become modern self-transparent autonomous detached selves? We should not presume that the only alternatives are modern distance or a helpless subservience to factors we cannot control.

Influenced by Plato's fears, controversies over the form of public discourse too often presuppose that rational discussion and forceful manipulation are the only alternatives. But any argument we can propose will always remain surrounded, located, and made relevant by that shifting discourse I spoke of in earlier chapters, the discourse that is not itself structured as an argument. While that shifting discourse has no first principles to rely on, it is not undisciplined. And other modes of discourse can have their own disciplines that are not the same as rational argument.

In Habermas's ideal scenario, discussants seek a consensus based on mutually accepted principles and shared descriptions of the situation. In such discussion the parties

to a dispute come to agree about what counts as rational argument and what counts as irrational persuasion. However, in another kind of agreement the parties agree only on some very general principles about interaction, and they forswear the use of crude power on one another. There may not be any very full description of the problem at hand on which they can agree. (Consider the differing views of what constitutes the "problem" in the case of abortion legislation.)

This pragmatic agreement can come in several styles. The most obvious is Hobbsean, but another is liberal, where the discussants are committed to an un-dominated mode of discussion. The agreement to avoid coercion does not include substantive agreement on some shared concept of the human good, or even that they re-examine their own conception. The parties are not required to justify their positions to one another, or even to themselves. This kind of discussion does not demand a precisely located distinction between rational argument and persuasive rhetoric, and in practice the parties usually accept some degree of manipulative discourse on each side since they do not completely agree on what counts as unfair rhetoric. The issue for Habermas is whether anything more is required of the performer of a speech act aimed at coordinating action than the willingness to be open and avoid crude power, and to offer a degree of sincerity and tolerance. Must the space of public discussion be structured by agreed-upon reasons and criteria, and surveyed by a totalizing discourse? Must the openness of public discussion be the openness of a process with its own self-justified unifying form? Is it necessary that the public space be unified, or only that it be un-dominated?

From Socrates to Kohlberg and Habermas, the ideals of mature selfhood and developed community have been almost always been linked to the ideals of rational discourse and justified self-criticism. It is the mark of a mature person or a mature society that a process of inner or outer dialogue replace the pressure of impulses and images. But perhaps the notions of person and community should not be so tightly linked with the notion of speaking and acting according to reasons.

Maturity in a self or society should certainly depend on being able to resist the pressure of impulse towards arbitrary and inappropriate action. But "appropriateness" is a wider category than "justified rational belief," and "rational" is not the only opposite of "arbitrary." Also opposed to arbitrariness is discipline. In place of seeing a mature person as a source of rational discourse and decision one might see them as capable of reacting appropriately to situations, where "appropriateness" is not defined in terms of rules or justifications but in terms of disciplined perception.

For a discussion of notions of truth and knowledge that broadens these out in a direction parallel to my suggestion here, cf. the final chapter of Goodman and Elberg 1988. The Socratic story cannot be the last word about what it means to be a person.

After Foucault, there is some danger in using the word "discipline," since it has become one more name for a supposed essence of modern society. But the word has an older resonance from the discipline one learns as one learns a craft, for instance how to center clay on the wheel, and what shapes a particular clay allows you to attempt. This is not a matter of learning a set of justified rules; it is more like learning a dance, or how to inhabit a particular locale. There are also the disciplines of the traditional spiritual paths. These involve kinds of self-discernment and unity that are not matters of justified true belief. Certainly these older disciplines are ancestors of the modern described by Foucault, but they do not connote its ubiquity and standardization.

Although I am not treating Foucault explicitly in this book, my contentions later about the multiplicity of our lives will challenge that part of his analysis that gets interpreted into a uniform picture of modern society after the fashion of Heidegger's Gestell. But this is not necessarily what he was trying to say. (Cf. Foucault 1977).

We are often told that rational criticism is "impersonal" and thus escapes being bound by the particularities of individual feeling and preference. But it is possible to escape the details of individual preference without demanding rational universality. The discipline of a craft is "impersonal" to the extent that anyone properly trained in that context and situation would judge in a similar, if not identical, manner. Yet that discipline is context-bound and not applicable in all situations.

Thus it might not be by studying the processes of argument leading to conclusions but by studying the processes of discipline leading to graceful skill and insight (in the crafts and in some traditions of spiritual development) that we might come to understand what it means to be a developed person or society.

