COSMOPOLITANISM
IN A GRIDLOCKED WORLD

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Cosmopolitanism
In a Gridlocked World

Pietro Maffettone & Marcello Di Paola

I n the past sixty years, the international community has achieved unprecedented levels of cooperation in an impressive array of domains, entrenching important principles of global coexistence, securing relatively high levels of peace and stability, and enabling the free movement and exchange of goods, people, wealth, knowledge, and innovation. Today, however, global cooperation is failing, largely incapacitated in the face of pressing challenges such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, financial insecurity, cross-border mass migrations, transnational terrorism, and more.

This failure has deep structural reasons. This is the main claim made by Hale, Held and Young in their excellent book, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most*.[1] This number of *Philosophy and Public Issues* convenes leading scholars to discuss that claim and some of its most significant implications for political theory.

Hale, Held and Young develop a simple but far-reaching and widely applicable explanatory argument—that global cooperation is failing due to: an increase in multipolarity following the

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[1] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

emergence of new world powers such as China, Brazil and India; the complexity of unprecedented systemic global challenges such as climate change and financial insecurity (among others); the institutional inertia that tends to block readjustments in formal and substantive power distributions; and a simultaneous fragmentation and overlap of responsibilities that makes most attempts at concerted global governance cumbersome and ultimately ineffectual.

These factors are today slowing and sometimes blocking action on many important fronts. They also raise fundamental normative questions about the nature and objectives of international relations in the new millennium—thus probing contemporary global political theory, particularly the cosmopolitan wave that has dominated the field in the last four decades.

I

Cosmopolitanism and Global Political Theory

Cosmopolitan philosophy has been successful in elaborating and defending the general ideal of universal moral equality, and in establishing its political relevance.[2] All cosmopolitans share the view that each and every human being has equal moral worth and that such worth deserves to be taken into account by political institutions regardless of national, ethnic, social and religious affiliations and differences. There is bound to be considerable disagreement on the exact political implications of such moral

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[2] See Thomas Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty," 103 *Ethics* 1 (1992), pp. 48–75.

recognition, but there is widespread consensus that it affords at least a minimal protection of basic human rights.[3]

Cosmopolitan thinkers have also orchestrated a related attack on the traditional notion of state sovereignty—which saw states as originators of their own powers, enjoying untrammelled authority over their subjects,[4] being wholly unaccountable for their abuses on subjects other than their own, and largely impenetrable to moral and political criticism from either within or without.[5] All these features, cosmopolitans have argued, become untenable once the "fundamental unit of moral concern"[6] is understood to be individuals and all individuals equally.

From these premises, cosmopolitans have gone on to suggest alternative models of political organization for both domestic and global politics. At the domestic level, this has usually coincided with a demand for some form of principled delimitation of legitimate government action—typically based on some list of basic human rights, of individuals and populations, which no government could violate. At the global level, suggestions have ranged from a vertical dispersion of sovereignty drawing on ideas of subsidiarity, to proposals for the establishment of supranational democratic governance structures that would recognize the importance of accountability to the people as a

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[3] See David Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[4] David Held, "Law of States, Law of Peoples," 8 *Legal Theory* 1, pp. 1–44.

[5] See Charles Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty."

necessary step to respecting and upholding the basic commitment to their equal moral status.[7]

Cosmopolitan thinkers have typically tended to assume that their suggestions for reform were actually realizable—if obviously not at once. They have been faithful to the idea that the continued development of well-functioning and normatively justified global governance institutions was not only desirable but also entirely possible. To be sure, that assumption was always tempered by the sobering realization that diverging national interests would be a constant threat to global cooperation. But the general perspective was that this would mainly reflect a motivational failure: a parochial lack of political will that would inhibit the pursuance of an otherwise normatively clear path. Accordingly, most cosmopolitans have tended to focus on clearing and further defining that path, and to dismiss collisions with reality as pertaining to "non-ideal theory," which was not their subject.[8]

II

Gridlock

Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most provides global political theory with a series of dark flashes from the real world of contemporary international relations, and with a powerful explanation of its current troubles. In so doing, it forces

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[7] See Daniele Archibugi, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi and Raffaele Marchetti, eds, *Global Democracy: Normative and Empirical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[8] For a discussion see Laura Valentini, *Justice in a Globalized World: A Normative Framework* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

some reconsideration of the typically cosmopolitan assumption of the possibility of institutional progress.

One aspect that those who read *Gridlock* will notice is that it makes little to no reference to motivational factors. As said, the notion that abstract principles can generate institutions that work, and that if those institutions stumble and fail is due to shortcomings in implementation, which are in turn due to motivational failures, has been a typical cosmopolitan leitmotiv. But according to Hale, Held and Young, the main obstacles to global cooperation today lie in the unprecedentedly complex nature of the very issues that need to be confronted, and in the rapidly changing circumstances in which cooperation is required to confront them. In such a predicament, the abstract principles themselves may seem unable to generate functioning institutional regimes.

Consider, as an example, the awkward position in which high aggregate but low per-capita emitting countries (including China, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia and others) find themselves today when trying to negotiate their role in global climate cooperation in a language that cosmopolitans would understand—that of human rights protection. Because these big emitters also host large numbers of highly vulnerable people whose human rights could be violated by climate change, they would enjoy the restrictions posed on industrialized countries by human rights-inspired climate governance, as these would prevent the deaths and suffering of many of their own citizens. However, they would themselves have to submit to these restrictions as their emissions also bring about deaths and suffering both within and beyond their borders. These restrictions would constrain their emissions, thus impeding fossil-fuelled development paths that may in turn serve to protect the human rights of their citizens—or at least of more of their

citizens more quickly. In other words, high aggregate/low per-capita emitting countries that favour human rights-inspired climate governance seem to have a case for appealing to universal principles both in order to obtain global governance arrangements that they recognize as morally desirable and justifiable, *and* in order to obtain a particularistic exemption from these very same arrangements. While in cases like these motivations may be faulty, the problem seems to run much deeper. The unprecedentedly complex nature of today's global problems, and the shifting conditions of the world, make it possible for cosmopolitan principles to justify both a given governance regime and exemptions from it. That is a higher state of gridlock, calling into question the typically cosmopolitan confidence in the possibility of global institutional progress.

Gridlock also highlights other worries. Institutions, including global institutions, can be functionally understood as tools to organize social action in order to achieve morally and politically desirable goals. Whatever else institutions may do, they are first and foremost called on to solve specific coordination problems, and thus make possible outcomes that can only be produced as a result of successful cooperation.[9] Arguably, then, a necessary feature of a legitimate institution is that it is capable of providing the kinds of moral and political goods that it was instituted to provide. *Gridlock* tells us that global governance institutions today are, in many important cases, structurally unable to do so. Or, different but equally troublesome, that the sorts of goods that the global community needs today are not the ones these institutions were designed to provide (after all, the UN was created to avoid a third world war, not to contrast unprecedented threats like

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[9] Allen Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

climate change). In both cases, the legitimacy of global institutions is at risk of being eroded: for why accept and comply with institutions that do not provide the moral and political goods that they were created to provide?

Cosmopolitans themselves, like most other political thinkers of the modern and contemporary era, have been unanimous in denying that political power, authority and legitimacy are God-given. On these views, institutions are created by people and for people: if they fail the people who institute them, as they are failing them today on many important fronts, there ceases to be reason for these institutions to stand. *Gridlock* tells us that the current cooperation breakdown within the many policy domains in which global governance institutions operate is not just a bump on the road: rather, it has deep structural reasons. Because of that, a case could be made that these institutions, at least in their present form, have lost most if not all of their efficacy. Without efficacy, they could (and, according to most political modern and contemporary political theory, also should) progressively lose legitimacy as well.

It is at this juncture that an inconvenient question arises: does the loss of efficacy and legitimacy of institutions that were (at least partly) built on cosmopolitan premises also mean that cosmopolitanism itself should be abandoned?

III

Cosmopolitanism for a Gridlocked World

To counter such conclusion, a cosmopolitan thinker should first show that retaining a gridlocked system built on cosmopolitan premises is still better than losing it. She should then advance proposals on how cosmopolitanism should be

remoulded in order to be of use for global politics in a gridlocked world. It is impossible to adequately confront these large questions here, so we shall limit ourselves to some minimal suggestions on how they could be confronted elsewhere.

Those who see gridlock as a justification for bringing down the present system must shoulder a heavy burden of proof. If doubts about the quality of a system of institutions are motivated by the plight of the oppressed, for example,[10] then one needs to look into the foreseeable effects *on the oppressed* of letting that system collapse. Suppose the final outcome of an efficacy/legitimacy crisis of global governance institutions is no system of global governance at all: a Westphalian world on steroids—with chemical and nuclear weapons, satellite-operated drone bombings, increasing resource scarcity, and more. A world like that may have potentially immense (and certainly unchecked) human costs, and these would certainly be paid first, foremost and disproportionately by the oppressed themselves.[11] Obviously, this does not make the current system excellent or just: being better than nothing is not what bestows normative standing to a system of governance.[12] However, it may be a decisive factor when debating what to do with that system in times of crisis. If, as in the example just given, the fate of the most oppressed members of humanity is what is at stake, then the choice between trying to reform the system or allowing it to collapse altogether must be made by taking into account the consequences that the

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[10] See Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
[11] See David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 148.
[12] See Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights.*

most oppressed would have to bear in either case—and the move from bad to worse is no good move.

Accepting that letting the system collapse is no good move, and assuming that if a system is to be normatively justifiable it has, at the very least, to be coherent with some of our most basic moral principles, how are we to go on? More precisely: what is the role and nature of cosmopolitanism for a gridlocked world?

It may be suggested that the role of cosmopolitanism should no longer be that of providing bright ideals to ascend to, but rather that of avoiding dark realities we do not want to sink into. In other words, cosmopolitanism in a gridlocked world will still provide prescriptions, as it has always done, but these prescriptions will have to be configured *given* the descriptive facts of that world and the structural factors that explain them—not *regardless* of them. The domain of cosmopolitan thinking will thus no longer be ideal theory.

A non-ideal cosmopolitanism will be less concerned with what moral and political outcomes we wish to achieve than with those we need to avoid: it will be mostly devoted to the search of principled ways to control the type of damages that humanity is in the process of inflicting upon itself (to paraphrase Judith Shklar).[13] Another way to put the same point is this: non-ideal cosmopolitanism will stay faithful to the notion that all human beings are morally equal and thus worthy of equal political consideration, but it will no longer work on the assumption of institutional progress. It will fully acknowledge that recognizing the equal moral status of all human beings also entails facing the

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[13] Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

concrete circumstances that threaten the political relevance of such recognition in a gridlocked world.

An example of this approach is Leif Wenar's work on fair trade.[14] Traditionally, the task of cosmopolitanism in regards to this issue has been that of asking abstract questions: What makes trade fair? Should fair trade be understood interactionally or institutionally? Should fairness in trade be strictly related to the idea of the modern state? Should fair trade be grounded in the ideal of reciprocity? These are theoretically fascinating questions but providing an answer to them is clearly not going to improve our prospects of resolving the most pressing global injustices that are today connected to the trade regime—anymore than providing abstract theories of the nature of mind will help us cure brain cancer. Wenar asks a different set of questions: not "what is fair trade?" but rather "what kind of trade practices concerning which specific products are particularly pernicious for the basic interests of the global poor?" Wenar starts not from what trade should ideally be to be fair, but from what can be changed about specific aspects of the trade system in order to avoid some of its most glaringly unfair outcomes.

In the current international trade regime, Wenar argues, at least when it comes to trade in natural resources "might makes right." The individuals who control a territory can legally sell its natural resources independently from the way in which such control has been achieved and perpetuated in time. This institutionalized feature of the international trade regime incentivizes authoritarian forms of political organization, worsens the economic prospects of affected populations, and makes most

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[14] Leif Wenar, *Blood Oil: Tyrants, Violence, and the Rules that Run the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

citizens in middle- and high-income countries directly complicit in severe human rights violations affecting millions of the world's most oppressed people.
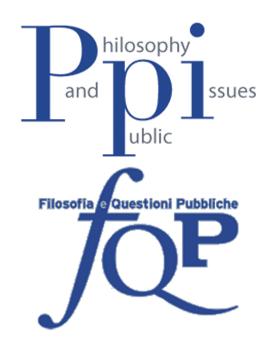
Wenar's non-ideal approach shapes the nature of the analysis and of the potential solutions that he puts forward. The basic normative proposal suggested by Wenar is popular resource sovereignty. According to the latter, it is the people of a country who own its natural resources. What is key about this proposal is its moral minimalism. The view is animated by the idea that we should reject "might makes right"—an idea that is near the heart of morality itself. While going beyond "might makes right" may have disruptive consequences on the trade regime in its current form, one need not be very idealistic to accept that objective as a morally plausible starting point. Furthermore, popular resource sovereignty is intuitively powerful and explicitly supported by several important international legal documents. Finally, popular resource sovereignty is congruent with some of the most important political values of international society, for example the importance of internal and external self-determination.

One of the main strengths of Wenar's proposal is that the normative assumption he builds on are morally extremely 'thin' and, for that reason, all the more solid. Another strength of Wenar's proposal is that it constantly strives to individuate political feasibility paths—by, for example, checking for the compatibility of suggested policy reforms with the wider regulatory system (including the WTO), by individuating real-world actors that would benefit from the proposed reforms, by considering the strategic implications for the foreign policy of some of the most important players in world politics, and by suggesting ways of minimizing the potential adverse impacts of policy reforms on stability and economic welfare.

These are the strengths of non-ideal cosmopolitanism, to be further developed in a highly complex, gridlocked world: theoretical make-do and focus on practical deliverance. Non-ideal cosmopolitanism starts not from what we should hope for but from what we can and cannot live with; and then focuses on how to concretely achieve what can concretely be achieved. This is not to abandon principles and aspirations but to show awareness that sequencing, too, is a central feature of moral progress, particularly when the reality in which that progress is to be pursued has become disorientingly complex; and that genuine moral concern must ultimately deliver morally valuable results, not just well-articulated theory. For that reason, it can dictate priorities that do not necessarily reflect the traditional scheme 'idealize first, realize later'.

Non-ideal cosmopolitanism will advise a rebalancing of the kind of priorities that political theorists take to be relevant in their work. This is probably the most powerful lesson that political theorists should draw from *Gridlock*. There is no accurate, plausible or useful political theory that ignores structural facts about the world we live in, and which does not strive to identify the relevant stakeholders and feasible institutional paths for the kind of morally motivated changes that it suggests. This does not mean that all searching for a glimpse of perfect cosmopolitan justice (or similar lofty ideals) should stop: but it does mean that such search should not be the main, let alone the only concern that a cosmopolitan political theory should have. Even if imagining perfect justice is part of the cosmopolitan philosophical mission, it may not necessarily be the most urgent or even the most important task for cosmopolitans to take up in a gridlocked world.

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BEYOND GRIDLOCK:

RESHAPING LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS
FOR A PLURALIST GLOBAL ORDER?

BY

KATE MACDONALD

Beyond Gridlock:
Reshaping Liberal Institutions for
a Pluralist Global Order?

Kate Macdonald

T he authors of *Gridlock* present a compelling if rather disheartening reflection on the state of contemporary global politics, and our persistently unsuccessful collective efforts to advance global institutional cooperation across a range of policy domains. The book is framed around a series of dispiriting narratives of failed international cooperation—from multilateral trade talks to climate negotiations and threats to global security and humanitarianism presented by major civil and regional conflicts. International cooperation is widely recognized to be vital for adequately handling pressing collective problems such as these; yet efforts to negotiate cooperative intergovernmental agreements remain gridlocked.

While recognizing the distinctive dynamics of each unique area of global policy, the authors argue that it is possible to identify underlying structural drivers of gridlock that cut across these diverse policy fields. Distinct yet intersecting blockages—characterized by the authors as rising multipolarity, institutional inertia, harder problems and institutional fragmentation—are argued to have created a situation in which intergovernmental cooperation is shifting increasingly out of reach, precisely at the time it is needed most. The book also paints a rather gloomy

picture of the prospects for transcending the current deadlock, amidst failures of global leadership, the inability of civil society to translate popular campaigns into institutional reform, and unaccommodating domestic political dynamics in some of the world's most powerful countries.

Much of the detailed analysis presented in the book focuses on dissecting the complex processes underpinning the present institutional gridlock. However, the authors also consider possible pathways through which new forms of decentred transnational governance may help to fill the gaps left by a faltering system of multilateral governance—enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of global governance on key issues. Analysis of both the functional problem-solving capacity of governance institutions, and underlying patterns of political agency and mobilization, enable exploration of the political as well as institutional foundations required to move beyond gridlock.

The book's systematic dissection of underlying sources of gridlock is significant not only for diagnosis of the drivers and consequences of gridlock, but also for questions of how we might approach the "search for a politics beyond gridlock."[1] Some dimensions of gridlock are more amenable to resolution through coordinated political action than others. Clear differentiation between blockages of different kinds thus provides an important basis for evaluating efforts to bolster global cooperation. The brief commentary that follows explores such differences, placing particular emphasis on distinctions between institutional and

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[1] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, "Gridlock: The Growing Breakdown of Global Cooperation," *Global Democracy*, 24 May 2013, available at: www.opendemocracy.net/thomas-hale-david-held-kevin-young/gridlock-growing-breakdown-of-global-cooperation

deeper societal dimensions of gridlock—each of which, it is suggested, has distinct consequences for global cooperative efforts. Institutional dimensions of gridlock—associated with blockages within established intergovernmental institutions—are in some ways the least significant of our challenges. More structural impediments to global cooperation are presented by complex social problems and fragmented or decentred global political authority.

Rather than investing too much political energy seeking pathways through multilateral gridlock, we may therefore find firmer grounds for revived global cooperation through efforts to rebuild legitimate forms of liberal global governance within the structural constraints of an increasingly complex, chaotic and pluralist global order. The reinvigoration of pluralist global governance institutions may assist us to more effectively tackle "some of the most pressing global issues we face,"[2] while seeking to salvage normative liberal visions of a rules-based global institutional system.

I

Institutional Gridlock and Potential Institutional Remedies

Let us first consider *institutional gridlock*—that is, those elements of gridlock that result from blockages within established global cooperative institutions on which we have come to rely. Institutional gridlock results mainly from contingent features of established institutional structures and processes. The authors describe how such structures emerge at particular political

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[2] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. xviii.

moments in response to prevailing configurations of actor power and interest, and then tend to reproduce themselves even as external conditions change. Such "institutional inertia" is reflected perhaps most strikingly in the entrenched and yet increasingly dysfunctional voting structures of international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund.[3]

The main consequence of such gridlock is to shrink our repertoire of available institutional strategies for managing pressing global problems—limiting our capacity to rely on established mechanisms of inter-state cooperation. To some extent, such institutional blockages may be circumvented by the use of alternative transnational governance "technologies,"[4] such as transgovernmental networks, multi-stakeholder initiatives, voluntary regulations or new mechanisms of adjudication and financing—all of which offer means of making rules or providing public goods.[5] Institutional gridlock is thus of greatest concern in circumstances where established intergovernmental institutions experiencing blockage possess unique functional capacities or sources of legitimacy that cannot easily be substituted.

Such concerns are sometimes significant. The authors identify notable weaknesses of potential institutional substitutes with regards to enforcement capacity and scope of coverage—limitations that constrain both problem-solving capacity and

[3] Ibid., pp. 41–2.

[4] Thomas Hale and David Held, "Gridlock and Innovation in Global Governance: The Partial Transnational Solution," 3 *Global Policy* 2 (2012), pp. 176–7, 169.

[5] These arguments are further elaborated elsewhere by two of the book's authors. See ibid.; and Thomas Hale and David Held, "Editors' Introduction: Mapping Changes in Transnational Governance," in *Handbook of Transnational Governance: Institutions and Innovations* (2011), pp. 1–36.

claims of broad-based representation. On the flipside, by enabling collective action amongst likeminded groups, limited coverage can at times more readily accommodate diversity of values and preferences. Less prescriptive and enforceable commitments can further enable "softer" and more flexible agreements to be reached. Thus, although new transnational governance technologies can deliver only "a partial solution for the challenges of contemporary interdependence," they offer at least some accessible remedies for distinctively *institutional* dimensions of gridlock—providing feasible albeit imperfect pathways through which institutional barriers to cooperation can be circumvented.

II

The Structural Drivers of Harder Problems

Impediments to reinvigorated global cooperation appear deeper when we turn our attention to another important source of gridlock highlighted by the authors, in the form of what they call "harder problems.". Such problems are "hard" in large part because of their *complexity*—a challenge that has been extensively highlighted in recent governance literature.[6] Multiple actors contribute to and are affected by such problems—increasing transaction costs and numbers of veto players involved in their governance. The governance challenges this entails are intensified by the diversity of values and preferences amongst different

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[6] Andreas Duit and Victor Galaz, "Governance and Complexity—Emerging Issues for Governance Theory," 21 *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions* 3 (2008), pp. 311–35; James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

constituencies, and by different understandings amongst actors of the nature of the problems and what would constitute solutions. Hard problems are also often highly dynamic in character, involving shifting interplay between multiple causal drivers.

Hard problems of these kinds resist governability in a number of ways. The multiplicity of political agents makes it harder to bring together dispersed actors in successful *deliberation and bargaining processes* to agree common rules or coordinated actions. Underlying societal complexity can also intensify *compliance and implementation* challenges, requiring more complex and differentiated compliance mechanisms, complicating the coordinating and sequencing of regulatory strategies, and impeding efforts to foster consistent processes of desired socialization.

Such governance tasks are all the more challenging when decision-making and implementation processes need to be managed across issues and jurisdictions. Particularly difficult then are what the authors refer to as "intermestic" problems, whereby "old and new problems alike now penetrate deeper into societies … requiring … more shifts from what the domestic equilibrium might be … to achieve cooperation."[7] Intermestic problems are usually complex, involving multiple actors and interests, intertwined through highly dynamic processes; this goes some way to explaining why these problems are so hard. But their distinctive challenges are compounded by the constitutive structure of statist jurisdictional boundaries, and the corresponding structure of political bargaining. Incompatibilities between political opportunity structures faced by negotiating parties—linked for example to electoral cycles or other local

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[7] Hale, Held and Young, *Gridlock*, p. 44.

political dynamics—generate distinctive obstacles for negotiators. The likelihood of political opportunity structures lining up across scales at a given moment in time to accommodate negotiated multilateral agreement is particularly low where cross-cutting coalitions or grand bargains are required not only across jurisdictions but across multiple issues—as is the case for many highly complex intermestic governance problems.