This is not an academic matter; the classical notion of mature personhood tied to rational discourse and action has become fundamental to so much of our ethical and political theory, and so interwoven with our legal and social practices, that we have only the dimmest ideas about what personal and institutional relations might be if personhood were thought and lived differently. It would be necessary to rethink the ultimacy of the opposition between rational and irrational actions. It would also be necessary to work out what it means to have a mutual discussion that is disciplined without necessarily following standard patterns of argument. This would mean finding ways of opening the disciplined

appropriateness of actions and words to interpersonal evaluation rather than individual appreciation, though not to rule-governed decision procedures and transparent public discussion. Contemporary feminist thought most directly attempts to address the task of rethinking personhood and institutions along these lines. As feminists suggest, we can find the wider notions of discipline and appropriateness already present in repressed corners of our own experience.

In the course of his book *Excesses* (1983) Alfonso Lingis paints portraits of actions and interrelations that are neither rational nor irrational in the classic sense and that illustrate how one might mutually perceive and relate in ways that do not fit the usual economy of talk about rationality, beliefs, and desires. What is important to personhood may lie in the interstices, in that which gets lost when one translates a person's world into sets of beliefs and desires.

Community demands mutuality, and Habermas is right to demand that participants to a discussion aimed at coordinating mutual action should be able to challenge the appropriateness of one another's judgments and values. But his claim that this implies self-transparent rational evaluation may actually narrow our possibilities for social self-criticism. As I said above concerning individual self-knowledge; as our methods of self-discussion become more varied, indirect, and metaphorical, there are fewer limits on what we can come to know about ourselves. It may seem that Habermas demands too much of discussion; perhaps he demands too little.

Yet while it is true that the crafts, the arts, and the traditions of spiritual development have means of disciplined discussion and evaluation that are not arbitrary even though they do not demand universal rationality, it is also true that these activities have been riven with conflicts and forceful interventions. The disciplines they offer are not enough to insure peaceful agreement. But this does not imply that the they must be subject to a higher uniform set of rules. It may be that disciplined communal judgments of appropriateness can be reached by some weaker version of Habermas's dialogue. Habermas himself may suggest something along these lines when he speaks of the reintegration of art works into the lifeworld.

Habermas does not demand that the poets be thrown out of the city, but he does cordon them off into a sphere of autonomous aesthetic culture. Neither the philosophers nor the citizens can make judgments for the poets, who alone are competent to evaluate the appropriateness of productions within their specialized field. Habermas also contends, however, that there is a moment when artistic productions are reintegrated into the

common lifeworld and function to stimulate thought and criticism there. So far, though, it is not clear how this is to operate, nor the degree to which rational argument or judgments of appropriateness are involved in such integration (cf. the discussions in Jay 1985 and Ingram 1987). The question is whether such discussion would have to converge on any ideal meta-agreement.

It is not the case that our only alternatives are rational universality or arbitrary force.

There are kinds of encounter that lie between the standoff produced by exercises in liberal tolerance, and the shared rational project Habermas encourages. Examples of such discussion can be found in the best inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, or in cases where arts are being integrated into the lifeworld.

I am most familiar with this kind of dialogue in the Asian context. Examples of this dialogue, which encourages self-criticism without being part of a project of universal agreement, can be found, for instance, in the journals published by the Nanzan Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, in Nagoya, Japan.» The crossings of traditions with one another and with the everyday world can further self-critical processes at work in the traditions, without being part of a universal project of self-criticism.

It is tempting to think that before modernization the crafts and spiritual traditions were not so self-critical as they later became, when subject to modern differentiation. This, however, underestimates the degree of movement and self-criticism in the pre-modern traditions, and it begs the question by assuming that all self-criticism stems from nascent processes of rationalization.

There is a mutual project involved in such dialogue, but it is neither the goal of liberal co-existence nor Habermas's universal rational agreement. Rather it is what I will call a care for the whole that does not involve a total vision of the whole. This, and the problem of discerning our communal identity, is taken up in two later chapter about the problems of building together in cities.

Self-evaluation should not be conceived as a process elevated above history and capable of being applied to any situation. Saying this does not endorse Lyotard's opposite claim that some situations are unresolvable in principle because of the different forms of life involved. The appeal to principle, this time in the negative, still misleads. My notions of appropriateness and discipline may seem vague; they can even seem dangerously empty if we persist in looking for criteria or processes of judgment that can be applied to any situation. Appropriateness and discipline only make sense in context; unlike

"rationality" they cannot be defined in a purely formal way. If we generalize the notion of discipline and appropriateness too much we lose the specificity that makes particular judgments possible; at most the discussion should be supplemented with descriptions of intellectual virtues. This does not insure peaceful agreement, but can anything guarantee that hope?