Although the distinction between institutional and deeper structural forms of gridlock is often blurred, it therefore has important implications for how we think about the possibilities of building a "politics beyond gridlock."s While institutional blockages can sometimes be overcome through coordinated strategies of institutional substitution, the diffusion and complexity of "hard" social problems makes them more resistant to change through coordinated political action.

III

Pluralist Ordering of Political Authority

To make matters harder still, the fragmented constitutive structure of statist political authority is now compounded by a broader *decentring* of authority within the global order. The inherent structural decentring associated with an inter-state system or society is intensified in the contemporary pluralist order by the proliferation of non-state, sub-state, supra-state and multi-stakeholder entities, often competing for influence over the definition and management of specific problems.[8] Not only is

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[8] Nico Krisch, "The Pluralism of Global Administrative Law", 17 *European Journal of International Law* 1 (2006), pp. 247–78; Sebastian Oberthür and Olav Schram Stokke, *Managing Institutional Complexity: Regime Interplay and Global Environmental Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

such authority decentralized, it is also *disordered*, in the sense that there are no overarching authoritative procedures through which multiple centres of political authority can be coordinated on the basis of consistent normative principles. Particularly fragmented governance institutions have often emerged in policy fields also characterized by high problem complexity, such as regulation of transnational business or the environment.[9] Complexity of social problems in need of governing is thus overlaid and intensified by complexity of political actors and institutions seeking to govern these problems.

Decentred political authority need not generate problematic forms of gridlock. Multiple, differentiated governance arrangements can productively accommodate the emergence of specialized bodies to regulate and govern specific issue areas, and support adaptiveness to varying needs and values across political contexts. In theory such problem solving capacities could be developed within a centralized political structure embodying appropriate principles of subsidiarity, but in practice such adaptiveness can more easily be negotiated through decentred processes that are able to opportunistically build on political coalitions and openings that emerge in different places, amongst different groups of actors, at different times.

Nonetheless, the weakly regulated nature of interactions between fragmented sites of political authority often also generates distinctive challenges. Institutional fragmentation can increase uncertainty and transaction costs, and generate costly duplication and diffusion of responsibility.[10] Moreover, as multiple sites of authority act on a problem in uncoordinated ways, complex, unregulated spillover effects are generated—

[9] Hale, Held and Young, *Gridlock*, Chapter 4.
[10] Ibid., pp. 46–7.

weakening coordination and problem solving capacity of governance institutions. The fragmented and disordered qualities of pluralist institutions also impede the capacity of governance institutions to coordinate decisions in accordance with normative principles of "impartiality and political equality."[11] Institutional fragmentation can likewise weaken the capacity for collective bargaining and deliberation around shared issues of concern— further diminishing the ability of collective institutions to foster qualities of representativeness or responsiveness to affected groups. There are often particular barriers to representation for stakeholders who are *indirectly* affected by the exercise of transnational authority, and thus frequently excluded from official membership or recognition within governance processes.

Unlike choices between alternative governance mechanisms or "technologies," the constitutive drivers of complex problems and pluralist political authority are strongly resistant to purposive change promoted by individual political actors or coalitions. Such structural dimensions of gridlock reflect more than simply contingent forms of political and institutional dysfunction; rather, they reveal deeper challenges of governability in the contemporary order.

IV

Legitimizing Pluralist Global Governance?

With these challenges in view, the authors remind us that political complexity and pluralism are now undeniably "the reality the world faces."[12] What then are the prospects for salvaging core

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[11] Ibid., p. 305.
[12] Ibid., p. 271.

liberal governance principles under social and institutional conditions that are increasingly multi-layered, dynamic and resistant to principled ordering? A politics beyond gridlock is unlikely to be one of reinvigorated multilateral grand bargains, but this need not be a prospect we lament. Rather, we can productively explore the potential for revitalizing liberal principles within more decentred institutional structures and processes.[13]

Coordination between multiple sites of political authority can be pursued not only through hierarchical forms of multilateral inter-state agreement. As recent scholarship has begun to explore, more indirect and non-hierarchical forms of cooperative governance can contribute in important ways to steering effective governance processes within a fragmented institutional system.[14] Moreover, because fragmented governance processes are distributed over multiple sites and scales, the *democratization* of pluralist global governance requires innovative accountability mechanisms to be established at sub-national as well as national and international levels. In this sense, pursuing a legitimate global governance beyond gridlock is as much about reorienting political coalitions and institutions at *local levels* as it is about building distinctively "global" institutions.

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[13] Kate Macdonald, "Global Democracy for a Partially Joined-Up World: Toward a Multi-level System of Public Power and Democratic Governance?" in Daniele Archibugi, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi and Raffaele Marchetti, eds, *Global Democracy: Normative and Empirical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Adrian Little and Kate Macdonald, "Pathways to Global Democracy? Escaping the Statist Imaginary," 39 *Review of International Studies* 4 (2013), pp. 789–813.

[14] Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "International Regulation Without International Government: Improving IO Performance Through Orchestration," 5 *The Review of International Organizations* 3 (2010), pp. 315–44.

The highly *dynamic* character of both complex global problems and institutional interactions further suggests a need for global institutions with distinctive qualities of responsiveness to instability and change. As the authors highlight, principles of experimentalism and institutional adaptation may offer useful pointers towards strategies of productive incremental change, through the distribution of institutional innovation "across small, dynamic institutions which try new methods and share their results with others in a continual process of learning and reform."[15] The highly dynamic character of transnational and local political dynamics can make it particularly difficult to identify changing patterns of actors *indirectly affected* by decisions taken in multiple, interacting forums. Institutional innovation may therefore also be required to develop mechanisms equipped to enable ongoing contestability, revision and review regarding ongoing stakeholder entry and exit, and to accommodate appropriate forms of recognition and voice for indirectly affected stakeholders of various kinds.

Such observations gesture only in highly schematic terms towards potential directions for ongoing institutional innovation and experimentation. However, they underscore the need to think differently about the deep challenges of governability that we face in a pluralist global order, and to channel intellectual and political energy not into resisting, but rather into strengthening and legitimizing decentred institutional arrangements.

The authors of *Gridlock* leave us in little doubt that "the challenges before us and the likely effectiveness of the probable

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[15] Hale and Held, "Gridlock and Innovation in Global Governance," p. 179; Michael Dorf and Charles Sabel, "A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism," 98 *Columbia Law Review* 2 (1998), pp. 267–473.

responses"[16] are sobering. Yet despite the gloomy tone of the book's prognosis, the authors maintain a desire not "to cast despair on the prospects for effective global governance."[17] In accordance with this sentiment, the brief reflections offered here offer some modest grounds for viewing with at least a subdued optimism the prospects of salvaging normative liberal visions of a rules-based global institutional system, bound by broadly democratic principles of inclusiveness and equal respect. As we have seen, however, we may need to think differently about the institutional forms that resurrected forms of liberal global governance might most plausibly take—and correspondingly, the mechanisms of democratic inclusion and legitimation through which liberal governance principles may be protected within an increasingly pluralist global order.

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[16] Hale, Held and Young, *Gridlock*, p. 275.
[17] Ibid.

GRIDLOCK? MAYBE

BY

RORDEN WILKINSON

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Gridlock? Maybe

Rorden Wilkinson

E ven the most casual of observers will have noticed how clogged with sand intergovernmental machineries have become. Negotiations on climate change, trade, finance and disarmament, among others, have stalled and the institutions charged with facilitating progressive agreement in each of these areas have struggled to deliver. Yet, while casual observers will have noticed what is going on, few serious attempts have been made to stand back and make sense of how the various pieces of this intergovernmental logjam fit together. Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young's *Gridlock* is a notable exception.

Gridlock is an excellent book. It captures well patterns of inertia in intergovernmental global governance and provides plausible explanations for how this situation has arisen. It does, however, leave unresolved a series of issues that in combination lead to a retort of "maybe" when considering whether Hale, Held and Young are right. These can be characterized as: i) the "what if" issue; ii) the "it is all quite bad now" issue; iii) the "victim" issue; iv) the "behind the headlines" issue; v) the "what is gridlock doing" issue; vi) the "causal relationship" issue; and vii) the "solution" issue. In isolation none of these issues is big enough to nullify the authors' claims or to suggest that their analytical lenses are wanting. Together they are sufficiently bothersome to warrant further reflection and debate. My purposes in this short intervention are to underscore the need for further reflection and debate and to push Hale, Held and Young towards the further

development of the conceptual and policy tools required to produce better global governance.

I begin with a brief summary of their core argument to demonstrate why the issues outlined above are cause for concern. I then explore each of these issues in turn before offering my concluding comments. Like Hale, Held and Young, I share the view that the current state of multilateral governance is worrisome; that this state is the consequence of prior institutional design, development and operation (intentional or otherwise); and that serious thought needs to be given to where humanity goes from here. Where the authors and I depart is on the historical significance of institutional inertia, the role that periods of stasis play in institutional development and how they can be, and are, transcended.

I

Gridlock: Thesis, Method, Empirical Prosecution

Hale, Held and Young's central thesis is that global cooperation is in gridlock. By gridlock they mean a state of inertia wherein the productive capacity of the most visible intergovernmental aspects of contemporary global governance has ground to a halt. This general state of inertia has arisen because of increasing multipolarity, growing institutional stasis, the increased difficultly of the problems subject to negotiation, and processes that have led to institutional fragmentation. These tendencies are termed "pathways" or "roads" to gridlock.

Hale, Held and Young argue that the inability to provide global public goods has become evermore troublesome because gridlock has occurred at a time when demand for international cooperation is at an all-time high. The result, as they put it, "is

that the governance gap between the existing multilateral order and the public goods needed is now dangerously large."[1] While they are clear to warn that "gridlock does not characterize every aspect of global politics,"[2] unless ways through this state of inertia are found, the gains of the post-war period may be rolled back and the state humanity finds itself in will become increasingly dire.

The authors draw their argument from a historical reading of the development of institutional capacity in three areas: security, the economy and the environment. In each area they show how the four pathways to gridlock are uniquely blended to create the inertia of today. In global security governance they find a logjam generated by complex networks of state and non-state actors, growing multipolarity, intergovernmental paralysis and new trans-border challenges. In the governance of the global economy they see widespread institutional stasis and fragmentation alongside harder-to-crack issues and changing power relations. And in global environmental governance they argue that institutional fragmentation and incoherence, tensions among established and "rising" powers, and the difficulty of resolving key issues are the principle drivers of inertia.

II

The "What If" Issue

One of the strengths of Hale, Held and Young's analysis is its historicism. This enables them to argue with compunction that

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[1] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 42.
[2] Ibid., p. 48.

the "governance structures designed in one era do not necessarily fit the next."[3] Moreover, the global governance challenges of today are "necessarily contingent on preceding institutional developments."[4] Yet, their conception of history is also one of *Gridlock*'s weaknesses and it leads us to ask, "what if something else is going on?"

For Hale, Held and Young, comprehending why the evolution of intergovernmental global governance has generated a generalized state of inertia requires an understanding of the circumstances in which international institutions were forged and the manner in which they have evolved, along with the changed and changing nature of the world order. This is all fair and good. Yet, given this historical sensitivity, it is strange then that Hale, Held and Young should present contemporary institutional inertia as the endpoint rather than as the latest stage in an ongoing process of evolution.

A different version of historical institutionalism might have stood back and seen contemporary inertia—in both a generalized and institutionally specific form—as a catalytic moment and/or a normal component of any instance of institutional evolution. Here, Stephen Krasner's punctuated equilibrium would not necessarily be an evolutionary trajectory comprising moments wherein "a mismatch between institutions and the conditions on which they depend" ultimately leads to the *destruction* of "existing institutions … allowing a new set more attuned to the changed conditions to take their place."[5] Rather, it could simply be an evolutionary trajectory that is non-linear and which contains within it moments of innovation, stasis, change and development.

[3] Ibid., p. 84.
[4] Ibid., p. 48.
[5] Ibid., p. 42.

In this understanding, gridlock might just be a natural stage in the development of our international institutions through which they will either pass or evolve in a manner that is reflective of the outcome of the confluence of the forces that come together at that moment in time,and not something that is necessarily destructive.

Two quick examples underscore this point. First, the demise of an international institution is a rare event.[6] Clearly, international organizations have fallen by the wayside and they have done so precisely because they have proven unable to adapt to suit changed political and economic circumstances and/or they were poorly designed: the League of Nations is the most obvious example though we might also think of the Concert of Europe and Holy Roman Alliance. The corollary here is that either punctuated equilibria—as Hale, Held and Young understand it— are rare, or else they are part of many other processes that do not necessarily result in institutional destruction. Given that the latter is the more likely, we might want to conceptualize inertia as a component of an evolutionary process rather than a signal that it is ending.

Second, prominent examples exist of the kind of institutional adaptability that has enabled particular organizations to navigate troubling climes and transition across changes in the global distribution of political and economic power. Here, the innovation and adaptation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is perhaps the most instructive. As Nigel

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[6] See Richard T. Cupitt, Rodney L. Whitlock and Lynn Williams Whitlock, "The (Im)Morality of International Governmental Organizations," 21 *International Interactions* 4 (1996), pp. 389–404.

Haworth and Steve Hughes[7] document, the enlightened leadership of several ILO executive heads enabled the organization to transition from League of Nations to United Nations when the former perished as well as to periodically reinvent itself in the face of challenges that threatened to render it an irrelevance in the period thereafter.

The question here is, "what if we are witnessing a momentary pause in institutional development out of which a new phase of evolution will emerge rather than an endpoint in a trajectory?" Perhaps what makes the current moment unique is that so many institutional trajectories are experiencing the same stage simultaneously, which is why we might consider this inertia to be gridlock. Maybe this should not come as a surprise precisely because we know that international institutions—irrespective of the area in which they operate—are subject to the same global political and economic context. Thus, it might be that it is only the number of institutions experiencing inertia that is unique and not the inertia itself.

III

The "It Is All Quite Bad Now" Issue

The reason the "what if" issue matters is because of the related "it is all quite bad now" issue. The latter results from the presentation of the current moment as one in which gridlock exists and which stands in contrast to seven preceding decades of steady progress in the provision of global public goods. Here, Hale, Held and Young are a little too selective in their use of

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[7] Nigel Haworth and Steve Hughes, *The International Labour Organization: Coming in from the Cold* (London: Routledge, 2011).

historical data and present too generalist a view of post-war institutional history as a result. Clearly, over the long run spectacular gains have been made in global public good provision. It is also the case, however, that other moments have existed wherein a generalized state of gridlock could have been said to occur and other moments where particular institutions have been rendered inert. The late 1940s to mid-1950s was a period of inertia for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and (what was to become) the World Bank. The late 1960s to early 1970s and the early to mid-1980s were also moments wherein various institutional processes ground to a halt. Moreover, institutions like the UN, the IMF, the World Bank and the GATT have all experienced several moments of stasis out of which it was thought they would not easily move.

It is not just that inertia and gridlock have been features of prior times that are important here. It is also that examples of major institutional progress and global public good provision are evident right now which disrupts the idea that we are in a period of generalized inertia. We might consider the surprising ease with which the post-2015 development agenda (*Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*) was agreed, with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) replaced with a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as one clear example. Other examples might include the process of institutional consolidation that resulted in the creation of UN Women, or the new forms of institutionalization that have resulted from growing multipolarity (of which the New Development Bank, formerly the BRICS Bank, is perhaps the most well known).

At issue here is not so much Hale, Held and Young's argument, but more the way the argument is made. *Gridlock* relies on tracing particular historical developments for the production of its argument. It does not theorise those developments, the

stages through which an institution's evolution may pass, or how change occurs therein. Equally, moments of crisis, stasis and inertia are not accounted for theoretically in how we might expect an institution/s to evolve. The result is the presentation of gridlock as a historical endpoint rather than a stage that will be passed through. Of course that does not mean we should be fatalistic about institutional development—periods of crisis should be worried about in equal measure with the celebration of the opportunities they bring to encourage change. It simply means that the uniqueness of contemporary gridlock might be better brought out theoretically as well as empirically, and the story they tell ought to be a little messier.

IV

The "Victim" Issue

There is a sense throughout *Gridlock* that international institutions are passive agents rather than machineries that are able to affect their evolutionary trajectory and apply pressure to overcome periods of stasis. There are at least two issues here. First, in constructing the pathways to gridlock, Hale, Held and Young present international institutions as rather distant and disconnected phenomena whose developmental path is observed and where corrections to that course are made largely exogenously. This underplays the role that institutions can and have been able to play in taking charge of their own institutional fortunes. I have already mentioned the effect that successive ILO executive heads have had on that institution's developmental path—a capacity that led Robert Cox to remark that "[t]he quality of executive leadership may prove to be the most critical single

determinant of the growth in scope and authority of international organization."[8] Examples of executive head agency can also be gleaned from the histories of UNICEF, the World Bank and the World Health Organization.[9]

The role of executive heads is only part of the story, however. Multiple instances of individual and group agency exist where a dramatic effect has been had on the development of international institutions in the post-war era. These include the compilation of negotiating texts that have resulted in agreements being made in times of turbulence and stasis, the arrangement of negotiations to overcome discord, populating key positions with likeminded characters, and the advising of political elites, among many others—all instances of action that might not be seen as being beyond the bounds of what an international civil servant is supposed to do but which could and can assist in overcoming periods of enervation. Of course, the capacity to affect change in an institution's trajectory is not restricted to insiders. Many an external agent or agents have affected—sometimes profoundly so—institutional development. Hale, Held and Young are not insensitive to these qualities, but in making their argument gridlock is presented with the quality of a force of nature rather than one of our making.

Second, the obverse is also true. If the agency exercised by an individual or group/s of individuals inside or beyond an intergovernmental organization can have an effect on institutional

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[8] Robert W. Cox, "The Executive Head: An Essay on Leadership in International Organization," 23 *International Organization* 2 (1969), p. 205.
[9] See Richard Jolly, *UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund): Global Governance That Works* (London: Routledge, 2014); Katherine Marshall, *The World Bank: From Reconstruction to Development to Equity* (London: Routledge, 2008); Kelley Lee, *The World Health Organization* (London: Routledge, 2009).

development, it follows that these actors can also work to *generate* gridlock. The injection of inertia into an intergovernmental process is a well-understood strategy and one that could be at play today. In my own work[10] I have shown how the construction of a crisis by key players has been used as a strategy for generating a particular kind of forward momentum in multilateral trade negotiations. This was clearly India's intention in the wake of the agreement of the "Bali package" at the WTO's ninth ministerial conference.[11] The withdrawals of support for particular processes (or agreements) in climate and disarmament negotiations are also salient examples.

The point here is that international institutions are not passive entities. Insiders and outsiders can and do affect the manner in which an institution evolves. Getting to grips with when, why and how that happens is also a necessary component of understanding gridlock, part of which requires a greater sensitivity to self-interested behaviour.

V

The "Behind the Headlines" Issue

Understanding agency in international institutions forces us to look beyond headline events to see what is going on under-the-radar. This helps us recognize whether what we are seeing is actually an instance of gridlock as well as to detect what hidden

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[10] Rorden Wilkinson, *The WTO: Crisis and the Governance of Global Trade* (London: Routledge, 2006) and *What's Wrong With the WTO and How to Fix It* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).
[11] Rorden Wilkinson, "Changing Power Relations in the WTO: Why the India–U.S. Trade Agreement Should Make Us Worry More, Rather Than Less, About Global Trade Governance," *Geoforum* 61 (2015), pp. 13–16.

processes might be underway that could drive an institution through a period of stasis. It is useful to return to the WTO for a moment. While the stuttering passage of the Doha round has dominated the headlines, organizational insiders and supporters have been at pains to point out that negotiating trade openings is only one aspect of what it is that the WTO does. The round may have so far failed to result in a grand commercial bargain,[12] but its administration, dispute settlement, surveillance, assistance and data-gathering roles have continued to function (and, for WTO supporters, have done so with aplomb). I have my own reservations about how significant this is in diluting the general view of WTO stasis but it is certainly the case that deadlock in the Doha round has unleashed a great deal of institutional activity that is attempting to drive the organization beyond its present circumstances. This includes not only the use of a variable geometry and "plurilateralism" in negotiations—attempts to find agreement among a smaller subset of members in particular commercial areas—but also via investment in "big data" programmes, public relations exercises and so on.

To overcome the "behind the headlines" issue requires that aggregate analyses of institutional processes be under-laid with forensic accounts of what sits behind these figurehead events. This means we should be more attentive to the "everyday" of international organizations than we might otherwise be.[13] In turn, this enables us to reflect back on the conceptual tools that we

[12] The package of measures agreed at the WTO's December 2013 Ministerial Conference is too limited to be considered a grand commercial bargain. See Rorden Wilkinson, Erin Hannah and James Scott, "The WTO in Bali: What MC9 Means for the Doha Development Agenda and Why It Matters," 35 *Third World Quarterly* 6 (2014), pp. 1032–50.

[13] Michele Acuto, "Everyday International Relations: Garbage, Grand Designs and Mundane Matters," 8 *International Political Sociology* 4 (2014), pp. 345–62.

have when we come to analyse stasis, continuity and change in international institutions.

VI

The "What Is Gridlock Doing" Issue

One way to think about gridlock in international institutional processes is to characterize it as an inhibiting force in the production of global public goods. However, by treating gridlock only as an inert force we miss the outcomes that moments of deadlock can and do produce. I have already mentioned two examples of gridlock being a productive force—to push through an agreement and embark on the next phase of an institution's development, and to encourage activities away from an area of blockage—with illustrations from the WTO.

Beyond institution-specific developments at least two other instances of gridlock as a productive force are noteworthy. First, there are instances of inertia that have been key drivers in the production of global public goods. For example, the East/West standoff during the Cold War and the paralysis it generated in the United Nations produced a global public good preventing planetary destruction arising from nuclear conflict—albeit that the "elements of stability" that this lent the international system, to use John Lewis Gaddis's phrase,[14] came at the expense of the considerable suffering inflicted by the proxy wars fought during this period. Second, there are also instances of generalized stasis nurturing processes of institution building. During the Cold War superpower deadlock fuelled the development a series of

[14] John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements Of Stability in the Postwar International System," 10 *International Security* 4 (1986), pp. 99–142.

opposing regionalisms: NATO and the European Economic Community in the West, Comecon and the Warsaw Pact in the East, and the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 in the South.

What is important here is that Hale, Held and Young leave out the productive capacity that gridlock can have, preferring instead to treat deadlock as an endpoint in itself. This is a problem when analytical tools that look at long-run developments are brought to bear on the here-and-now. To overcome this, Hale, Held and Young need to account in their argument for the productive energy that gridlock can have. This ought to be easy enough give that the creation of competitor institutions to the existing multilateral system—such as the New Development Bank and the Forum and China–Africa Cooperation[15]—will inevitably reinforce, rather than attenuate, system stasis.

VII

The "Causal Relationship" Issue

A further problem relates to the extent to which gridlock is a consequence of prior institutional development or whether it is just a reflection of world politics today. An argument could easily be made that world politics in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century is itself gridlocked so we should not be surprised that this is refracted through international institutions. A very different set of circumstances may prevail in a few short years' time. These scenarios have occurred in previous periods. It is also the case that the broad turn to the right that has occurred

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[15] Ian Taylor, *The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)* (London: Routledge, 2012).

in domestic politics across the industrial countries has had an effect on the capacity of international institutions to get things done. This is not a function of gridlock *per se* but it certainly lends weight to the argument that the inertia may just be a function of timing.

It is tempting to take Hale, Held and Young's argument at face value nonetheless. The four pathways to gridlock—together and in isolation—certainly seem to explain the current state of intergovernmental global governance. But what is the causal relationship here? Is it that international institutions have assisted in the creation of a multipolar, highly interdependent, institutionally fragmented environment in which it is harder to find solutions to problems of coordination and which has led to contemporary gridlock? Or is it that wider political and economic developments have entangled international institutions in such a way that they have been rendered near inert? On this point *Gridlock* is a little too brief. Clearly, for Hale, Held and Young there is a symbiotic and mutually constitutive relationship that has developed between international institutions and the context in which they were created, evolved and have operated even though statements such as "[t]he postwar institutions helped to create this new world but they were not built for it"[16] suggests a degree of unidirectional causality. The problem here is how to separate out clearly enough causal factors such that discrete solutions can be pursued and corrective action applied. Perhaps it is precisely because of the complex interrelationship of all of these factors—and many more—that few discrete solutions present themselves in such a way that gridlock can be meaningfully overcome (in the sense that new global public goods can be provided and global governance return to

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[16] Hale, Held and Young, *Gridlock*, p. 34.

something like the form that Hale, Held and Young previously saw). This leads us to the final, and ultimately the trickiest, issue.
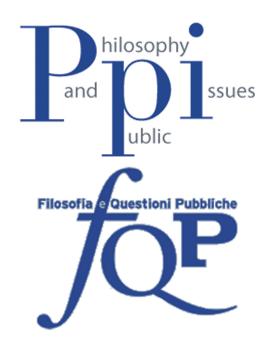
VIII

The "Solution" Issue

The least satisfying part of this otherwise admirable book is the way it concludes. Rather than bringing the argument to a close with a set of statements—normative or otherwise—about what is required to resign gridlock and the undersupply of global public goods to the annals of history, Hale, Held and Young concentrate too much on reviewing the factors that are likely to reinforce gridlock in the coming years. In so doing they leave just twelve pages to discuss possible pathways through gridlock and the politics that might encourage them to be taken.

The lack of satisfaction results not just from the vague way that Hale, Held and Young specify what the pathways through gridlock might be, it is also because their analysis leads them somewhere else. If we are to take seriously their use of concepts like punctuated equilibrium then surely the only way gridlock can be overcome—beyond a resignation that the existing institutions will expire and be replaced with others that reflect changed global power relations—is to build a different type of global institution. Most logically this would be a world body that moves beyond piecemeal attempts to govern the inter-state system to one that is truly global.

If this is *not* the logical corollary of their argument then they should spell out how institutional stasis, multipolarity, increasingly difficult problems and institutional fragmentation are better overcome. It is only then that policy solutions can be distilled to make the most of the uniqueness of the current

moment and the potential that it holds to exercise meaningful leverage on intergovernmental processes. Otherwise, we will not be able to move beyond the gridlock we are in.

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GRIDLOCK,
OR A PERIOD OF REFLECTION FOR TRIPLE LOOP LEARNING

BY

JOYEETA GUPTA

Gridlock,
Or A Period Of Reflection
for Triple Loop Learning

Joyeeta Gupta

T he new century did not so much begin with a new optimism and enthusiasm as it did with the lingering gloom of the *fin de siècle*, exacerbated by the events of 9/11, the financial crises and the inability of the global community to address climate change or trade challenges. It led authors to talk of negotiation, lockjam, deadlock and institutional/technological/political lock-in. In much the same spirit, Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young[1] discuss the current crises in global governance in a historical perspective arguing that in areas of wicked problems, we are now in gridlock and that multilateralism is failing.

Straddled in the nexus between global governance books and global change books, the authors argue that the fields of security, economy and environment reveal complex challenges of interdependence and yet systems of governance are not able to address these issues. They argue that the combination of institutional inertia, growing multipolarity, harder problems and fragmented governance systems have led to the current

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[1] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 357.

historically contingent deadlock. In the vein of Ostrom[2] and others they suggest that there is no silver bullet for these second-order cooperation problems and that there will need to be different solutions for different problems.

While their book takes one through a fascinating and extremely convincing narrative of how the twentieth century has evolved into the twenty-first, I take this opportunity to build upon my innate optimism, my Southern roots and perspective, and my exposure to multilevel resource and development governance which perhaps takes a broader look at global governance than an International Relations perspective might do. Hence, I complement the authors' assessment to argue that we are not in a gridlock situation, but that we are facing the birth pangs of triple loop learning in global institutionalism. Triple loop learning calls not just for incremental change but for understanding the changing context and paradigms needed to address global problems since (a) the challenge is not so much institutional inertia in dealing with interdependence as it is the fear of the powerful to deal with resource and sink limits ("shrinking ecospace") in the Anthropocene; (b) the harder problems are not just exhibiting extensity and intensity, but can only be addressed when related development trajectories and the multiple causes of problems at different levels of governance are assessed; (c) it is not so much that multipolarity brings transaction costs, but that multipolarity in combination with the increasing positive and negative presence of the South in different issue areas requires greater attention to global and Southern issues; and (d) fragmentation of policy processes is inevitable and a consequence of democracy and public participation, but such

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[2] Elinor Ostrom, Marco A. Janssen and John M. Anderies, "Going Beyond Panaceas," 104 *PNAS* 39 (2007), pp. 15176–8.

fragmentation should not violate the environment or human rights and should not ignore redistribution issues. This calls for triple loop learning: learning that there are other viewpoints on the limits of the earth and there is the need to share it equitably; learning that the weaker party is gradually becoming more vocal; and learning that a fundamental reordering of global society is inevitable and the best way to protect people and societies is through global constitutionalism.

I

Institutional inertia: From Incremental Approaches in an Interdependent World towards a Structural Approach in a Resource- and Sink-Constrained World

Hale, Held and Young argue that we are locked in institutional inertia in an interdependent world leading to failing multilateralism.[3] While this may be true, our institutional inertia is also driven by the realization that many of us are talking at cross-purposes. While for some the problem is one of interdependence, for others it is about sharing the shrinking resources and sinks (ecospace) in the Anthropocene.[4]

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[3] See also Edward Newman, Ramesh Thakur and John Tirman, eds, *Multilateralism Under Challenge? Power, Normative Structure and World Order* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2006), p. 563.

[4] Joyeeta Gupta, "Sharing Our Earth," inaugural address as Professor of Environment and Development in the Global South, University of Amsterdam, 2014, available at: www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-3450weboratie_Gupta.pdf; Joyeeta Gupta, "Toward Sharing Our Ecospace," in Simon Nicholson and Sikina Jinnah, eds, *New Earth Politics: Ethics from the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

This ecospace (environmental utilization space) can be visualized as a cake that has to be shared between people and countries, daily, annually and over time; from locally through to globally. The problem of shrinking ecospace is the medium-term problem of shrinking abiotic and biotic resources and sinks available to meet our growing demands. The available quantity of many economically viable and accessible abiotic resources, the so-called strategic resources, is declining, at least in the short- to medium-term. Our biotic resources such as land and fresh water are limited and have to be shared between the growing needs of the growing population. Our pollution of the available sinks, such as the emissions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is affecting its ability to provide the ecosystem services[5] that society as a whole can benefit from, signalling the need to set up ecosystemic limits.

This limited ecospace is shrinking on a per-capita and per-use basis. Before examining the governance paradigms for dealing with scarcity, let me explore why this scarce ecospace needs to be shared. If fixed resources like land and fresh water shrink on a per-capita basis and in relation to our growing demand, we will have to reallocate resources and rights. If abiotic resources are scarce but essential for life, such as phosphorous for food production and rare earths for telephones and computers—a modern day necessity—sharing rules will need to be devised. If the sink is shrinking, given that this sink provides a range of ecosystem services which are either public goods like climate

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[5] Kanchan Ratna Chopra et al., eds, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Policy Responses* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005), p. 621.

change or biodiversity or merit goods like access to health,[6] and/or public bads like polluted ecosystems leading to damage, it creates obligations sharing the rights, responsibilities and associated risks.

Sharing implies equitable governance which ensures (i) access (minimum rights for all) and (ii) allocation (distribution and redistribution) of the remaining ecospace rights, responsibilities and (social and environmental) risks and burdens among peoples and countries including the impacts of climate change.

Traditionally, scarce resources can be governed through neoliberal capitalist approaches in which they are privatized and traded among those who can pay the premium price, thereby allocating ecospace and related rights, responsibilities and risks through pricing, markets and privatization. This can lead to the monopolization of the ecospace through confidential contracts, controlling politics and the ability to use offshore tax havens, and thereby avoid redistributive issues. A second control mechanism is hegemonic where states claim absolute territorial sovereignty over their resources, decline to ratify international agreements, or securitize issues making them into high-politics affairs. This allocates, by default in an anarchic global system, the shrinking ecospace and related rights, responsibilities and risks on the basis of binding bilateral and plurilateral treaties (or other less legal means) to secure continued access to resources for individual countries or control "sovereign" resources. A third approach is a polycentric approach where multiple centres of authority manage their own resources in a transnational world hopefully in coordination with each other.

[6] Inge Kaul, Pedro Conceição, Katell Le Goulven and Ronald U. Mendoza, eds., *Providing Global Public Goods: Managing Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 646.

A fourth approach is a transformative, not incremental, sustainable development approach—which uses a constitutional approach to managing resources. This calls for structural reform and change in status quo politics.

II

Harder Problems: From Extensity and Intensity to Understanding Development Trajectories and Multilevel Drivers

The *Gridlock* authors argue that we face harder problems than before—harder in their intensity and their extensity. I would like to deepen this argument by adding two elements. First, we live in a multi-speed world and countries, regions and peoples pass through different trajectories. Just as demographic trajectories show that one cannot stabilize populations overnight, and take-off theories predict that societies cannot develop overnight, the forest transition curve shows that societies cannot stop deforesting overnight.[7] This implies that one has to understand at which stage of the possible transition curve a specific country is and how these can be changed through specific interventions. The complete lack of understanding of trajectories in an effort to impose common rules on all countries often leads to a breakdown in the negotiations—possibly the transaction costs that the *Gridlock* authors are referring to. But a good understanding of each other's starting points is necessary for change. This, however, may upset the status quo and powerful

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[7] E.g. A.S. Mather, "The Forest Transition," 24 *Area* 4 (1992), pp. 367–79; Thomas K. Rudel et al., "Forest Transitions: Towards a Global Understanding of Land Use Change," 15 *Global Environmental Change* 1 (2005), pp. 23–31.

countries may prefer to avoid the implications of such a discussion.

Another key issue is that in an intensely globalized world, governance can no longer only be purely among and between states and non-state actors, but needs to find ways of engaging with the contextual, spatial and scalar nature of the challenge. This is because the causes of problems and their multiple impacts operate simultaneously at multiple levels, the system is glocal, and solutions can often be found in other countries. In other words, one needs to take into account which specific driver affects a problem at a specific level/context and address that. Let me explain. Where the problem is the global market discourse of privatizing resources, local authorities may have no countervailing power to prevent its effects. Nor can a climate treaty address global market forces, if it has an explicit principle that it must protect the global economic order. Where biodiversity loss is caused by global demand for trophies (e.g. the head of a lion) or souvenirs (e.g. the toes of a bear), making national parks may not help. Of course, governments have multiple political, economic, legal and social reasons for not wanting to scale up or scale down a specific problem.[8] The implication of this is that modern wicked problems require temporal, scalar, interdisciplinary analysis, before level-appropriate specific solutions can be crafted.

[8] Joyeeta Gupta, "Global Politics of Scale on Environmental Issues: Climate, Water and Forests," in Frans Padt, Paul Opdam, Nico Polman and Catrien Termeer, eds, *Scale-Sensitive Governance of the Environment* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

III

Multipolarity: Towards a Better Balance of Power in a Changing World With Persistent Challenges

While Hale, Held and Young argue that the rise of a multipolar world has contributed to gridlock, I would argue in the spirit of authors from the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) school, that first, although membership of rich and poor countries has and will keep changing, the rich–poor divide remains persistent. With 1 percent of the population monopolizing 50 percent of the resources and the poorest 2.5 billion people living on less than $2 per day, we are increasingly seeing that the 1 percent is beginning to control politics both directly (in terms of what is focused on) and indirectly (in terms of ensuring tax holidays for themselves and through controlling the polycentric governance arenas through their "long arm"). A substantial portion of trade, bank loans and foreign direct investment is channelled through offshore tax havens to avoid paying taxes. The poor will also have to bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change, but also of global capitalism through the effects of land- and water-grabbing. The bulk of the poor will be concentrated in middle-income and poor countries. Second, the issues in the developing world will boomerang back to the developed in multiple ways. For instance, developing countries are becoming more articulate in international negotiating arenas; their size, economy and potential consumption patterns make it impossible to ignore some of them; civil war in many and the rise of IS not only affects these countries but also the West either through the rise of home-grown terrorism in the internet age or through the migrants from war-torn countries who are desperately seeking an alternative to war. These different aspects of the increasing presence of the countries and peoples from the South will make it impossible for

the developed countries, and in particular the US and Russia, to impose a unilateral approach towards the South. This has clearly increased the transaction costs and increased the stakes! The South can no longer be ignored or controlled unless a more just international order is promoted.

These changing yet persistent geo-development patterns call for a critical, constructive, glocal, relational approach. This implies (a) understanding how glocal paradigms and institutions are used to control people, shape sharing politics and perpetuate inequalities, and how and whether this might change through changing geopolitics; (b) not only a focus on the poor/South but also on the rich/North (their capital markets, flows, operations) and the relations between them; (c) using also Southern epistemological approaches such as TWAIL; (d) analysing how past relations and their shadows and future expectations will shape ecospace sharing: such shadows are solid when they refer to the infrastructural and technological lock-in of societies, but others are more ephemeral but no less real in terms of social and political lock-in; (e) understanding how changing geopolitics and Asia as both the centre of power and poverty in the twenty-first century will affect the development prospects of others; (f) understanding how empowering the poor, weak and marginalized at the glocal level (from LDCs to indigenous peoples) would help in addressing ecospace challenges in a world growing to 9 billion people; and (g) assessing how redistributive mechanisms can be funded not just by new and innovative funding mechanisms but also by closing offshore tax havens and redesigning capital markets.

IV

Since Fragmentation Is Unavoidable, Constitutionalization Is Imperative

A key feature of *Gridlock* is fragmentation of governance institutions leading more often than not to competition rather than accommodation, coherence and mutual support. For example, an "open economic order" within which trade can flourish may be diametrically opposed to a world that uses its resources sustainably. Processes of trying to promote coherence, coordination, mainstreaming, and now the nexus approach have been tried and probably will continue to be tried. But there will be two reasons why these will never be truly successful. First, if we accept the principle of public participation in policy definition and implementation, then the results of public participation are likely to be different from place to place, context to context, and vertical coherence will remain an elusive goal. Second, the history of issue-by-issue political negotiations has led to entrenched policies in each arena that cannot simply be wished away through horizontal efforts at creating coherence.

This means that, in my view, fragmentation is not necessarily a problem; it is a fact of global governance! But such fragmentation of governance should not imply that basic human rights are violated, distributional issues ignored, damages remain uncompensated or that the ecosystemic standards are not adopted. This calls for global constitutionalism since the scale of problems is multiplying and we live in a world of physical limits, since neither markets nor hegemons nor polycentric governance can resolve these glocal conflicts. Such a constitutional approach redefines the normative values of society and creates a combination of common standards for all and respect for all humans and societies, while challenging the status quo.

This would imply the adoption of a common set of global goals (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly); a common set of systemic principles which would combine the adoption of ecosystemic standards with human rights standards and principles of environment and development (e.g. as emerging from the Rio Principles); a set of rules about how redistribution is to be financed which includes principles of taxation of the large multinationals and the ultra-rich; a set of rules that demand transparency of all contracts and arbitration in relation to the use of natural resources and sinks; and finally a toolbox of instruments for ensuring compliance. The market, hegemonic approaches, polycentric approaches can then continue to function within that constitutional framework. Such an idea has more chances for survival when superpowers vie with each other for control and where social movements promote it, in addition to states. The developing countries that have asked for a new international economic order and a level playing field may be willing to accept this if the West will also accept constitutional limits. As Hale, Held and Young argue, China benefits more than it loses from the international order right now and will therefore be more than likely to accept such an order. The question is whether the US has the intellectual flexibility to not just develop the science and read the signs but to understand that it is time to ratify human rights and environmental treaties and join the international community of states as not just a hegemonic actor but as a team player!
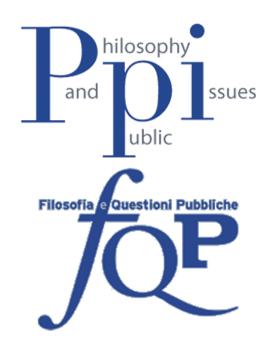
V

Conclusion

Gridlock which describes and explains the current breakdown in cooperation between countries or the gap between need and

effort, is in my view merely the time needed for a reconsideration of the fundamental assumptions and context in international relations for moving towards triple loop learning. Since the sixteenth century our earth has experienced various forms of exclusive development, development limited to the few, often legitimized and legalized through rules that protected the status quo. However, the nature of the limits in the Anthropocene, the need to complement extensity and intensity and take the multiple drivers that operate at multiple levels of governance and the transition paths of development into account, and the need to accept that democracy at a global level in a multipolar world, will lead to demands for change and calls for a global constitution that protects common values for all. This inevitable change in context and understanding must lead to a re-examination of global values, and is already doing so. This will lead many in the North to talk of gridlock—because it is difficult to pursue the agenda of the North, and because inevitably the agenda of the South has to be accounted for! Our Sustainable Development Goals is a critical unifying charter, a key milestone in the process towards triple loop learning! For me gridlock is the end of exclusive development and the beginning of a more inclusive development paradigm. We are in the midst of its birth pangs.

University of Amsterdam

RESPONSE TO CRITICS

BY

THOMAS HALE, DAVID HELD & KEVIN YOUNG

Response to Critics

Thomas Hale, David Held & Kevin Young

I t is worth clarifying the historical basis of *Gridlock* as well as the development of the causal conjectures behind it. World War II was calamitous not just for Europe, but for the world at large. The death and destruction was of a scale nearly impossible to comprehend, leaving Europe devastated and much of East Asia traumatized. World War II brought humanity to the edge of the abyss, but not for the first time in twentieth-century history.

I
The *Gridlock* Argument

The politicians who gathered from forty-five countries in San Francisco in 1945 were faced with the choice of either allowing the world to drift in the aftermath of the shock of the war, or to begin a process of rebuilding the foundations of the international community. Addressing the gathering of leaders, US President Harry Truman warned that the world was at a crossroads: "The continuation of international chaos, or the establishment of a world organization for the enforcement of peace."[1]

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[1] Harry S. Truman, Address to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, 25 April 1945.

At the heart of the post-war security arrangement was, of course, the newly formed United Nations and along with it the development of a new legal and institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and security. Article I of the UN Charter explicitly states that the purpose of the UN is to "maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace."[2] Moreover, Article I goes on to stress that peace would be sought and protected through principles of international law. It concludes with the position that the UN is to be "a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends."

The UN sought to replace unilateral military action with collective action that might still preserve central elements of state sovereignty.[3] Maintaining global peace and stability serves the obvious purpose of limiting violence, but it is also a quintessential prerequisite for accelerating "globalization" across many domains of human activity: trade, finance and communication being the most prominent among them. With peace comes the prospect of stable and rising prosperity.

The titanic struggles of World War I and World War II led to a growing acknowledgment that the nature and process of global governance would have to change if the most extreme forms of violence against humanity were to be outlawed, and the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of all nations recognized. Slowly, the subject, scope and very sources of international law were all called into question. The image of

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[2] United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI.

[3] G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

international regulation projected by the UN Charter (and related documents) was one of "states still jealously sovereign" but now linked together in a "myriad of relations"; states would be under pressure to resolve disagreements by peaceful means and according to legal criteria; subject in principle to tight restrictions on the resort to force; and constrained to observe "certain standards" with regard to the treatment of all persons in their territory, including their own citizens.[4]

At the heart of this development lies claims made on behalf not just of individual states, but of an alternative organizing principle of world affairs: ultimately, a community of all states, with equal voting rights in the UN General Assembly, openly and collectively regulating international life while constrained to observe the UN Charter and a battery of human rights conventions.[5]

Yet, the promise of the UN was compromised almost from its inception by the Cold War, the ideological and geopolitical tensions that would shape the world for almost fifty years. These tensions stemmed from the political, economic and military rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, each bolstered by their respective allies. However, this standoff facilitated, somewhat paradoxically, a deepening of interdependence among world powers. It is difficult to imagine a more immediate form of interdependence than Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Once the world reached a point at which a small group of decision-makers could release weapons that could,

[4] Antonio Cassese, "Violence, War and the Rule of Law in the International Community," in David Held, ed., *Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 256.
[5] David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

literally, obliterate the rest of the world, it created a new recognition of shared vulnerability. This awareness demanded greater coordination among world powers. Thus, the nuclear standoff of the Cold War drew world powers closer together as a way to mitigate the threat and ensure that military posturing did not escalate into all-out nuclear confrontation.[6]

Thus, despite all its complexities and risks, the post-World War II UN system, including weapons of mass destruction and the threat of MAD, facilitated in many respects a new form of "governed globalization" that contributed to relative peace and prosperity across the world over several decades. The importance of this should not be underestimated. The period was one of peace between the great powers, although there were, of course, many proxy wars fought out in the Global South. This relative stability created the conditions for what now can be regarded as an unprecedented period of prosperity that characterized the 1950s onwards. While the economic record of the post-war years varies by country and region, many experienced significant economic growth, and living standards rose rapidly across several parts of the world. By the late 1980s a variety of East Asian countries were beginning to grow at an unprecedented speed, and by the late 1990s countries such as China, India and Brazil had gained significant economic momentum, a process that continues to this day (although Brazil is faltering now).

Post-war multilateral institutions—not just the UN, but the Bretton Woods institutions as well—created conditions under which a multitude of actors could benefit from economic activity,

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[6] It is worth noting that this sense of shared vulnerability can only be upheld if both parties believe the "good life" lies in this world; in other words, if they are both more or less secular. If this association is no longer valid, the idea of shared vulnerability on this earth breaks down.

forming corporations, investing abroad, developing global production chains and engaging with a plethora of other social and economic processes associated with globalization. These conditions, combined with the expansionary logic of capitalism and basic technological innovation, changed the nature of the world economy, radically increasing dependence on people and countries from every corner of the world.

This is not to say that international institutions were the only cause of the dynamic form of globalization experienced over the last few decades. However, economic globalization, and everything associated with it, was allowed to thrive and develop because it took place in a relatively open, relatively peaceful, relatively liberal institutionalized world order. By preventing World War III and another Great Depression, the multilateral order arguably did just as much for interdependence as microprocessors or email.[7] From the late 1940s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, a densely complex interdependent world order emerged.

However, global interdependence has now progressed to the point where it has altered our ability to engage in further global cooperation; that is to say, economic and political shifts in large part attributable to the *successes* of the post-war multilateral order are now among the factors grinding that system into gridlock or deadlock. Because of the remarkable success of global cooperation in the post-war order, human interconnectedness weighs much more heavily on politics than it did in 1945. The need for international cooperation has never been greater. Yet the

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[7] John Mueller, "The Obsolescence of Major War," 21 *Security Dialogue* 3 (1990), pp. 321–8; John R. O'Neal and Bruce Russett. "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950–1985," 41 *International Studies Quarterly* 2 (1997), pp. 267–94.

"supply" side of the equation—effective institutionalized multilateral cooperation—has stalled. In areas such as nuclear proliferation, the explosion of small arms sales, terrorism, failed states, global economic imbalances, financial market instability, global poverty and inequality, biodiversity losses, water deficits and climate change, multilateral and transnational cooperation is now increasingly ineffective or threadbare. We have argued that gridlock is not unique to a one issue domain, but appears to be becoming a general feature of global governance. Why?

It is possible to identify four reasons for this blockage, four pathways to gridlock: rising multipolarity, harder problems, institutional inertia and institutional fragmentation.[8] Each pathway can be thought of as a growing trend that embodies a specific mix of causal mechanisms.

Growing multipolarity

The absolute number of states has increased by 300 percent in the last seventy years. More importantly, the number of states that "matter" on a given issue—that is, the states without whose cooperation a global problem cannot be adequately addressed— has expanded by similar proportions. At Bretton Woods in 1945, the rules of the world economy could essentially be written by the United States with some consultation with the UK and other European allies. In the aftermath of the 2008–09 crisis, the G20 has become the principal forum for global economic management, not because the established powers desired to be more inclusive, but because they could not solve the problem on their own. However, a consequence of this progress is now that

[8] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

many more countries, representing a diverse range of interests, must agree in order for global cooperation to occur.

Harder problems

As interdependence has deepened, the types and scope of problems around which countries must cooperate has evolved. Problems are both now more extensive, crossing more countries, and intensive, penetrating deep into the domestic policy space and daily life of many countries. Consider the example of trade. For most of the post-war era, trade negotiations focused on reducing tariff levels on manufactured products traded between industrialized countries. Now, however, negotiating a trade agreement requires also the discussion of a host of social, environmental and cultural subjects—GMOs, intellectual property, health and environmental standards, biodiversity, labour standards—about which countries often disagree sharply. In the area of environmental change a similar set of considerations applies.[9] To clean up industrial smog or address ozone depletion required fairly discrete actions from a small number of top polluters. By contrast, the threat of climate change and the efforts to mitigate it involve nearly all the countries of the globe. Yet, the divergence of voice and interest within both the developed and developing worlds, along with the sheer complexity of the incentives needed to achieve a low carbon economy, have made a global deal extremely difficult to achieve.

[9] Ibid., Chapter 3.

Institutional inertia

The post-war order succeeded in part because it incentivized the involvement of great powers in key institutions. From the UN Security Council to the Bretton Woods institutions to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, key pillars of the global order explicitly grant special privileges to the countries that were wealthy and powerful at the time of their creation. This hierarchy, it could be argued, was necessary to secure the participation of the most important countries in global governance. Today, the gain from this trade-off has shrunk while the costs have grown. The architects of the post-war order did not, in most cases, design institutions that would organically adjust to fluctuations in national power. And it is very hard to change them; for example, numerous efforts to alter or reform the position of the permanent members of the Security Council have floundered.

Institutional fragmentation

The institution-builders of the 1940s essentially began with a blank slate. But efforts to cooperate internationally today occur in a dense institutional ecosystem shaped by path dependency. The exponential rise in both multilateral and transnational organizations has created a more complex multi-level and multi-actor system of global governance. Yet within this dense web of institutions mandates can conflict, interventions are frequently uncoordinated, and all too typically scarce resources are subject to intense competition. For instance, there are many examples of aid failing to meet its targets in pressing humanitarian crises due to the fragmentation of efforts. There are also many cases in emerging global health crises where the international community

has failed to coordinate its action in sufficient time to prevent the loss of life accelerating.[10]

The challenges now faced by the multilateral order are substantially different from those faced by the 1945 victors in the post-war settlement. We posit that they are second-order cooperation problems arising from previous phases of success in global coordination, and that together they now block and inhibit problem-solving and reform at the global level, and create the risk of dangerous drift in the global order, punctuated by force and violence. The Brexit vote and recent election of Donald Trump as president of the United States add a profound sense of foreboding in this context. Both are votes for the pursuit of national interests, isolation and seclusion above all else, and votes against multilateralism, international institution-building and an international law anchored in human rights and responsibilities. They both reinforce the risk of dangerous drift in the international order and the risk that existential challenges like climate change will only get worse.

II

Gridlock **and its Critics**

Gridlock has received a number of responses and challenges since its publication. Some have received it as a welcome contribution and helpful guide to the current dilemmas facing global governance, while others remain more sceptical about

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[10] See Garrett W. Brown and David Held, "Gridlock and Beyond in Global Health," in Thomas Hale and David Held, eds, *Beyond Gridlock* (Cambridge: Polity Press, forthcoming).

either the premises upon which the book is based or the conclusions that are reached in the sectors analysed. Where for some it is an all-encompassing theory, for others it is overly simplified. The collection of critiques offered in this Special Issue set out a series of thoughtful and well-developed responses to *Gridlock*. In many cases we accept and agree with the criticism laid out, while in some others we tend to maintain the arguments set out in *Gridlock* in contrast with the views offered in response. Whichever, we welcome the opportunity to respond to and expand on issues of contestation, ambiguity or uncertainty.

As everyone recognizes, the book examines the question of why global cooperation is breaking down amidst the increasingly pressing need for it. In a sentence, the causal core of the argument is this: the breakdown of global cooperation is often paradoxically the result of prior success in global cooperation. This is a very different kind of argument than others to date. For lack of a better term, this is a historical and institutionalist-centred explanation for why the world looks the way it does— one that engages with but ultimately significantly diverges from existing international relations theory, as well as many other popular (i.e. non-academic) accounts of what is wrong with the global governance today.

Our argument is hinged on two concepts: self-reinforcing interdependence, and second-order cooperation problems. The process of international institution-building that has taken place since World War II has allowed human interdependence to grow deeper. However, this process has also given rise to new problems that must be managed, which we refer to as self-reinforcing interdependence. As the supply of global-level management is outstripped by demand for coordinated policy solutions, "second-order" cooperation problems have emerged that stymy global cooperation on a range of pressing issues.

These second-order cooperation problems are products of the historical development of the international system; specifically, we show that increasing multipolarity, the emergence of harder problems after simpler ones have been tackled, institutional inertia and institutional fragmentation all affect the ability to solve pressing global challenges, from climate change to global economic imbalances. Each of these second-order cooperation problems emerges as a result of a historical process, and thus cannot be understood through a theory of why and how human beings fail to cooperate or why and how states fail to cooperate.

Throughout, we intended to strike a balance between a simple set of propositions and an encompassing take on the nature of the contemporary world order and its problems. To date several critiques—in this Special Issue of *PPI* and elsewhere—have been proffered arguing that the propositions we have put forward are too simple or should be extended further for analytical benefit. Surprisingly to us, there hasn't been much resistance to the notion that one can attempt an analysis of the nature of the contemporary world order and its problems as such. Given the current in a lot of contemporary political theory that seeks to resist universalizing narratives, this is somewhat surprising. Yet, whilst we are encouraged by many reactions to our argument that are also trying to "think big," there are some important distinctions with respect to how we approach the subject matter and some of the critiques the book has received.

We emphasize these points about the historical nature of our analysis because we wish to clarify that *Gridlock* is not an argument about how global cooperation per se breaks down. It is an argument that seeks to explain how the once highly successful forms of global cooperation have recently been failing. The temporality of this objective is important because we are trying to explain the present, and not global governance per se.

The argument of *Gridlock* was also not attempting to explicate all the things that are wrong about the world, or even about global governance more generally. We suspect one significant way in which we perhaps oversimplified the argument was in drawing too fuzzy a distinction between "the breakdown of multilateral cooperation" and "the breakdown of the world." Since, in our view, many good things came from the previous successes of multilateral cooperation in the past, it was all too easy for us to make this kind of slippage. As several colleagues have pointed out to us, global cooperation is not necessarily a good thing in and of itself—it is the ends and consequences of that cooperation that matter. We fully agree with this stance.

In the four essays of this Special Issue we receive truly thought-provoking and interesting reflections on the *Gridlock* book, its strengths and shortcomings. Di Paola and Maffettone offer a deeply thoughtful discussion of the meaning and relevance of cosmopolitanism in a gridlocked world. We find much of this analysis compelling, even though it takes us beyond the scope of the book itself, which did not discuss cosmopolitanism in anything other than a passing way in the conclusion. Nonetheless, there are some general points here that are valuable to highlight.

In the first instance, Di Paola and Maffettone emphasise that gridlock makes it hard for any form of progressive thinking, and for cosmopolitanism in particular, to assume institutional progress is possible. In their words, the book provides "a series of dark flashes from the real world of contemporary international relations." As they note, cosmopolitan thinkers have all too often assumed that their programme of ideas for global governance reform were realisable, if not immediately, imminently nonetheless. Such thinkers have been faithful to the idea that the continued development of global governance institutions is both

desirable and possible. Di Paola and Maffettone argue that the "dark flashes" make this highly problematic.

They go on to emphasise how *Gridlock* forces cosmopolitans to remould their thinking in relation to trends in global politics. Future cosmopolitan prescriptions will have to be configured in relation to the descriptive facts of the world and the structural factors that explain them—not regardless of them. To ignore these facts and explanations is to build prescriptive castles in the sky that will have no anchors or bearing on the actualities of global politics. Di Paola and Maffettone hold that the domain of cosmopolitan thinking can only go forward if it is no longer in the form of ideal theory. We agree, with one qualification. The project of a political philosophy in a gridlocked world needs to be rooted in the "type of damages that humanity is in the process of inflicting upon itself." But if this is all it does, such a political philosophy will no longer be able to project a normative pathway—whether based on justice, democracy or sustainability—beyond the dangers we face. It is unclear why we have to choose between a political philosophy rooted in the here and now, and one that sees visions beyond. As Martin Luther King understood, it is hard to motivate change by just focusing on what people fear; hence, he had a dream. What we can and cannot live with, and what we can and cannot achieve, can only be worked out at the intersection of the facts of the world and what we have good reason to strive for. As navigators have long noted, one sails by the stars not to reach them, but to chart a path; yet, without the stars there is no path.

It is true, as Di Paola and Maffettone suggest, that the unprecedentedly complex nature of today's global problems, and the shifting conditions of the world, make it possible for cosmopolitan principles to justify both a given governance regime, a human rights-inspired climate governance, and

exemptions from it, if such standards would create undue burdens on struggling developing countries. But it is not clear why this is an argument just about cosmopolitan political thinking; principles and the conditions of their application are questions for all positions in political philosophy. Finally, while it is true that *Gridlock* offers, essentially, a structural argument, it is important to note that it is not structuralist in the sense of excluding agency. The foundation of the post-war order was driven by principles and the application of them by leaders. Gridlock pathways try to explain why the application of these principles has led to difficulties as the post-war era unfolded. Factors such as multipolarity and fragmentation are about the changing patterns and conditions of agency, not about the absence of agency.

In her contribution "Beyond Gridlock: Reshaping Liberal Institutions for a Pluralist Global Order?" Macdonald seems to agree a great deal with several parts of our diagnosis with respect to particular pathways (such as "harder problems") but not others ("fragmentation"). In many places she calls for a reinterpretation of our conclusions, not the causal evidence that led us there. More specifically, she argues that some of what we regard as limitations within the current multilateral order can sometimes also be seen as strengths. Whilst the problem-solving capacity of international institutions might be weak, or their broad-based representativeness thin, these features can actually be good things. Under some circumstances, for instance, the limited representativeness of international institutions can accommodate a diversity of values, thus enabling collective action among like-minded groups. Similarly, while Macdonald agrees with us that transnational governance processes can deliver only a partial solution, that partial solution can provide "feasible albeit imperfect pathways through which institutional barriers to cooperation can be circumvented."

We agree that a lot could (and indeed does) still feasibly get done under the conditions laid out in *Gridlock*. However, there is a basic assumption in the book that governance capacity has to date required forms of centralized coordination, usually present in formal governance institutions. An important question is whether these conditions still need to be met in the future, given the incredibly diverse models of governance one can observe in operation at other scales of governance, and increasingly as forms of governance innovation transnationally. This seems to be an empirical question, and one that we have already put some thought into in a forthcoming book, *Beyond Gridlock*, by Thomas Hale and David Held.

In some ways Macdonald comes down even harder on the decentring of political authority than we did in *Gridlock*, as she sees it generating uncertainty and higher transaction costs, the costly duplication and diffusion of responsibility, and the weakening of the capacity for collective bargaining and deliberation around shared issues of concern. Yet, ultimately Macdonald contends that decentred political authority "need not generate problematic forms of gridlock" because differentiated governance arrangements "can productively accommodate the emergence of specialized bodies to regulate and govern specific issue areas, and support adaptiveness to varying needs and values across political contexts."

Macdonald puts the emphasis of her critique on the book's conclusions, contending specifically that it concentrates "too much on reviewing the factors that are likely to reinforce gridlock in the coming years." In this respect she asserts that "[a] politics beyond gridlock is unlikely to be one of reinvigorated multilateral grand bargains, but this need not be a prospect we lament. Rather, we can productively explore the potential for revitalizing liberal principles within more decentred institutional structures

and processes." It is difficult to disagree with such a proposition, since "productively exploring the potential" for something can hardly be resisted. Yet Macdonald goes further than this, pointing to recent scholarship that has established how governance can work in relatively non-hierarchical fragmented institutional systems. Whilst we engage with some of that scholarship—as she notes herself in her essay (regarding experimentalism and institutional adaptation)—we clearly did not do so sufficiently in terms of thinking about how a book on the breakdown of global governance should be concluded.

Wilkinson raises a very different kind of critique in his essay "Gridlock? Maybe." His thoughtful commentary raises seven "issues" that, whilst insufficient in his estimation to negate the *Gridlock* argument, are "sufficiently bothersome to warrant further reflection and debate." We might group these seven points into two lines of critique. First, is the argument correct? Second, if it is correct, what does it mean?

To our mind, the first set of criticisms usefully highlights caveats and nuances that qualify the gridlock argument but do not overturn it. Such qualifications are of course crucial, given that our aim was to articulate a general and parsimonious set of key dynamics in contemporary global governance. We are all too aware that the story is a "little messier," as Wilkinson gently puts it, but believe the gridlock argument still makes a clarifying analytic contribution.

The second set of criticisms, concerning how to interpret and understand the gridlock we identify in global governance, cuts more sharply against our claims. Like the contribution by Macdonald, Wilkinson is right to focus attention on the productive possibilities that gridlock may engender, and we welcome the opportunity his critique gives us to pursue the

"further reflection and debate" to which this line of argument leads.

First, however, we respond to the arguments against the gridlock hypothesis. Wilkinson begins by challenging the idea that "it is all quite bad now," echoing other critiques by arguing that our contrast of past cooperation and current gridlock is overly stylized. Relatedly, Wilkinson notes that many aspects of international institutions function effectively "behind the headlines," which is certainly true and noted but not emphasized in *Gridlock*. That said, while we agree that elements of our argument may be an oversimplification, we think overall the main argument remains a tenable and useful one if we conceptualize gridlock as a kind of ratio between the functional need for cooperation, which has grown with globalization and interdependence, and the ability of international institutions to supply that need. While "supply" has always been a difficulty, the need has grown enormously in the post-war period, we argue, and has done so in ways that actually undermine the supply function. Certainly this highly structural argument abstracts away from the historical processes "though which an institution's evolution may pass," as Wilkinson puts it, but that generality is precisely the value of the argument, we maintain. We sought to describe the evolution of a system of global governance, and of course that system has constituent parts which themselves evolve internally. Our analytical emphasis was on the system itself, because it is at that "emergent" level that second-order cooperation problems can be observed.

In addition to raising questions about the accuracy of our diagnosis, Wilkinson also questions some aspects of our causal explanation, highlighting important dynamics he feels *Gridlock* has missed. For example, he argues that *Gridlock* treats international organizations as overly passive actors, ignoring the way in which

secretariats may use their own agency to resist, or even promote, gridlock. He also wonders if, in focusing on "second-order" cooperation problems, our analysis is inattentive to "first-order" problems, such as a shift to the political right in the domestic politics of certain countries. These factors are certainly relevant. Again, however, we do not consider them contradictory to or incompatible with our core argument.

Second, Wilkinson questions the implications we draw from our gridlock analysis. What does it mean for world politics if international cooperation has entered a historically determined period of stasis, as we claim? Wilkinson correctly notes that there is no reason to necessarily think of gridlock as part of a process of punctuated equilibria in which cooperation swells, overwhelms itself, declines and then, perhaps, grows again. "Rather," he notes, "it could simply be an evolutionary trajectory that is non-linear and which contains within it moments of innovation, stasis, change and development." This is an important point because it shapes how we think about potential solutions to gridlock. Here Wilkinson encourages us to think about gridlock as a potentially "catalytic moment" for larger restructurings of world politics. It is not just a dampener on public good provision, but also a potential source of new strategies and transitions. Maybe. Such ideas are raised in the final chapter, but we agree with Wilkinson that these are the "least satisfying" elements of the book. Our subsequent work—the forthcoming *Beyond Gridlock*—has sought to address them more directly.

Even more so than Wilkinson's essay, Gupta's contribution, entitled "Gridlock, or a Period of Reflection for Triple Loop Learning," argues forthrightly that our book presents an incorrect diagnosis—that we are not in a gridlocked situation but something rather different. Gupta calls this the emergence of "triple loop learning in global institutionalism." According to

Gupta this entails a feedback process regarding the diversity of viewpoints on the limits of the earth and the need to share it equitably, and the recognition that weaker parties are becoming stronger and more vocal. Curiously, however, such "triple loop learning" is presented as both a condition of global governance (e.g. "we are facing the birth pangs of triple loop learning in global institutionalism") and also as something we need to do ("This calls for triple loop learning").

With respect to the engagement with *Gridlock* itself, it is not always clear to us what the identified weaknesses with the gridlock argument are, other than their being not encompassing enough in the depth of analysis.

Regarding institutional inertia, Gupta seems to agree with our stance but argues that its problems should be extended by a recognition that "institutional inertia is also driven by the realization that many of us are talking at cross-purposes." Following from this she argues that ways of thinking about shrinking resources available in terms of ecospace represent promising intellectual tendencies. With respect to harder problems, Gupta contends that "modern wicked problems require temporal, scalar, interdisciplinary analysis, before level-appropriate specific solutions can be crafted." Such a stance is a position regarding what to do about harder problems from the point of analysis, and not a position about whether or not contemporary global governance is befuddled by harder problems.

Gupta does not contend with the condition of multipolarity itself but rather how it should be interpreted, especially given the fact that wealthy elites—she points to the global one percent—are still purportedly able to exercise effective control decisions in global governance. Without stating as much, Gupta thus reminds us that the "poles" of a multipolar world order are not necessarily

assemblages of state power but rather take other forms. This is an excellent point on its own terms, and we would only point out that the recent diversity of wealthy elites tend to emanate from states that are themselves emblematic of the state-based forms of multipolarity that we point to. We are also in general agreement with the notion that global constitutionalism, when supported by forms of local rule-making and participation, is both a desirable goal and an orienting principle that can guide how we operate politically today and in the future.
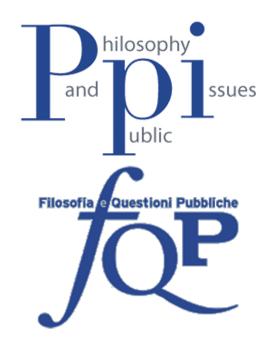
Ultimately Gupta offers multiple arguments for why current ways of thinking—about politics, about global governance, about sustainability and the organization of institutions—should be rethought. In many places she offers an alternative vision of social order as such. This is an ambitious and fundamentally radical stance and deserves an encompassing treatment the likes of which we cannot partake of here. However, it does allow us to highlight what we feel are some important differences in terms of the approach of our analysis and that which she offers. We suspect we are starting from different premises of where governance arrangements come from.

For Gupta the causal forces are based clearly in the realm of ideas—hence the "learning" that we are encountering and the need to rethink and reinterpret the world around us. Running through much of Gupta's critique seems to be a notion that thinking about the world's problems needs to go deeper into the structures of our thinking and ways of life than is frequently done. While we are not prone to disagree with this on principle, this in some way misses the point about the relevance of inherited structures in our environment (for *Gridlock* this meant an analysis of prevailing ideas and institutional arrangements). The successful transformation of the world into a better planet does not depend on visions alone but rather must contend with

the inherited structures of the past, which means contending with material circumstances and institutional configurations that are not of our own choosing. The world at large is always being rebuilt, to be sure, but it is never rebuilt from scratch. It is built from what is available to us. Because it is an institutionalist argument, *Gridlock* contends with the inherited structures of the past as a starting point to thinking about contemporary dilemmas in global governance. In trying to identify and explain challenges to global governance in this way our stance is thus grounded on a different model of how social change should be thought about.

Ultimately Gupta contends that "gridlock is the end of exclusive development and the beginning of a more inclusive development paradigm." This is a curious conclusion to reach on the basis of the analysis and evidence offered, since Gupta's stance is centred on the need to deeply rethink the way that human beings interface with the world around them. It is not clear that current trends are leading to such a radical *progressive* rethinking as one might hope. We leave this open for debate and would only reiterate our stance with respect to the potential catalytic effects of gridlock discussed above with respect to Wilkinson's critique, which we hold as a possibility but ultimately an empirical question. It seems worrying, however, that if anything the way that many people have recently reacted to problems with global governance is not with a paradigm-shifting eco-progressive turn. The last decade has seen a resurgence of right-nationalist sentiment and forms of xenophobia, reinforced by Donald Trump's success in the US presidential elections, which are all too familiar from our past. Far from engendering momentum towards a new global constitutionalism, these and other trends represent steps in the opposite direction. These are, of course, matters of contemporary and future social struggles, which are themselves open-ended and contingent by their very nature. Our stance is that we should conceptualize these

multidimensional issues from the perspective of where we are based and on where we have come from.

Virtualization of the Real and Citizenship:
People, Power, Society, and Person

Paolo Bellini

T his paper intends to show the contradictions in democratic systems within the globalization process, through an interpretation of new technologies, whose virtualising and connective nature determines the transformation of the idea of person as a fundamental element of political individualism and liberal culture. In particular, it aims to develop a critical theory of the good citizen, intended as a symbolic paradigm of reference for the stabilisation of post-modern political systems in a liberal and democratic perspective.

I
Legitimacy, democracy and virtuality

The moment in which the myth of the sovereign people becomes true – as a translation, at least *de jure*, of the sacred centre of gravity of the power (God) to a secularised entity (the people) – will necessarily lead to a rethinking of the legitimation of power, which should originate from the bottom and be recognisable as a sum of individual wills under the principle of majority. This new founding myth appears to be a determining

force for modernity. However, it is not devoid of problematic elements, which concern not only its intrinsic logical and ontological contradictions (which will be discussed below) but also the representative option as opposed to the exercise of direct democracy. Both representative and direct democracy are indeed largely justifiable in accordance to the principle that people are sovereign and the ultimate foundation of any power. At first glance, the exercise of direct democracy would seem preferable in any case, since it always allows the ultimate holder of power (the sovereign people) to express themselves without mediation and representatives. In Rousseau's words, «Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; its essence is the general will, and the will cannot be represented, either it is the general will or it is something else; there is no intermediate possibility»[1]. The author of *The social contract* is then echoed, in more recent times and in a much more radical way, by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who, through a sort of federalist assembly project, promote a radical kind of direct democracy which may be able to determine the legislature, the executive and the judiciary[2]. In the latter case, with due proportions, it appears to be the revival of the classic model of *extreme democracy* of Aristotelian type[3]. These forms of direct

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[1] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The social contract,* trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1974), 141.

[2] Cf. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration* (Allen: Argo-Navis TX, USA, 2012.),

[3] "For all the citizens to be members of the deliberative body and to decide all these matters is a mark of a popular government, for the common people seek for equality of this nature. But there are several modes of such universal membership. One is for the citizens to serve in rotation and not all in a body …; and for there to be joint assemblies only to consider legislation and reforms of the constitution and to hear the reports submitted by the magistrates. Another mode is for all to assemble in a body, but only for the

democracy have always been criticised, from Plato to Talmon, for being potentially tyrannical[4] or totalitarian[5]. In fact, without the principle of representation, a minority is not allowed to form, organise itself and contrast, with equal dignity, the majority in any way or circumstance. In this sense, the exercise of direct democracy always becomes, in the best case, the tyranny of a variable, faceless majority. As a matter of fact, for each issue, a minority cannot permanently organise itself, not in the way that is possible in a representative democracy. It is no coincidence that the latter political formula has undoubtedly prevailed in the course of modernity. However, globalization and the virtualization of the real are profoundly changing its nature and its mechanisms. Two fundamental and contradictory elements have indeed emerged: one that we could define as *external*, since it is linked to globalization and to the success of the liberal democratic ideology on a planetary scale, and a second, *internal* one, which is defined by an increasing difficulty with which the established powers try to represent the people, understood as its constituent foundation. In that regard, it is necessary to remark how the effectiveness and the global spread of liberalism and

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purpose of electing magistrates, enacting laws, considering the declaration of war and the conclusion of peace and holding the audit of magistrates, … Another mode is for the citizens to meet about the magistracies and the audits and in order to deliberate about declaring war and concluding an alliance, … A fourth mode is for all to meet in council about all matters, and for the magistracies to decide about nothing but only to make preliminary decisions; this is the mode in which democracy in its last form is administered at the present day…" (Aristotle, *Politics,* Book IV, 1298a, 10-32, trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1944), 377-379.

[4] Cf. Plato, *The Republic,* Book VIII, 56-81.

[5] Cf. Jacob Leib Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1986).

democracy ultimately hinge upon the ability to effectively propagate the narrative that the people hold the power and exercise it through its representatives within the boundaries set by liberal principles. This model, in turn, generates consent only in so far as it is represented in the media (*virtualized*) so that it be perceived as the only legitimate model, involving, both in a rational and emotional way, the peoples who are subject to it. In other words, it is necessary not only that liberal democracy be respected as the best form of government and political organisation, but that it also be loved and sought-after as a necessary condition to achieve individual and collective happiness.

After the Second World War, this goal was certainly met within the Western civilization, so that liberal democracy was able to take roots even in those countries that had experienced a totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian form of government, such as Germany (Nazism) and Italy (Fascism). After 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the liberal democratic formula was exported, sometimes more in form than in substance, to the former Soviet Bloc countries, where real socialism (communism) was in place. These countries, for their part, often adapted to this new ideological condition, reinterpreting it within their own culture of reference with very distorted effects, especially in regard with certain fundamental aspects of liberalism, such as freedom of thought and other individual rights of equal importance[6]. In the rest of the world, instead, as with the Islamic civilization, the typically Western system of rights, as well as the representative democracy of liberal kind, appear to be almost utterly impracticable. Even where democracy sets in, it always

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[6] Cf. Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya, *Putin's Russia,* trans. Arch Tait (London: Harvill, 2004).

coincides with forms of power which are plebiscitary and dictatorial and/or conditioned by a substantial inability to separate the political from the religious. Therefore a first and macroscopic contradiction emerges, related to a global display of a model of liberal democracy which in many cases has no real application, but it is experienced as a purely media-related and ideological object, generally used to produce consent and for the widespread distribution of a sort of *false collective consciousness*[7]. It is no surprise that governments always tend to justify their own wars as if they were actions meant to export *democracy* (liberal democracy), while knowing that in most cases this task is bound to fail. This contradiction, however, is inevitable for any *political formula*[8], since there cannot be any legitimising authority[9] (of whatever type) that is not determined by a narrative which, by its

[7] This concept is derived from Engels, who describes it in the following terms: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker. Consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process." (Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Franz Mehring, July 14th 1893", in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Engels Correspondence,* trans. Donna Torr, London: International Publishers, 1968). Here the false consciousness is to be interpreted with a more general meaning, as a distorted perception of reality, conveyed by the mass media, through the display of impracticable models in specific historical- geographical contexts.

[8] This term is derived from G. Mosca, who points out how those who hold power justify the status quo. "… ruling classes do not justify their power exclusively by *de facto* possession of it, but try to find a moral and legal basis for it, representing it as the logical and necessary consequence of doctrines and beliefs that are generally recognized and accepted" (G. Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1939), 70

[9] Intended as a source of legitimation of power and political action, so that it is always necessary to justify in the eyes of the governed people the reason for which a class, a group or an individual holds an actual power and the ability to exercise coercion.

very nature, produces a gap between reality and ideology. In other words, the legitimation of power and command can only have a fictional character, determined by the ever-present hiatus between reality and its representation, which is particularly noticeable in relation to those political phenomena which are subject to remarkably heterogeneous interpretations. A typical instance in this regard is the attempt to move beyond the sacred and divine origin of power, through the symbolic invention of the sovereign people. If, on one hand, it is impossible, despite the numerous theological attempts, to prove the existence of God through empirical, objective and incontrovertible proof or abstract reasoning that leaves no room for doubt[10], it is equally difficult to prove with certainty that the power belongs to the people, who hold it as its attribute. As a matter of fact, it is possible to argue that the people are a political object whose existence depends on the power which forms before and beyond the people. As Cicero had indeed understood, «...the people is not every group of individuals brought together in any manner, but the coming together of a multitude of individuals united by agreement about law (*iuris consensu*) and by community of interest (*utilitatis communion*e)»[11]. If we accept this definition, we can easily infer that the people cannot exist apart from the power that makes it such, precisely because of the fact that justice (understood as the set of laws and rights determined by specific ethical convictions), as well as the pursuit of common interests, which are the necessary condition for the existence of a people and characterise it, depend in turn on the power. Power, in other words, exists only as a possibility of production of ordered forms of collective existence;

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[10] Cf. Piergiorgio Odifreddi, *Il Vangelo secondo la Scienza. Le religioni alla prova del nove* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999),137-154.
[11] Cicero, *De Republica*, Book I, 25.

disregarding this or that form, it cannot be eliminated, because it ensures the existence of the political horizon which is necessary for the survival of the human species and a self-conscious subject. While power, in order to exist (*ontological position*), needs neither *justice* nor *community of interests*, these latter depend instead on its very own existence. Power, in other words, is not truly an object, but a relationship among individuals, groups or political systems[12], so that the very existence of the people presupposes power as its foundation, since the people itself, before becoming such (in conformity with justice and community of interests), can only express itself as an aggregate of individuals dominated by asymmetric relationships of power. This is determined by the very nature of the human species, marked by a tendency to establish social relations. It is therefore possible, for instance, to subjugate individuals or entire human groups by identifying specific relationships of power, without it necessarily presupposing the existence of a people as we have defined it. By contrast, it proves impossible to exercise any kind of *justice* or *community of interests* outside of the relationships of powers that put them into effect by giving them an empirical consistency. Moreover, the very existence of the idea of justice, as well as the idea of interest, presumes some form of education and acculturation which identifies the relationships of power of some kind (both at an embryonic stage, as in the teacher-student relationship, and more articulate and complex ones, as in the case of the educational institution). Finally, from a purely logical point of view, the very existence of justice or community of interests, without relationships or systems of power, exists only in the

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[12] Cf. "Potere"*,* in Norberto Bobbio and Nicola Matteucci and Gianfranco Pasquino, *Dizionario di Politica* (Turin: U.T.E.T., 2004).

abstract, since it expresses, in most cases, claims that are contradictory and undecidable[13].

However, beyond these theoretical discussions and of greater practical relevance, a contradiction within the dynamics of spectacularization and the virtualization of the established power tends to deeply undermine from inside the Western civilization the premises on which the liberal democratic system stands. New technologies, as we touched upon at the beginning of this paragraph, make the exercise of direct democracy potentially feasible, since they remove space-time barriers, which had always prevented it on a large scale. This way, by eliminating representation and taking away from minorities the ability to establish themselves as bearers of instances which are different from the will of the majority, new technologies let the absolute idea of the sovereign people emerge, and such an idea tends to conflict with political liberalism, with fatal effects on it, and on the typical values of Western civilization based on individual rights and the dignity of the person. New possible forms of

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[13] Concepts such as *justice* and *community of interests* make sense only within a system of power that establishes *justice* (i.e. who, among two or more contenders, is right) and what is, each and every time, the *common good*; otherwise, those concepts remain arbitrary expressions of an individual consciousness. "When two people (in good faith) argue in court around a point of law, i.e. they seek justice, they do it because they perceive justice in a different way. Justice is, therefore, *a different thing* for different people; there is no *Justice*, but several *justices*, as they are revealed and expressed by two conflicting consciences. … The consciousness of the two contenders says: justice is clearly as I see it, it is the one I see, it is what my inner self, pronounced in a very clear and indisputable way, shows me. And that is what two *opposite* consciences say; in fact, they even seek a judgement, i.e. each one wants the judge to give strength to their own justice, which is the *opposite* of the other person's". (G. Rensi, *La mia filosofia,* Milano: Dall'oglio editore, 1989, 142-143).

totalitarian democracy are therefore revealed, which deeply call into question the double-edged nature of liberal democracy, breaking the balance between what is public and common and what instead belongs to the individual dimension, intended in terms of self-property and free will. If the people were to effectively establish themselves on a virtual plane as a power without representation, and if, as is currently the case, no sacred, natural, metaphysical or cultural order, capable of limiting the power of this new sovereign (the people), were to be recognised, there would soon be no way to curb the absolute exercise of such power by those who claim to be the bearers of the general will. In this respect, a sort of Orwellian totalitarianism or, in the best case, something that the great liberal thinker Alexis de Tocqueville would have called a subtle and imperceptible form of tyranny[14] would appear.

[14] "I want to imagine under what new features despotism could present itself to the world; I see an innumerable crowd of similar and equal men who spin around restlessly, in order to gain small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others; his children and his particular friends form for him the entire human species; … Above those men arises an immense and tutelary power that alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyment and of looking after their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-sighted and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like it, it had as a goal to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary it seeks only to fix them irrevocably in childhood; … It works willingly for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent for it and the sole arbiter; it attends to their security, provides for their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, settles their estates, divides their inheritances; how can it not remove entirely from them the trouble to think and the difficulty of living? This is how it makes the use of free will less useful and rarer every day; how it encloses the action of the will within a smaller space and little by little steals from each citizen even the use of himself" (Alexis de Tocqueville, "What Sort

II

Power, person and institutional crisis

The only way to restrain all forms of tyranny within the democratic system must therefore rely upon the symbolic translation carried through the framework of representation. With all its limitations, it is this framework that allows, through a vote, to transfer the conflict on a purely symbolic level, defusing, through the electoral competition, any possible resort to violence among the parties[15], which otherwise would find its *raison d'être* in the exercise of direct democracy, where a portion of voters is systematically reduced to silence. It is evident, however, that the effectiveness and proper functioning of this translation depends in large part on how the power is able to shape the imaginary of the population. From this point of view, it is of paramount importance the task, bestowed upon the institutions and the media, of forming a *good citizen*, by creating an appropriate image and inspiring the highest possible number of individuals to conform to it. In every liberal democracy, so, the *good citizen*, as a person with rights and duties, becomes a symbolic paradigm of reference, whose circulation and metabolization at the social level ensures the proper functioning of the political formula (the liberal democracy). Within Western civilization, if we analyse the symbolism that distinguishes it in greater detail, disregarding some specific cultural nuances, it can be maintained that the *good citizen* embodies certain characteristics that qualify it as such, that is, the love of country, the desire to actively participate in the management of public affairs, a respect for the institutions, a

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of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear"*, in *Democracy in America,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 812).

[15] Cf. Elias Canetti, "The Nature of the Parliamentary System, *in Crowds and Power,* trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Continuum, 1978), 188-227.

tolerant attitude, honesty, commitment to work, and respect for the law. Obviously, hardly any individuals within the political body can actually and definitely boast all those qualities in their entirety; they are rather symbolic elements that define, in terms of the collective imaginary, the most widely shared narrative[16]. However, this narrative is undoubtedly going through a very serious crisis, which threatens to put the durability of the liberal democratic political formula at risk.

The crisis is determined by the same virtualising and pluralistic vocation of Western civilization, which, on one level, clashes with cultural models that are inhomogeneous and different and, on another level, suffers from a series of internal contradictions which affect the very operating mechanisms that legitimise power. First, it is necessary to remark how the globalization process[17], which is probably reaching its climax during this century, inevitably dictates, both on a territorial and a virtual[18] level, a complex dialectic, and sometimes a conflictual one, among civilizations on a planetary level[19]. In particular, within the

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[16] Cf. Salvatore Natoli ed., *Le virtù della cittadinanza,* (Brescia: Grafo, 1998); "Citizenship and Civic culture*, in The concise Oxford dictionary of politics,* ed. I. McLean and A. McMillan (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); *The civic culture revisited,* ed. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (Sage Newbury Park -CA: Publications, 1989).

[17] For an in-depth analysis of globalization from an economic and political point of view, cf. M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society I, The Power of Identity II, End of Millennium III* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell 2000); Paolo Bellini, *Cyberfilosofia del potere. Immaginari, ideologie e conflitti della civiltà tecnologica* (Milan – Udine: Mimesis, 2007) and *Mitopie tecnopolitiche. Stato-nazione, impero e globalizzazione* (Milan – Udine: Mimesis, 2011).

[18] For a definition of virtual, cf. Pierre Levy, *Becoming Virtual,* trans. Robert Bononno (New York: Plenum Trade, 1998).

[19] Cf. Samuel Phillips Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone Simon & Schuster, 1998).

post-modern and technological West the massive presence of numerous little-westernised ethnic groups produces a continuous conflict of values which, in conjunction with the progressive fragmentation of the person[20], threatens to undermine the foundations of civil coexistence, which, among its fundamental traits, includes, as seen in relation to the *good citizen*, tolerance[21]. Furthermore, the *good citizen,* by acquiring an increasing and dangerous deconstruction of himself as a distinctive feature, which in some ways brings him back to a Homeric condition, devoid of a true and proper personal identity and subject to divine *possession[22]*, conforms to the typical logics of the virtualization of the real. In the virtual world, indeed, the person-individual is fragmented and dispersed in provisional and fluctuating identities, within which he projects an ever-changing and unstable self, characterised by a *noncommittal-being-together[23]*.

However, while Western culture has developed, throughout modernity, a mindset based on freedom of expression and worship, practising the separation between politics and religion, other civilizations have not evolved in the same direction. Hence, whenever the West argues that the political power bears no right to interfere in religious matters, or that religious ministers, as

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[20] For a symbolic analysis of the concept of person, cf. Antimo Cesaro, "Il pensiero antico di fronte alla crisi delle istituzioni: l'emergere del concetto di persona"*,* Heliopolis. Culture, Civiltà, Politica 1 (2002)

[21] Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance,* trans. Brian Masters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000); Nicola Abbagnano, "Tolleranza", in *Dizionario di filosofia* (Turin: Tea, 1993).

[22] Cf. Cesaro, "Il pensiero antico di fronte alla crisi delle istituzioni: l'emergere del concetto di persona"

[23] Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 131-134; Cf. Bellini, *Cyberfilosofia del potere. Immaginari, ideologie e conflitti della civiltà tecnologica,* 93-107.

such, have no power to directly influence political choices or cannot forcibly tie the population to a specific religious belief, it inevitably clashes with those who do not accept such a worldview[24]. In particular, it can be quite easily observed how, on this subject matter, since the beginning of the modern era, there has been and there is still a significant conflicting opposition (in a symbolic and empirical sense) between the Western civilization and Islam[25], which is expressed as much in the management of foreign affairs as in the internal ones. In Europe, for instance, for historical and geopolitical reasons, this conflict is most intensely felt, so that several countries with an important colonial past, such as France or the United Kingdom, increasingly experience a deep identity crisis which affects the relationships among citizens (or subjects) of different religious beliefs. The presence of Islamic groups, more or less organised, on Western soil causes a political radicalisation of identity values, in an ethnic, national, religious or simply cultural sense, which, in turn, significantly weakens other symbolic components of the imagery of the *good citizen*, including tolerance and respect for institutions and laws. In other words, it is becoming increasingly difficult to mould society on the basis of such a symbolic paradigm; the durability of which, however, is

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[24] "The State is actually a *society of human beings established only to preserve and promote civilian goods:* that is, life, freedom, bodily well-being and integrity, the possession of external goods etc. Among its duties, then, the care of souls and their eternal salvation is not included… On the other hand, the Church is *a free society of human beings, who spontaneously came together to publicly serve God, in the way they deem it will be the best-received by God himself, in order to promote the health of their souls.* As a free and voluntary society, it cannot compel anybody by force…" (Abbagnano, *Tolleranza,* in *Dizionario di filosofia*).

[25] Cf. Paolo Bellini, "Civiltà e conflitto come forme di rappresentazione della realtà", Metabasis.it 18 (2014), accessed May 10, 2016. DOI/ 10.7413/18281567038

crucial for the proper functioning of the liberal-democratic formula. As it is indeed easy to understand, the stability of every political formula must be founded on its ability to spread within the political body, inducing behaviours consistent with its premises, so that, *de facto*, every ideological option, in order to be effective, must necessarily echo within a political subject that interprets it in the reality of daily life. Otherwise, it turns into a mere object of study, more suitable for a book on the history of political doctrines than for the functioning of institutions and the practices to legitimate power.
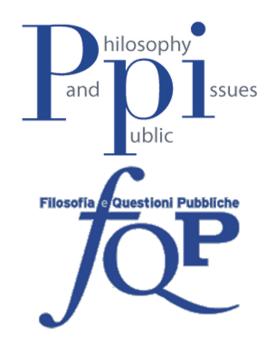
The king is naked, like the Emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale[26], the political power in the West reveals its own weakness every time it proves unable to shape a *good citizen*, weaving a dress of liberal and democratic kind that struggles to obtain proper recognition at the social level. This will necessarily force the Western political systems to either influence more effectively the collective imaginary of the political body (exploiting the mass media in all their power and mobilising institutions to reinvigorate the typical values of modern culture) or to reformulate their narrative around the civic virtues, intercepting and digesting the new ideological and identity pressures that populate the social universe. In both cases, more than democracy, as a form of government and power legitimation, but liberalism itself is at stake, with its political principles and the assertion of individual rights, that, without values like tolerance and respect for institutions, combined with a

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[26] Cf. Hans Crhistian Andersen, *The Emperor's New Clothes* in *Fairy Tales Told for Children. First Collection,* trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York: Viking, 2005). For an analysis of the political symbolism of this fairy tale, cf. Claudio Bonvecchio, "I vestiti nuovi dell'imperatore: un racconto archetipico sul potere*", in *Simbolica politica del terzo,* ed. Giulio Maria Chiodi (Turin: Giappichelli, 1996).

conception of the citizen as a person with great stability in terms of symbols and values, run the risk of dissolving into an empty rhetoric which states *de jure* what *de facto* is denied.

Università degli Studi dell'Insubria

(Varese – Como)

The Concept Of Person

Between The Christian Tradition And Post-Modern Society

BY

ANTIMO CESARO

The Concept Of Person Between The Christian Tradition And Post-Modern Society

Antimo Cesaro

T his short essay analyses the concept of person in relation to its ancient and Christian roots, considering the role it plays in the contemporary political landscape and the conceptual and cultural twist involving its nature and its fundamental traits. In particular, it will show how the modern era, after arriving at a consciential and individual conception of the person, in its most mature and contemporary phase, tends to deconstruct its identity through new technologies and the mindset (*forma mentis*) they convey.

I

Prologus

It is a well-established opinion that Christianity constitutes the cultural substrate on which the concept of person has developed; and that is by virtue of a traditional (to the point of becoming conventional) historiographical tradition which deemed the Christian intuition about the value of a subject so meaningful that it marked a clean break with the typical naturalistic objectivism of classical thought.

As Guido Fassò has already remarked in the beautiful introduction to his successful book *La legge della ragione[1],* while discussing this theory it is necessary to be really careful to avoid not to fall into excessive and reductive simplifications which, based on a priori views, fairly often lead to framing in not-fully-exact perspectives the *development of thought* within specific historical contexts.

And "it is precisely the idealistic-spiritualistic-modernistic pattern -according to Fassò- that firmly presents us with a Christian framework that discovers the subject, the spirit and ultimately the *man* in his absolute value and autonomy, as opposed to the Greek-Roman world which was centred on nature, an objective reality in which man could estrange himself, passively fitting into the natural order of things"[2]. This view of things cannot certainly be passively accepted, especially in light of Rodolfo Mondolfo's research[3] which, developing Zeller's brilliant intuitions[4], went beyond the schematic oppositions of the so-called *classicist conception* that postulated an irreducible antithesis between the ancient classical world and Christianity on the basis of the partitions objectivity/subjectivity, finiteness/infiniteness, naturalistic-legalistic ethics/ethics of the consciousness.

On the basis of these premises, strong doubts immediately arise regarding the evaluation of the *naturalistic objectivity* which would be typical of Greek thought and the alleged discovery of the *human person* by Christianity.

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[1] Cf. Giulio Fassò, *La legge della ragione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964).

[2] Fassò, *La legge della ragione*, 5 (my translation).

[3] Cf. Rodolfo Mondolfo, *La comprensione del soggetto umano nell'antichità classica,* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1958), X.

[4] Cf. Eduard Zeller and Rodolfo Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci nel suo sviluppo storico* (Florence: La Nuova Italia,1932), 306-355.

Regarding the former, one indeed wonders whether what is commonly called a *naturalistic conception* is actually an objectifying projection of the human world into the physical, natural world, or it is rather a characterisation of the latter by the former; and if any doubts about the so-called *objectivism* of Greek thought begin to arise, if we accept for a second, with due caution, such a theoretical position, we then have to ask ourselves what is the exact meaning that should be given to the supposed *anthropocentric revolution* brought about by Christianity.

"The discovery of Christianity -Fassò observed, with an expression that is so naively simple it would look obvious if not properly understood- is God", not man; "God who is no longer *nature*, yet a reality which is very different from men in their humanity (and rationality)"[5].

The discovery of Christianity, we might add, is a *person-God,* not *nature.*

II

Nullus deus miscetur hominibus

Plato, *Symposium*, 203a

The personalistic inspiration of Christianity is therefore a reflection of the belief in a personal God who, in turn, establishes an *inter-personal* relationship with men.

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[5] Fassò, *La legge della ragione*, 10 (my translation).

Hence the need, for the early Fathers of the Church, to clarify a new concept, introducing it in the history of philosophy, so that it fully expressed the Christian notion of *person*[6].

The cosmological scheme of Middle Platonism certainly seemed the most appropriate to express the new concept of the divine in a trinitarian form through a passage from the One (God the Father, uncreated) to many (made of corruptible matter) through *divine mediators*, who were created *(Logos, Pneuma)*; however, what emerged from such a simplistic interpretation was heresy.

The difficulty lay in the fact that previous interpretations of the concept were hard to find throughout the whole classical world: if a metaphysics of the substance had long been investigated, a metaphysics of the person had to be invented *ex novo*. The term was not missing from the Greek vocabulary, but the word *pròsopon,* borrowed from theatre, was then used to express the outward appearance of a person, the mask of an actor, his role on stage; so that, if referred to man, it could at best express his role on the world stage; if the word were to be referred to God, it would prove completely inadequate (and dangerously ambiguous, since it implies a non-substantial character) to express the real and concrete distinction among the three divine persons.

[6] For a full take on the matter, cf. Andrea Milano, *Persona in teologia. Alle origini del significato di persona nel cristianesimo antico* (Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996); Giuseppe Goisis and Marco Ivaldo and Gaspare Mura, *Metafisica, persona, cristianesimo. Scritti in onore di Vittorio Possenti* (Rome: Armando editore, 2011); to analyse the concept semantically, cf. Onorato Bucci, "La formazione del concetto di persona nel Cristianesimo delle origini: avventura semantica e itinerario storico"*,* Lateranum 2 (1988); Maurice Nédoncelle, "Prosopon et persona dans l'antiquité classique", Revue de Sciences Religieuses 22 (1948): 277-299.

The word *hypostasis* was then suggested: once used in quite a general way in the classical world, it then came to be specifically used to express the concept of a person in its concrete, individual reality. The word was suitable to express a subsisting ontological reality (avoiding the overuse of the term *ousia-substance*), yet it was full of a complex spiritual reality, and with a wealth of psychological and moral implications (which was the primary aspect of the term *pròsopon).*

Hypostasis, then, to signify not an undefined sense of substance, but a concept capable of grasping, along with a number of peculiar psychological characteristics, what is common and undefined in something[7].

Hypostasis, then, expresses the division, the particular *(tò ìdion),* the individual *(tò àtomon), someone (tòn tinà):* its peculiar characteristic is *to be in itself*[8]*.*

And, if during the period of Trinitarian disputes, the attention was focused on the *ousia-hypostasis* distinction, when the controversy centred on the person of Christ instead, the key point of the discussion became the distinction *physis-hypostasis,* with the subsequent emergence of what might be called the peculiar trait of the person: an irreducibility to its own nature; an irreducibility of the particular to the common kind; an irreducibility of every man to a generalised human nature.

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[7] Following Saint Basil's lead, we could argue that: "the distinction between essence and hypostasis is the same as that between *the general* and *the particular*; as, for instance, between *the animal* and *the particular human*" (Saint Basil, *Letter* CCXXXVI, 6).

[8] For further discussion, cf. Francesco Livi, "La dimensione ontologica del personalismo dei Padri"*, Sapienza* 2 (1976): 178-188.

III

Per – se – unum

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I, 29, 4 c

Before God, Triad-Monad, then, the multiplicity of the created finite entities arises; among those, there is man, made in God's image[9] (that is, carrying in himself the *personal* mark of the Deity); man, created not only as a species, but as an *individual person*, defined by the necessity of a relationship with God[10], with himself[11] and with other men[12]; man, capable of knowing and loving and, therefore, arbiter of his fate.

Hence the description of the concept of person in John Damascene: "A person is one who by reason of his own operations and properties exhibits to us an appearance which is

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[9] "Singulus quis que homo, qui… secundum solammentem imago Dei dicitur, una persona est et imago Trinitatis in mente" (Augustine, *De Trinitate [On the Trinity],* XV, 7, 11).

[10] "The evangelical *your names are written in heaven* stands for *your persons*, meaning that God has a direct and personal relationship with every man" (Livi, "La dimensione ontologica del personalismo dei Padri",183).

[11] Man discovers to be a *person,* in his self-consciousness, as a "unifying principle of a universe of experiences"; through the act of cognition, "which fixes a person who stays always identical in the flow of historical events" (it can be underlined, in this regard, the etymology that is used by Thomas Aquinas to derive the term person: *per-se-unum,* cf. *Summa Theologiae,* I, 29, 4c; cf. Pasquale Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito* (Naples: Luciano 1995), 254; Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "La personalità di Cristo e l'unione ipostatica" in *La sintesi tomistica,* ed. Marco Bracchi (Brescia: Fede & Cultura, 2015).

[12] Singularity and communion imply one another, although, in his necessary openness towards others, in his interpersonal relationships, and in his transcendence towards God, every man remains irreducible in his freedom, and his absolute diversity remains unchanged.

distinct and set off from those of the same nature as he"[13]. This formulation passed patristic and scholastic scrutiny, it then flowed into the theoretical thought of Boethius (the person is "individual substance of a rational nature")[14] and was then revised by Thomas Aquinas ("the person is the subsisting distinction in an intellectual nature")[15] in the quintessential philosophical definition of the known characteristics of a person (rationality-intelligence, freedom-independence and individuality-unity); thus a *distinct*, *intelligent* and *free subsistence*[16]. These characteristics give

[13] John Damascene [Saint John of Damascus], *Dialect.*, c. 43, Migne, p. 94, col. 613.

[14] Boethius, *De duabus naturis,* 3, PL 64, 1345.

[15] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I, 29, 1 c; III, 2, 2; I, 29, I ad 3; *De pot.* 9, l; *In I sent.* D. 23, q. 1 ad 3; *Qdl.* 9, 3 ad 2; for further reading cf. Sofia Vanni Rovighi, *L'antropologia filosofica di S. Tommaso,* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1989); Umberto Degl'Innocenti, *Il problema della persona nel pensiero di S. Tommaso* (Rome: Libreria editrice della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1967); Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito*, 237-258. In particular, Orlando underlines the merits of the Thomistic definition, when compared to Boethius', stating: "As a clarification, I would also like to point out the decanting that Boethius' definition receives through the Thomistic formulation of person. Boethius defines the person as *individual substance of a rational nature*, while Thomas Aquinas prefers to say that *the person is the subsisting distinction in an intellectual nature*. The preference given to the *subsisting distinction* consists of a more comprehensive expression, which identifies in the subsistence the formal element of the substance. The expression *intellectual nature* is equally more comprehensive; the adjective *rational* restricts the definition of person to a human; while *intellectual* includes God, who uses intuition and not reason, in the definition. Therefore Aquinas will be able to say that *the term person identifies what is most perfect in all its nature* (*S. Th.* I, 29, 3 c.), referring, in that instance, precisely to God" (Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito,* 245).

[16] "*Subsisting* is the substance's very own being, distinct from the accidental being" (Thomas Aquinas, *De pot.,* 9, l; *In I sent.* D. 23, q.1, a.l, ad 3); in this light, the person, while sharing subsistence with the individual, distinguishes itself through its intellectual nature. "Subsistence is the virtue of the thing to be distinct from all other things; subsisting adjusts the very own being of the

man a chance to acquire dignity and provide an opportunity for greatness, but also for eternal damnation.

In this respect, the innovation brought about by Christianity can be seen, with all due caution, as we mentioned in our introduction and in the light of the considerations below, in the substitution of a previous *cosmocentric* mindset with an *anthropocentric* one[17]: hence the sense of the Christian catharsis, "the overturning of the cosmologically-preordained *universum* of the Greeks and the creation of a new view of reality, no longer centred on the cosmos, which, in the immutable determination of *its laws*[18], pantheistically involves everything, including man and

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substance, so that we called *distinct* the individual because of its individualised nature" (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Qdl* 9, 3 ad 2; *S. Th.* III, 19, 1 ad 4; *In III Sent.* D. 118, q. 1, ad 3; d. 6, q. 2)" (Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito,* 253).

[17] Of course, it is not to be ruled out the fact that within a general cosmocentric mentality a clearly-anthropocentric content of thought might emerge (an example is, for instance, the philosophical speculation of the sophists). What is worth noting "is that Greek speculation never stopped being cosmocentric, even when it focused its full attention on man, since it never gave him ontological priority over matter, i.e. it continued to consider him a *piece of the world* among others, one *case* in the context of the being" (Francesco D'Agostino, "Appunti per una teoria dell'Epikeia"*, Sapienza* 2 1977: 157). For further reading, cf. Francesco D'Agostino, "Antropocentrismo cristiano. Note sul pensiero di Johann Bapstist Metz"*, Rivista internazionale di Filosofia del Diritto*, 47, (1970): 355-373; Johann Baptist Metz, *Antropocentrismo cristiano. Studio sulla mentalità di Tommaso d'Aquino,* trans. Aldo Audiso (Turin: Borla, 1969); Angelo Scola and Gilfredo Marengo and Javier Prades Lopez, *La persona umana. Antropologia teologica,* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2000).

[18] Empashis on *its laws* has been added; we tried to visually convey with the italics our uncertainties in considering innate with the cosmos or, if you will, inborn in nature, the *laws*, intended as *paradigms of reason*, which to us look rather like the result of a transfer, from a *human* dimension to the world of *nature*, of the (*human*) ideas of order, harmony and regularity (-of rationality-according to Fassò) which, from the beginnings of Greek philosophical speculation, represent the *implicit potential* of a subjectivistic attitude compared

the Deity, but a man who, created by God as a person, involves the entire cosmos in his personal history"[19].

IV

Metanoia

With the announcement of the Christian *good news*, man's conversion to new ethical and spiritual values takes place. There is a new, *revolutionary* worldview: the classical conceptions of time[20], history[21] and man change; and that happens as a

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to the alleged objectivity of the physical world. For further reading, cf. Fassò, *La legge della ragione*, 20-21; Mondolfo, *La comprensione del soggetto umano nell'antichità classica,* 70-71.

[19] Crescenzio Sepe, *Persona* e *storia,* (Milan: San Paolo Edizioni, 1990), 60.

[20] "From Heraclitus to Pythagoras, to Proclus and the last Athenian philosophers, the doctrine of the eternal discourse weighs on the spirits. That is why history is unravelled… There is neither before nor after, since every event is, in its turn, in the past and in the future. And in the depth of the cycle, historical time always remains a time of dissolution… By liberating thought from the common conception of the eternal return, Christianity opened the doors to the idea of progress and freedom, an idea which was absolutely foreign to the Greek world" (Jean Guitton, *Le temps et l'eternité chez Plotin et St. Augustin,* Paris: Boivin 1933, 357-58).

[21] "The Greek world is a world without history, so to speak, an eternal order in which time has no effectiveness, it can either leave the order always identical to itself or it can generate a succession of events that always come back to the start, in cyclical transformations that recur indefinitely… The opposite idea, namely that radical transformations happen in reality, as absolute initiatives, true inventions, in a word history and progress in the global sense of the term, such an idea was impossible before Christianity came and upset the cosmos of the Hellenes" (Emile Brehier, *La filosofia di Plotino,* Milan: Celuc libri 1976, 87). About the idea of time in Greek historians, refer also to Antimo Cesaro, "Tra tempo ciclico e tempo lineare: il tempo ritmico in Polibio di Megalopoli"*,* in

consequence of the Incarnation[22], since the Word of God, by becoming *man*, has entered *time* and *history*.

It is primarily the concept of divinity that changes: unlike in the Greek-Roman classical world, Christianity professes divine transcendence and, simultaneously, an inter-personal relationship between God and man (evident in the Old and New Covenant).

A metaphysics replaces a mythology.

In the light of the aforementioned considerations, it can be said that while it is undoubtedly true that Christianity completely overturned the classical worldview of reality, such a concept, as Fassò pointed out, should not be passively accepted "in the sense this overturning is usually interpreted. Christianity does not replace objectivism with subjectivism. It is somewhat questionable to define Greek thought as objectivistic, but Christian thought can be defined as subjectivistic only when with subject we intend the Subject, not just an absolute but a transcendent one, the Father who is in Heaven, of whose

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Tempo della legge e tempo della storia, ed. Giulio Maria Chiodi (Naples: Guida 1999), 177-198.

[22] We should not ignore, though, as C. Sepe observes, that if God's *personality* is fully asserted *by* and *in* Christ, ("who expresses in himself the mystery of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the uniqueness of the Person and, at the same time, reveals God as a Tri-Personal essence"), nevertheless "in the Old Testament the truth of God as Person is already clearly manifested. [...] A first, though embryonic, *personalistic* assertion can be inferred from the examination of the name of Jhwh himself. His self-definition as *He is*, if on one hand serves to show the transcendence of his being, which is *above every name*, so that nobody may pronounce it, on the other hand it shows as a clear manifestation of his being as a *Person*. As a matter of fact, in his self-definition, Jhwh first introduces himself as an *I* who possesses a full consciousness and complete independence in the personal possession of the self" (Sepe, *Persona e storia*, 65-66).

kingdom man awaits the advent. [...] The fate of the Christian man is supernatural, and supernatural are the means to fulfil it: we are not on humanity and society level, but on the level of transcendence, not on the level of what is finite and relative, but on that of the Absolute, therefore not reason and law, but faith and grace"[23].

God is the *creator* of the world (and, as such, he deeply cares about his own creatures), he is the *father* of man (with whom he entertains a special *interpersonal* relationship) and, through the incarnation of the Word, he became *man* (nature itself, at this time, participates in the divinity).

Since there is no difference in nature among men, as every man is equally a child of God[24], it follows that conversion and the consequent salvation are to be referred to the totality of human beings (a *human unity*, which is, in turn, a reflection of the *divine unity*), regardless of their ethno-social characteristics. As a consequence, the Christian vocabulary gives to the word *humanity* a meaning that surpasses both the Greek acceptation of *anthropotès,* and the Latin acceptation of *humanitas.* "Christianity completely changes the scope of the word. It no longer considers the common nature of the human animal, but the nature of the people envisaged in their new dignity, as a consequence of the Redemption. In this way the word *humanity* defines its own entity, which consists of all generations and races, of human beings of all ages and countries, and of all conditions, among whom the presence of God instituted real solidarity"[25].

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[23] Fassò, *La legge della ragione*, 26-27.

[24] Cf. St. Paul the Apostle, *Epistle to the Colossians,* III. 11: "In this new life, it does not matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave or free".

[25] Marcel Prélot, *Histoire des idées politiques,* (Paris: Dallot, 1959), 116-117.

V

Melius est obedire Deo quam hominibus

For Christians the meaning of life can no longer be found in the compliance with the objectivity of the world, nature, society or the State, it has to be found in the *faithfulness to a person*, a fidelity of love, which can only be lived in freedom. And if *freedom* becomes "the quintessential human prerogative"[26], the possibility of a *mistake (sin)* linked to it becomes, paradoxically, the measure of the greatness of man, who by now has freed himself from a fatalistic view of existence.

To the personal God (by virtue of a metaphysical similarity) it is inextricably linked the person-man, *imago simillima* of the deity.

By virtue of this, man, as depository of sovereign and inexhaustible values, is the bearer of rights which are inherent to his personality, and which cannot be manipulated in any way. If man in the classical world was just a *pars in toto,* from which he drew meaning, now he acquires an absolute value, in and of itself; a value that is related, through love, not only to God, but also to another man, *thy neighbor.*

Consequently, love is the only rule of life among those who belong to God *(amor fundamentum iuris)* and who, in their spiritual dimension, form a single supernatural reality, a single *mystical body.*

Von Ihering, in his *Geist des römischen Recht,* stressed the importance of this innovation with very specific terms: "The simple idea that man, as such, is free, an idea that was practically never reached by the Roman Law, [...] represents such an innovation for all subsequent Law, if compared to the Roman

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[26] Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito*, 244.

one, that the superiority of the latter from a technical point of view is completely obscured"[27].

It would seem, then, that from a *Christian perspective* the juridical dimension, far from being considered only from a, so to speak, *vertical* perspective (with a predominantly public significance of the inter-subjective relationships), would also, and above all, express itself in a *horizontal* direction, in perfect consistency with the concept of person intended as the subject of *self-* and *other-oriented relationships*.

It is necessary to point out, however, when we generically mention a *Christian perspective* -like we did in the last paragraph- that early Christianity (and the Pauline[28] approach in particular) completely removed the concept of law (*letter*, not *spirit[29]; outward appearance*, not *intimate participation*), placing the entire juridical dimension under a Pharisaic horizon characterised by falsehood and deception:

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are

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[27] Prélot, *Histoire des idées politiques,* 113-114.
[28] Cf. St. Paul the Apostle, *Epistle to the Galatians,* V, 18; *Epistle to the Romans*, III, 27, VII, 14, VIII, 2; *Second Epistle to the Corinthians,* III, 3.
[29] Cf. Augustine, *De spiritu et littera,* 21 (36) (MIGNE, *Patrologia latina,* XLIV, 222).

justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"[30].

What are the consequences on a social and political level?

A partial reading of the Gospels might easily give the impression of an almost exclusive interest for spiritual needs, thus freeing men, by placing emphasis on the *substantial* character of the person, from any earthly commitment.

From this perspective, even the Gospel passages which are commonly considered social acquire a purely mystical and religious meaning, with the necessary conclusion, which Fassò[31] had already pointed out, of a "Christian negation of law and justice, intended in its proper social function" and, more in general, of a "Christian indifference to society and its problems", in accordance with the well-known Pauline principle: *hic civitatem manentem non habemus, sed futturam inquirimus.*

And yet an absolute sense of the person cannot deny, on an ethical-subjective level, in the spirit of a renewed Christian humanism and in an attempt to ontologically found a person we would like to call *global*, neither a dialogue nor a sympathetic bond with the *other*, in an *inter-subjectivity* which obviously should not be understood as a "primum in relation to the person, but as an immediate and direct consequence of personal enrichment"[32].

On an ethical-philosophical level, borrowing the words of Mounier[33], we might say that the *vocation* of a person (intended as

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[30] St. Paul the Apostle, *Epistle to the Romans*, III, 19-24.

[31] Giulio Fassò, *Cristianesimo e società,* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1956).

[32] Orlando, *Filosofia dell'essere finito*, 257.

[33] On the other hand, there is no doubt that precisely in Christianity the cultural ancestry of the community personalism of Mounier can be found; he harboured serious misgivings on a kind of sociability which was exclusively

propensity – which finds an expression in meditation- to go infinitely beyond itself) cannot absolutely disregard the *incarnation* (which is its bodily and material condition – which acquires value through *commitment-*) and, therefore, must necessarily open up to *communion* (even at the cost of self-*denial*, an initiation into self-giving and a life in others): the person has, by its own nature, a tendency to belong to a *community*.

VI

Conscientia ipsa

The Christian elaboration of such a concept therefore favours, since the origins of modernity, the secularisation of the person in itself, obeying a deeper cultural change triggered by a general process of desacralisation of the real. The person becomes fully incarnated in the self and in human consciousness, by identifying with the subject-individual and its moral identity, partially to the expense of its *community-centred* aspect. A first clear representation of this appears in Renaissance Humanistic art, which, in the XV century, expresses a desire for portraits, a custom that spreads among the Flemish and Tuscan merchant civilisations, where the

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founded on the law (i.e. the society of the Enlightenment natural law theory, a product and consequence of a *contract*, the result of a *compromise of egotisms* rather than a real *interpersonal relationship*. Cf. Emmanuel Mounier, *Révolution personnaliste et communautaire* (Paris: Éd. Montaigne, 1934); Emmanuel Mounier, *Le personnalisme*, (Paris: Puf, 2001). For further reading, Giorgio Campanini, *La rivoluzione cristiana. Il pensiero politico di E. Mounier,* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1967); Giuseppe Limone*, Tempo della persona e sapienza del possibile. Valori, politica, diritto in Emmannuel Mounier* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988); *Emmanuel Mounier, actualité d'un grand témoin. Actes du colloque tenu à l'UNESCO*, ed. Guy Coq (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2003 – 2006).

financial bourgeoisie, the new protagonist of civil and political life, is developing greater self-awareness: the portrait is the natural expression of this newly-acquired dignity[34]. Thus the portrait celebrates, symbolically, a praise of the autonomous individual, who gets more confident every day, thanks to his own economic and technical progress and to the opportunities offered by an increased social mobility. Therefore not only princes, high-ranking clergymen and noblemen, but also merchants, artists, bankers and craftsmen are beginning to feel the importance of the perception of their *imago* as a way to produce and spread a (real and symbolic) representation of their own persons. An *imago* – at *full-length*, *knee-length* or *half-length* – which is not devoid of fictional content (a reference to the social projection of the individuals), and which takes on, gradually, a *profile* pose, then a *three-quarter* one, and finally a *frontal* one. The latter is really evocative, for it directly approaches the viewer[35]. In this way, a visual consciousness of the self arises, as a foreshadowing of the person as an entity which coincides with the individual self, which in turn is gradually acquiring a new social and political importance through subsequent natural law and contractarian doctrines[36]. As a matter of fact, in the XVII century, at the height of this conceptual trajectory, Locke finally projects the idea of person on the individual (self), understood as a conscious and rational entity. "…, to find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what *person* stands for; – which, I think, is a thinking

[34] Barbara Bottacin, "Sette stanze per la Dama", in Gaia Carroli, Cristina Costa, Denis Isaia*, Incontro reale 3. Raffaello a Bolzano per capire la dama* (Bolzano: Tipografia Alto Adige, 2005), 43.

[35] Cf. Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait. Masterpieces of European Portrait Paintings 1420-1670*, (Cologne: Taschen, 1999), 6.

[36] Cf. Norberto Bobbio, *Il giusnaturalismo moderno,* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2009); John Wiedhofft Gough, *The Social Contract,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it, …"[37].

Later, in Kant, who in his doctrine combines the typical instances of the British empiricism with continental rationalism, the person becomes the cornerstone of every political and moral discourse for which the famous maxim of practical imperative holds true: "so act as to treat humanity, both in your own person, and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means"[38]. In this conception, the person plays a decisive role within the political structure of modern states, in which it becomes the bearer of a complex set of rights and duties, which define the boundaries that set the scope of the established powers.

The person, in a modern sense, refers therefore to a stable and durable conception of individual identity, which, from its earliest formulations, is determined as a function of a self/individual consciousness intended as something immutable, in its ability to recognise itself as such, and to conceive an identity with its very own self. "[A]nd by this everyone is to himself that which he calls *self*: – it not being considered, in this case, whether the same self be continued in the same or diverse substances. For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being:

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[37] John Locke, *Essay concerning human understanding*, II, 7.
[38] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals,* trans. Mary Gregor, Jens Timmermann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 61.

and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; …"[39].

VII

Post conscientiam

In the current period of rapid technological and social evolution, characterised by a significant fragmentation of the identity[40], the concept of person instead *recedes*, since it inevitably undergoes a twist that involves its nature and its fundamental traits. The post-modern era appears to bear witness to a sort of flaking off and weakening of the personal identity and of the person itself, in favour of kaleidoscopic identitarian practices conveyed by the new mass communication tools[41]. As a matter of fact, the self tends to deconstruct itself by following the typical logics of the virtual environment, in which a relevant part of its existence is displaced[42]. The self floats freely in cyberspace, taking

[39] Locke, *Essay concerning human understanding*, II, 7.

[40] Cf. Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996); Paolo Bellini, *Cyberfilosofia del potere. Immaginari, ideologie e conflitti della civiltà tecnologica* (Milan – Udine: Mimesis, 2007), 93-107.

[42] "The virtual environment, despite the fact that the technology that produces it is founded on tight logic and internal stability and consistency, is actually and continuously subjected to a mutation, in form and content, … This is clearly the manifestation of a new dimension of existence, which tends to shape, in an increasingly decisive way, the cultural paradigms and the operational methods through which the post-modern subject establishes his relationship with reality. It is a real cultural revolution, broadly speaking, which might be compared, in terms of importance, to the modern one. In the virtual dimension, a reintegration of nomadism within a planetary civilisation that is

on shifting personal identities each and every time, changing as the very same nature of the space it is passing through; the person thereby loses its fixity, which was typical of its modern conception, to take on characteristics we could define as archaic, where personal identity is not crystallised in a stable self-concept, but it is determined in accordance with perspectives that are functional to the logics of cultural adaptation, seconding the typical liquidness of contemporary civilisation[43]. As with the Homeric man, also for the post-modern subject identity does not seem to manifest itself statically in its *being*, but rather, and quite dynamically, in its *actions[44]*, and it is revealed through feats, not through memorable ones, as was the case with Greek heroes, but in the mundane desire to be a part of the *media narcissism[45]* induced

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[43] almost completely *sedentary* is carried out, thus generating a new existential condition" (Paolo Bellini, *Cyberfilosofia del potere. Immaginari, ideologie e conflitti della civiltà tecnologica,* 103).

[43] Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

[44] "Man identifies himself with his own deed, so that he can be fully and legitimately understood from it; he has no hidden depths. [...] The being [of Homeric men] emanates freely in the world, through their fates and deeds" (Hermann Fränkel*, Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Grieschentums,* München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1962*,* 88, cit. in Giovanni Reale, *Corpo, anima e salute. Il concetto di uomo da Omero a Platone,* Milan: Cortina, 1999).

[45] "Many users, as a matter of fact, seized by a sort of electronic narcissism, where the wish to show and intrigue is a partial substitute for material existence, tend to project on such a platform their private mental sphere. They confide, sometimes in real time, to the community they feel a part of, thoughts, wishes and practices that were once jealously guarded within the sphere of their own consciousness or, at most, where whispered to a much narrower set of friends, family and confidants. Very personal messages, although often futile or foolish, together with pictures portraying the subjects in the most diverse situations, clearly represent, compared to the past, the emergence of a much greater porosity between the public and the private sphere" (Paolo Bellini, *L'immaginario politico del Salvatore. Biopotere, sapere e ordine sociale,* Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2012, 22).
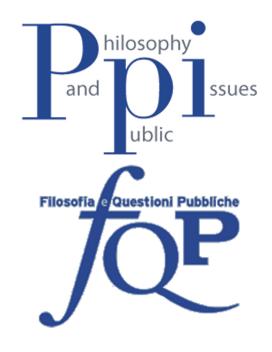
by the new connective technologies. These, in most cases, just like the ancient pagan gods, possess the body and the consciousness of the user, who, while surfing the network, passes through archaic experiences, where, free from *his own* body and without *his own* soul, he is unable to fully exercise a personal freedom of the will[46], but, inspired by the deity[47] (that, in this case, is bearing the virtual features of media content), fulfils himself, "unfolding in the most vigorous way his human strengths"[48], by carrying out, in harmony with the *cyberworld* in which he is now inscribed, his individual destiny.

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[46] "Not even here there are autonomy and freedom in the sense that we give to these words. Those who err do not do it for ill will. That does not exist for the Greek man, who does not even have a word to describe what we call *will, volition...*" (Walter Friedrich Otto, *Theophania. Der Geist der altgriechischen Religion,* Hamburg: Aufl. 1959, 61).

[47] "In the face of a view like the Greek one, where the proximity of the gods appears to be so immediate and decisive, our concept of freedom and lack of freedom makes no sense. We cannot in fact say that the Homeric man is not free. It is better to state that only in the presence of the deity he acquires the joyful certainty of his strength, of his ability, of himself. Top self-perception and awareness of divine proximity are one and the same. [...] The Greek man, in his decisive moments, is, so to speak, taken in within the Divine, i.e. the Deity is so close that he perceives the divine action as his own and vice versa" (Otto, *Theophania. Der Geist der altgriechischen Religion,* 64).

[48] Zeller and Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci nel suo sviluppo storico,* 105.

Money, Autonomy, Citizenship

Effects of the *Programa Bolsa Família* on its Participants

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Money, Autonomy, Citizenship

Effects of the *Programa Bolsa Família* on its Participants

Alessandro Pinzani & Walquíria Domingues Leão Rêgo

> How can we consider as truly free a man
> who is hungry, who is living in severe poverty,
> who has no job, who is humiliated
> because he does not know
> how to maintain and educate his children? This is no free man.
> Sandro Pertini
> (Former President of Italy)

T his paper succinctly presents the main findings of a field research project carried out between 2006 and 2011 in some of the poorest regions of Brazil.[1] We investigated some effects of the social programme *Bolsa Família* (in the following: PBF) on the subjective experience and on the personality of its beneficiaries. We wanted to find out, particularly, whether it was possible to identify any moral or political transformations as a direct or indirect result of benefitting from the PBF.

In the following text we (I) briefly present the program and (II) explain why we chose to investigate subjective changes rather

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[1] For a full report on the research see Walquíria Leão Rego and Alessandro Pinzani, *Vozes do Bolsa Família. Dinheiro, autonomia, cidadania* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2013).

than improvements in the material life of the beneficiaries.[2] We then briefly address methodology (III) before discussing and evaluating the interviews (IV). We go on to present the theoretical foundation of our beginning thesis (4.1 and 4.2), offer some general data (4.3) and proceed to what we call a "phenomenology of poverty in Brazil" (4.4). We are, of course, using "phenomenology" in its most basic meaning, that of the analysis of how poverty manifests itself, i.e. neither in reference to Phenomenology as a philosophical method nor to phenomenology in the Hegelian sense. In each section, interview excerpts appear to better illustrate our points. The names of the interviewed women have been changed, according to common practice.

I

The *Bolsa Família* programme

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva assumed the presidency of Brazil in 2002, one of the declared priorities of his government was fighting poverty, a problem that still affects a relevant percentage of the Brazilian population. Several programmes were launched or extended (Lula's predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, had already taken steps in this direction), but none were as successful and as widely discussed (and criticised) as the PBF, which is, at present, the widest ranging social programme in Brazil (serving approximately 55 million out of a general

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[2] Perhaps we should call them 'fellows,' since *Bolsa Família* means literally Family Grant. Why should not the recipients of a social grant be called 'fellows' in analogy with the recipients of academic or research grants?

population of 200 million people).[3] Contrary to other programmes that distribute directly food to poor families (e.g. the *Banco de Alimentos*), the PBF is a CCT (Conditional Cash Transfer) programme, distributing money instead of goods.[4]

The Bolsa Familia is neither a credit scheme nor a loan: its participants do not receive money in order to start an economic activity or their own business (even if they might use it for this purpose) and they do not have to repay anything. Its aim is not to increase economic inclusion nor economic development, even if it works in both directions. According to the Institute for Applied Economical Research (IPEA), every *real* paid by the government via PBF and spent by families in consumption contributes with 1.78 R$ to the GDP (on the whole, the sum spent by the government with the PBF amounts to just at 0.48% of the

[3] On the PBF and its economic impact on Brazilian society see among others: M. Medeiros, F. V. Soares, S. Soares, R. G. Osório, *Programas de transferência de renda no Brasil: Impactos sobre a desigualdade* (Brasília: IPEA, 2006); J. A. Castro, L. Modesto (orgs.), *Bolsa Família 2003-2010: Avanços e desafios* (Brasília: IPEA, 2010); M. O. S. Silva, V. F. Lima (orgs.), *Avaliando o Bolsa Família: unificação, focalização e impactos* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2011); G. Díaz Langou, "Validating one of the world's largest conditional cash transfer programmes. A case study on how an impact evaluation of Brazil's Bolsa Família Programme helped silence its critics and improve policy," *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 2013 (DOI: 10.1080/19439342.2013.861501).

[4] In this sense, it would be incorrect to accuse it of being paternalistic or – to put it in Portuguese – of being merely *assistencialista* as opposed to *assistencial*: it is intended to aid in emergency situations (extreme poverty), even if such a situation might seem to be quite stable and likely to be long-term. In this context, we will not take up the criticism that the PBF runs the risk of simply shifting the kind of dependency from depending on private charity or on the interested help of the local elites (the so-called *coroneis*) towards depending on State assistance (which some consider to be a form of public "charity"). An analysis of this question would lead to a discussion of the nature of social policies in general, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Brazilian GDP).[5] It is a program of civic inclusion: it aims to help citizens face the most basic necessities and sometimes just to survive. Its goal is to create *citizenship*, not to merely train the entrepreneurial spirit.

At present, the allowance is granted to individuals or families (defined widely as a unit formed by one or two parents and their children, by one or two grandparents and their grandchildren, by an aunt or an uncle and her or his nephews etc.) whose per capita income is equal to or less than R$ 77 (approximately US$ 30 or EUR 26)[6] per month. Brazilian average income per month in 2011 was R$ 783 (US$ 303 or EUR 267), whilst the minimum wage in the same year was R$ 678 (US$ 263 or EUR 231), increasing to R$ 724 (US$ 280 or EUR 247) in 2014. The PBF is a CCT program because the participants have to meet two conditions in order not to lose the allowance: if there are children in the family, they have to go regularly to school and to get regular vaccinations[7].

As of January 2015 the basic allowance amount to R$ 77. For school age children under fifteen there is a per capita

[5] Camilla Veras Motta, "Valor Econômico (SP): Cada R$ 1 gasto com o Bolsa Família adiciona R$ 1,78 ao PIB, calcula IPEA," accessed January 28th, 2015, www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20244&Itemid=75.

[6] The exchange rates of the Brazilian Real x US Dollar and Real x Euro will be quoted herein based on the official exchange rates of the Brazilian Central Bank as of January 2015 (1 US$ = 2.58 Brazilian *reais*, 1 EUR = 2.93 Brazilian *reais*).

[7] Of course, participants would lose the allowance also in case their income rise above the aforementioned limits. In the ten years since the introduction of the PBF around 1,700,000 families left the program for this reason (Josie Jeronimo, "Eu sai do Bolsa Família," *IstoÉ*. Accessed January 28th 2015. http://www.istoe.com.br/reportagens/333863_EU+SAI+DO+BOLSA+FAMILIA+).

"variable" allowance of R$ 35 (US$ 13.5 or EUR 12) for a maximum of five children. For teenagers under nineteen, there is a per capita "variable" allowance of R$ 42 (US$ 16.3 or EUR 14.3) for a maximum of two young people. In any case, a family will not receive more than five "variable" allowances. Therefore, the maximum allowance for a family with three children under fifteen years and two teenagers under nineteen years is R$ 266 (US$ 103 or EUR 90.6). There are also special allowances for pregnant women and for babies under six months, but they are granted for a limited amount of time, due to their very nature. When we carried out the interviews the allowance was significantly lower and the maximum number of children was just three.

II

Listening to the poor

We tried to listen to the voice of people who find themselves in the worst social position, since they are extremely poor and live in particularly disadvantaged regions which are historically among the most neglected by the Brazilian state. They can be considered as second-rate citizens, either because they do not receive any basic public services (such as health care, public transport, cultural events etc.) or have difficulty in accessing such services when offered. For example, schools may be very far from people's homes and children may have to walk for hours to reach them, or the services are of very poor quality mostly owing to a lack of infrastructure and adequate training of the officials and personnel. This lack of interest on the part of public authorities on every level facilitates social atomism and the loss of political interest and participation. These people become secluded from

the rest of society and live in an environment truly incapable of stimulating their human development.

This kind of social exclusion can scarcely be identified by statistics and quantitative research. This is the main reason why we decided to investigate the effects of the PBF (more generally of CCT programs) on the *subjective experience* of its beneficiaries and to do so by means of *qualitative* research based on extended interviews. In order to better grasp such effects we often interviewed the same people with a time gap of one or two years, in order to try to capture features that are not easily accessible by other research methods (whose validity we do not question, of course). This is not tantamount to claiming that material or economic changes in the lives of the participants are not important or not as relevant as the "internal" or subjective changes we wanted to detect. On the contrary, the latter would be unthinkable without the former. It is *because* of the material changes in their economic situation that the participants experienced changes in their subjectivity, in their self-perceptions and in their self-esteem.

For many years, the State has been totally neglectful of the need to guarantee the rights of these people, creating a situation, in which a large number of individuals exist who have no right to have rights, to use Hannah Arendt's expression[8]. In a sense, it was as if the Brazilian State had decreed their *civil* death. They were silenced, since their public voice remained (and basically still remains) unheard because of the lack of organised mechanisms for expressing their situation (as Georg Simmel put it: the poor disappear from our society not only because they are made

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[8] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1968 [1951]) 177.

invisible, but most of all because their voice goes unheeded).[9] We are talking of millions of Brazilian citizens who have practically no formal education, no qualification for any kind of job that demands the ability to read and write or that of understanding and following even slightly sophisticated rules and commands. This shows the limits of a model of economic growth that does not make a priority of creating citizenship and fostering social inclusion (Brazil has experienced this kind of merely economic development in the 1960s and 1990s and even more recently). It further raises the issue of submitting economic processes to political control aiming at public utility, instead of leaving these citizens to the mercy of private interests.

III

Methodology

As we mentioned above, we chose to undertake qualitative research, using open-ended interviews instead of the questionnaires that are usually used by economists and by researchers interested in the quantifiable, material effects of the BPF (e.g. by the researchers of Brazilian governmental institutions such as the IPEA and the Ministry for Social Development).[10] Two reasons justified our choice. Firstly, we

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[9] Georg Simmel, "The Poor," translated by Claire Jacobson, *Social Problems*, 13/2 (1965), 118-140.

[10] On the difficulties connected with qualitative interviews see among others Siegfried Lamnek, *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Band 2: Methoden und Techniken* (München: DVU, 1989); Rainer Strobl & Andreas Böttger (Hrsg.), *Wahre Geschichten? Zur Theorie und Praxis qualitativer Interviews* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1996) as well as Andreas Witzel, "Das problemzentrierte Interview," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 1/1 (2000) (http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1132).

realised almost immediately that the women interviewed found it difficult to answer direct questions about such objective questions as the amount of money they spent weekly or monthly for food, clothes etc. (We think that most individuals would have these difficulties, if they had to answer to such questions without going through their bills and bank statements – but these women do not receive bills and have no bank account). Questionnaires also tend to neglect or to overlook the peculiar language of the interviewed persons, but this is a necessary evil, if they want to obtain data that can be summed up, compared and treated statistically. On the other hand, by ignoring the linguistic problems faced by the interview participants as well as their particular view of things (which might not be translatable into numbers or into pre-formulated multiple options), questionnaires are prone to present contradictory results or distorted data. By way of example, in our very first interview, we asked a woman how much she typically spent on food in a month and the answer was simply unrealistic (hundreds of *reais*, she claimed). We then reformulated the question and asked her how often she bought food at the market or at the grocery and then what she would buy and in what quantity. Finally, by asking her and our local informants, we would ascertain the price of the items she purchased. This allowed us to come up with a sum that was much more realistic and probably closer to reality. We repeated the experiment several times and we always registered this discrepancy between the first answer to the more abstract questions and the following answers to the more detailed questions.

The second reason for using open interviews is that we consider it to be the only possibility for our kind of investigation, which aimed at reaching the participants' subjective experience at a deep level. We conducted long interviews (varying in length from fifteen minutes – when we realised that the woman was not

answering freely, but was motivated by a fear that we would use her answers to reduce her allowance or when other people would interfere and try to control her answers – to a whole afternoon), using a script containing certain groups of questions concerning such aspects as the family make up, the gender and age of its members, its income before and after the PBF, the way the allowance money was spent, the changes introduced by the PBF with regard to consumption, etc. Following our script, we invited the women to evaluate and even criticise the programme and to comment on the fact that the nominal beneficiaries of the allowance are almost in every case women rather than men. We asked them whether they thought that the PBF was a duty or a favour on the part of the Federal government. We inquired about their attitude towards elections and political participation. Of course, we did not ask all these questions directly and we avoided formulating them in a suggestive way that might signal any expected answer (also because we did *not* expect any special answer). The first precaution we had to take, though, was to gain their confidence (Bourdieu speaks of a "contract" of confidence between the interviewer and the interviewed persons).[11] We were assisted by local contacts (mostly social workers, often volunteers) who helped us to establish a relation of mutual confidence and acceptance. It was essential that our participants did not see us as government agents monitoring the way they used the money or surveying their satisfaction with the programme. Furthermore, the local contacts helped us to better understand certain linguist peculiarities, the social context of the families, the political situation of the town etc. We also interviewed mayors and city officials in charge of managing the PBF or local social affairs, academics etc. We prepared for every

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[11] Bourdieu, Pierre, *La misère du monde* (Paris: Seuil 1993) 9 f.

field trip with both scientific and literary readings (writers such as Graciliano Ramos, Guimarães Rosa or João Cabral de Melo Neto helped us to better understand the world of the *sertão*) and long e-mail exchanges with local contacts.[12]

Since the debit card, through which the allowance can be cashed at the local branch of *Banco do Brasil* or *Caixa Federal*, is always in the name of the woman registered as head of the family (exceptions are done when there are no female adults in the family unit), we chose to interview women. More specifically, we interviewed rural women, in small towns in the inland regions of Brazil or in the outskirts of larger cities, since their situation is very different from that of the urban poor, who are already the subject of many studies. The rural poor face different problems, starting with geographical isolation which, in almost every case, makes it impossible to access basic public services. The regions targeted were: the *sertão*[13] and the coast of Alagoas, the Jequitinhonha River Valley in Minas Gerais, the inland of the

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[12] We approached 181 women; only 12 refused to be interviewed. We decided not to include another 15 interviews by women who did not respond freely. Some were evidently trying to give us the answers they thought we wished to hear, whilst other were influenced by their husbands who refused to leave, or they seemed scared despite the fact that we always were accompanied by local contacts in order to gain their trust, as described above. We selected the women according to family size and age, but we also carried out blind interviews (one or two for every place we visited, for a total of 21) in order to make sure that our contacts, who helped us select the persons to be interviewed, had not chosen people whom *they* judged to be likely to give us certain answers and not others.

[13] The *sertão* is a semi-arid region that comprises parts of many Northeastern states far west of the Atlantic coast. It is characterised by very low levels of precipitations and is frequently plagued by draughts of biblical dimensions, depicted by many Brazilian writers (e.g. Graciliano Ramos in his powerful romance *Barren Lives*).

states of Piauí and Maranhão, and extremely poor neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the cities of São Luiz (Maranhão) and Recife (Pernambuco). In some cases, we did not succeed in reaching rural women due to a lack of roads (we should have used a horse). This geographical isolation increases their needs and at the same time makes it almost impossible to satisfy them. In this sense, they are more destitute than the urban poor and can be considered to be the worst off group in Brazilian society.

Any discussion of whether the implementation of the program was always successful is beyond the scope of this paper, since our interest was in analyzing the effects of the program on the subjectivity of its recipients, not in evaluating the program from an economic point of view. Some of the women we interviewed reported cases of unfair treatment by the officials charged with the implementation, others complained that they got a smaller allowance than they expected or that they had to wait a long time to get the money. While these are of course important aspects to be considered in evaluating the program, they were relevant to us only insofar as they affected the self-esteem of the participant in the PBF or their view of themselves as citizens to whom officials owed respect and attention. In this paper we shall briefly address certain political aspects of the PBF, connected to civic participation and to the construction of citizenship, but we will not be able to discuss them fully.

IV

Analysing interviews

It is very difficult to present the material collected in a single paper. We decided to include some of it in our presentation of the phenomenology of poverty in Brazil. First of all, however, we

shall discuss the theoretical foundation of our beginning hypothesis and offer some general data.

4.1 Money as a source of autonomy

In his *Philosophy of Money* (1900) Georg Simmel showed that money has a liberating dimension, since it affects the choices and wishes of individuals. It makes its owners "more determined persons", who are more respectable and respected in a world that is dominated by mercantile relationships. It gives them a greater capacity to make decisions about their lives and, in doing so, it acquires a democratic character that makes individuals more equal, since it does not distinguish whether the person who uses it to buy a service or a good is rich or poor, noble or plebeian, male or female etc. Finally, it liberates individuals from the personal bonds of economic dependency (from one's own family and/or from other individuals).[14] Independence is defined, herein, not in the sense of a total lack of depending on anyone in order to reach one's own goals (that is impossible, since we need their cooperation more often than we might think), but in the sense of being able to buy the assistance of others in service of said goals. Individuals are more autonomous, when they depend neither on the friendly inclination of others nor on their charity and benevolence in order to reach their goals. They are able to obtain help by paying for it, i.e. thanks to their money, just as any other person could expect to receive the same help by paying the same amount of money (as Adam Smith had already pondered, even if in a different context).[15] When discussing the effects of

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[14] Georg Simmel. *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 2004) 299 ff.
[15] We are referring to the well-known page of *The Wealth of Nations*: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect

the PBF on everyday life, it was quite common for the women to describe their present situation by using the expression "sentir-se mais à vontade" (feeling more at ease) in comparison to the period in which they had no regular income. Dona Amelia, from Pasmadinho (Jequitinhonha River Valley) affirmed categorically: "There is more freedom in money, because with money you can buy what you want". This might sound trivial for the reader, but not for her or the other beneficiaries.

According to Simmel, therefore, money guarantees a certain amount of individual autonomy perceived as independence from the will (including the goodwill) of others, whilst at the same time creating other forms of dependence, particularly on the existence of a labour market.[16] Our hypothesis, however, was that regular monetary income would allow individuals to reach a level of autonomy that surpassed mere independence from personal ties. How do we define this kind of autonomy?

4.2 Definition of autonomy

Let us start with a very generic definition that enables us to classify the necessary different fields and different levels of autonomy. In a fundamental sense, to be autonomous means to be able to choose a certain strategy of action. This implies being

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our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest," in Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 26.

[16] Of course, Simmel's position is more complex than that presented here, but in this context, it is sufficient to stress money's effect on individuals, without discussing the negative aspects of the process that leads to modern individualism (Simmel's intention, in fact, was to neutrally *describe* these aspects rather than lament their effects on the social fabric and on the individuals themselves).

able to formulate goals, to have beliefs about which strategies are more likely to enable us to achieve those goals and therefore to understand, at least to a certain extent, which consequences may result for us from our actions. This first, basic autonomy level coincides with *freedom of action*. Yet, autonomy can be defined at a higher level as the capacity to take responsibility for our actions, that is, to justify them to ourselves or others, to be something more than a mere actor, to be an agent. This kind of autonomy, *agency*, is connected to further conditions such as: being conscious of oneself as an actor, being aware of at least the most immediate consequences of our actions for ourselves and others, being able to formulate reasons in language and to justify our actions. Freedom of action and agency constitute basic or fundamental forms of autonomy.

On a higher level people are considered to be autonomous when they try to live what they consider to be a good life (it does not matter, in this context, whether they choose to follow the tradition and dictates of their culture, or to flout them), i.e. when they are able to act according to a personal plan of good life and to consider themselves and others as capable of establishing mutual relations of moral and legal obligation (in other words, if they see themselves and others as bearers of rights and duties). This kind of autonomy can be called *moral autonomy* and can be developed at several degrees. A person becomes more autonomous (1) to the extent that she begins to determine her life plan not by simply accepting the models offered by her environment, both the narrow one – family, friends, restricted community – and the wider one – her culture, her religious creed etc., but by reflecting upon such models and possibly by distancing herself from them (for instance, a woman coming from a very chauvinistic and patriarchal family who decides to live alone, even at the price of moving to another city or to a faraway place). Furthermore, a person becomes more

autonomous (2) the more she establishes her rights and duties (for herself and for others) based on a personal examination (and possible rejection) of the principles and values learnt from her family or church or community (for instance, a brother of the afore-mentioned woman who comes to consider his sister's life model as morally legitimate and who starts to attribute to women – in general – rights that the other family members still denied based on their chauvinistic views).

We do not understand this kind of autonomy in a merely atomistic sense, but would like to stress the intersubjective dimension present, particularly in regards to the second aspect of mutual recognition as moral and legal subjects. The individuals we interviewed tend to see themselves as embedded in a wider net of moral relationships, particularly of duties connected to their roles as mother, wife, daughter etc. While the acceptance of these roles might be the consequence of an oppressive education, these persons consider the ability to perform their corresponding duties as a central facet of their individual freedom. As social researchers, we must not neglect this aspect just because we might have different ideals of autonomy (and particularly of feminine emancipation). Criticizing these women because they want to be good mothers or good wives instead of emancipated women would be tantamount to judging them on the basis of values they cannot possibly have autonomously developed and would constitute an act of cultural domination. We shall see however that things are changing in this sense and that some women are in fact starting to question their traditional roles.

Once we define autonomy in this very broad sense as a multi-layered concept, we can approach the question whether (a) receiving a regular monetary income can be seen as a material pre-condition for (b) improving one's level of autonomy. To show the relation between (a) and (b) we did utilise Amartya

Sen's capability approach.[17] This approach has been widely used to evaluate social policies around the world, particularly policies aimed at fighting poverty,[18] but it was not our intention to do the same with the PBF. Rather, we used categories such as "capabilities", "functionings" and "conversion factors" in order to better understand how the programme might affect its beneficiaries' autonomy. To guide our analysis we chose two normative criteria, which had to be fulfilled in order to claim that the PBF is actually creating opportunities for greater individual freedom: (1) a basic level of moral autonomy as defined above and (2) a perception of oneself as a member of a political community. In other words, we evaluated the effects of the PBF with regards to individual moral autonomy and to citizenship. Both are connected to certain fundamental valuable functionings, namely, with respect to (1): the perception of oneself as being able to make free choices without being subject to basic needs for food, lodging, minimal physical and psychological health; a sense of being (or increasingly becoming) master of one's own life; the

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[17] See among others: Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987) and *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), as well as Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (eds.), *Women, Culture, and Development. A Study on Human Capabilites* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[18] See for instance: Séverine Deneulin, Mathias Nebel and Nicholas Sagovsky (eds.), *Transforming Unjust Structures. The Capability Approach* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Flavio Comim, Mozzafar Qizibash and Sabina Alkire (eds.), *The Capability Approach. Concepts, Measures and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Paul Anand, Cristina Santos and Ron Smith, "The Measurement of Capabilities," *Arguments for a Better World. Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen. Vol. I: Ethics, Welfare, and Measurement,* ed. Kaushik Basu and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 283-310, and Séverine Deneulin and Lila Shahani (eds.), *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach. Freedom and Agency* (London: Earthscan, 2009).

capacity of taking responsibility for one's own actions without external material constraints by the nearest social environment (parents, brothers, other relatives, husband etc.); the ability to care for one's own family (i.e. independence in the sense described by Simmel); and with respect to (2): the feeling of being treated by the State as a real person whose needs cannot be met merely through individual action; the perception that the governmental policies aimed at oneself are not expression of the goodwill and charitable attitude of some politician or the government, but the consequence of the individual's rights as a citizen; the certainty that one's vote counts towards modifying the country's and the individual's own situation.

The basic idea behind using the capability approach to assess public policies is, firstly, to identify the capabilities required to reach the target functionings and, secondly, to determine which commodities should be distributed in order to achieve the desired capabilities. In the case of the PBF, there is a single commodity, namely money. Therefore, the question is whether receiving a regular monetary income can in fact be converted into capabilities leading to the functionings listed above. We also evaluated if and to what extent the social, economical and political environment of the BPF beneficiaries enabled this conversion. This required a description of the participants' general environment. We therefore began with what we call the phenomenology of poverty in Brazil (although many of the characteristics are not peculiar to Brazil). Firstly, however, some data needs presenting.

4.3 A general view

All the women interviewed claimed that the PBF had had a tremendous impact on their material life, even if a significant number of them complained about the limited amounts granted

by the *Bolsa* (many defined the allowance "a help") and even if almost all of them stated that they would have preferred a regular job. This contradicts a widely held opinion (in the Brazilian public at least) that PBF recipients would prefer not to work in order to depend on the allowance. The preposterous nature of this claim can be countered by the fact that the minimum wage is much higher than the *Bolsa* (between three to nine times higher, depending on the amount of the allowance). The point is that many employers would never pay the minimum wage (R$ 510 [US$ 197.6 or EUR 173.7] in 2010 and currently R$ 788 [US$ 305 or EUR 268]) to unqualified workers like most of the PBF recipients. As a matter of fact, of the 154 women we interviewed, only two admitted having given up their former job when they started receiving the *Bolsa*. Both worked as housemaids for middle class families and got a monthly salary of R$ 150 viz. 200 [US$ 58 viz. 77.5 or EUR 51 viz. 68] for working weekly six and a half days.

Only about 10 % of the women said that it made no difference whether the allowance was received by the wife rather than the husband. All others claimed that women are better at spending the money wisely, knowing better what the family needed and understanding grocery prices better. Some alleged that men would use the money to drink, even if only a few admitted that her husband would do this or that they actually knew of such cases among their neighbours, relatives or friends. We were not able to ascertain whether this complaint was well grounded and we suspect that they were often reproducing a typical negative stereotype about poor males (without downplaying the evident fact of alcoholism amongst this population).

Most of the women (around 75%) considered the PBF to be a favour or a gift on the part of the government or saw it as a

consequence of the poor origins of President Lula himself. They felt he understood the suffering of the poor better than his predecessors (the women identified with the President who they said was 'one of us', while referring to other politicians as 'they' or as 'the politicians out there'). A few women claimed that the government had a duty to help the poor and just five of them used the word "right" (only two of these five had an adequate notion of the concept, whilst the other three seemed not to have very clear ideas in this sense. One of them used in the same sentence this term and the term "favour"). A slight majority (52%) of the women claimed to vote out of obligation (voting is compulsory in Brazil), since 'politicians are all corrupt' and 'nothing changes anyway' (these were the most common explanations). Nevertheless, almost all of them admitted having voted for Lula in the 2001 election and that his victory had changed their life. It remains unclear, however, whether and to what extent they saw a direct connection between their voting and Lula's support for governmental anti-poverty policies. They all expressed the fear that a different government would take the allowance away, but many were unsure whether subsequent presidents would continue the program (this was before the 2010 victory of Dilma Rousseff who has actually increased the allowance and increased the reach of the programme to more families).

This strict link between the implementation of the PBF and the presidency of Lula has been object of harsh criticism in Brazil. The program is accused by some of being as a not particularly well disguised populist attempt at 'buying' elections by granting the allowance to poor voters. While the latter have clearly an interest in voting for governments that guarantee continuity in the implementation of the PBF, we do not see this as a clear-cut case of vote selling or buying. Firstly, all candidates in the last presidential elections (2010 and 2014) vowed that they

would maintain the program, so that the identification of the PBF with a PT-lead government is no longer so obvious. Furthermore, even if the program participants voted for the PT because of the PBF, this would not be tantamount to selling their vote – no more at least than in the case of middle or high class voters who vote for candidates who promise them tax cuts, school vouchers or other financial and fiscal advantages. Either one accepts that voters may cast their ballot thinking first and foremost of their self interest – and then poor people are entitled to do this as much as richer people – or one condemns this attitude in general, independently of social class and the kind of promised advantage (be it the PBF or tax cuts for the rich). On the other hand, the social policies promoted by the PT governments (of which the PBF is just one, even if the most impactant and discussed) seem to have created a clear political gap in Brazilian society between the poorest parcel of the population (mostly participants in the PBF) and the middle class, as shown convincingly by some sociologists.[19] This topic is outside the cope of this research, however.

The experience of having a regular income was new for almost all the women interviewed. This simple fact changed their life and gave them more freedom, as they consistently reported (often without having been asked). When asked to specify the kind of freedom, they pointed out different features representing different fields and levels of personal autonomy as outlined below.

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[19] In our opinion, the most convincing description of this process is offered by: André Singer, *Os sentidos do lulismo. Reforma gradual e pacto conservador* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012). See also: Marcos Nobre. A polarização voltou. *Piauí*, nº 98 (2014), 18-21.

4.4 A phenomenology of poverty in Brazil

A description of the most relevant characteristics of poverty in Brazil appears in this section. These characteristics have a direct influence on what the capability approach calls the "conversion factors" enabling the transformation of commodities into capabilities (and therefore, potentially, into functionings).

1. Lack of basic requirements for a healthy life. Under this heading we include bad nutrition (as a result both of lack of food and of an unhealthy diet), precarious lodging, poor or no basic medical assistance, scarce access to medical facilities and to medications etc. In the case of our participants, the difficulty of accessing health services often depend on geographical circumstances (e. g. for those living in isolated places), but also on political and economical factors (e. g. when the municipal government chooses not to hire sufficient doctors or if it has no resources available for doing so). Bad nutrition is often caused by a lack of nutritional information. These women and their families have a diet lacking in vitamins (vegetables and fruits) or of noble proteins (such as red meat), while feeding on edibles rich in calories but also in fats and carbohydrates (rice, pasta, sausages). Not only does bad nutrition threaten these people's physical and mental health, making them more prone to illness, it also impairs their physical and mental capacities, affecting their work opportunities and condemning them to unemployment or underemployment[20]. Empirical studies have already shown the direct connection between bad nutrition in infancy and poor

[20] Cf. Paulette Dieterlen. *La pobreza: un estudio filosófico.* México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003, 34.

development of basic cognitive capacities and intelligence.[21] In other words, bad nutrition results in many bad functionings since it impairs the development of certain capabilities.

However, bad nutrition is not merely due to insufficient nutritional information. Many women we interviewed did in fact know that eating vegetables is important, particularly for their children, but either were unable to find these products at an affordable price in the local commerce (since they had to be imported from some distant, more fertile region to the semi-arid *sertão*), or they were not able to grow them in gardens due to a lack of water or because they had to use drinking water to irrigate the plants and could not possibly pay the water bill. According to Dona Ines, from Demerval Lobão (Piauí), who used her allowance to buy rice, flour and *mistura* (i.e. products rich in protein that are then mixed with rice or pasta, such as: poultry meat, sausages, eggs, canned beef or canned sardines), vegetables are very expensive. There is a truck arriving weekly from Terezina (the state capital, approximately 30 kilometres to the north) selling remains from the vegetable market, but she cannot afford even that. And Dona Amélia from Pasmadinho, in the Jequetinhonha River Valley said, about the possibility of a vegetable garden: 'It's impossible. We have water just for two hours a day, only. Then you cannot water any plant. Having a garden is impossible, since it takes a lot of water. And now we

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[21] Larry Brown (ed.). *The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children* (Medford, MA: Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, School of Nutrition, Tufts University, 1993).

have just drinking water, you can't wet the plants with drinking water, we can't pay for that'.[22]

Some women described how they introduced new products in the diet of their family thanks to the PBF. Many of them mentioned cookies and yogurt, which they buy particularly for the children, but also meat (mostly chicken). Dona Claudineide, from the Povoado da Cruz (Alagoas *sertão*) was very proud of being able to buy "pasta by the package" (in very poor regions, the owners of groceries shop would open the 500 grams or 1 kilo packages of pasta or rice to sell the content in smaller quantities, since their customers could not afford to pay for the whole package). One can conclude, therefore, that the money from the PBF provided the women the chance to improve their family's nutrition. However, they did not always take advantage of the opportunity either because the money was not enough to buy valuable products such as vegetables, fruit and red meat, or because they lacked the nutritional education to do so.

As for improving the quality of their lodging, the money from the PBF is manifestly insufficient. While there are other federal programs intended to help the lowest social classes to obtain affordable housing (such as the programme called *Minha Casa Minha Vida*, i.e. *My House, My Life*), the *Bolsa Família* in itself is far too low. None of the women we interviewed used the allowance to improve the condition of their house.

Health assistance is free throughout Brazil, but there are huge differences in ease of access, according to local circumstances, as mentioned above. Theoretically, families do not

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[22] The situation is analogous to that of buying red meat or other sources of noble proteins, since the prices are incompatible with the income guaranteed by the PBF.

need to spend the money from the PBF to buy prescription drugs, but some women reported that they used part of the allowance (sometimes almost all of it) to this end.

A particularly tragic case was that of Dona Nilza, from Itinga (Jequitinhonha River Valley). She was a heart patient and diabetic and had, therefore, to take many medications daily but, being illiterate, was unable to read the information leaflets. She sometimes confused different drugs (with obvious health risks). This is a dramatic illustration of how illiteracy can impair someone's life.

But the most illustrative case was probably that of Dona Quitéria, from Araçuaí (Jequitinhonha River Valley), who was 44 when we interviewed her. She was a widow and lived with six children and a small granddaughter. She received us in one of the two rooms of her house: a plain structure of exposed brick, with a roof of corrugated aluminium. While the whole family slept in the backroom, the front room had just a stove, a table with some chairs and no window. The only air and light came in through the door, together with a cloud of dust raised by the constant wind blowing outside (most children in the neighbourhood have breathing conditions such as asthma or chronic bronchitis). Dona Quitéria wore an incredibly sad expression, her gaze lost in contemplation of something we could not grasp (perhaps a happy or at least less miserable past?). She would sit on her chair with the posture of someone who was unbearably tired and drained of any energy. She complained that they wanted to cut her allowance because one of the children was not going to school. She pointed at him and told us his story: 'He got a problem, since he was a small child, a problem with his hand, and when his hand swells… his hand swells with wounds, nobody never discovered why, the doctors here never discovered what it is. They think it's syphilis. They asked whether I had it while I was pregnant with him, I told

them I didn't know, then his hand swells and gets full of wounds and he cannot even hold a pencil, I did already speak with the [school] principal, and what happened is that she stared at me and said that I had to bring the paper from the doctor. I brought it to her, the… how do you call it?...the certificate, you know? She said she had crossed his name out of the *Bolsa Escola* [Dona Quitéria was still confusing the PBF with a former program, which granted a small allowance for children in school age], now it's only two of them in the *Bolsa Escola*. When he gets his hand that way, his hands and his feet, oh, it gets full of wounds and they start releasing water and when it gets dry, it smells real bad, and then the children at school laugh at him'. Therefore the boy stopped going to school in order not to be teased any more.

Sometimes she would use the money from the allowance to buy medication for the boy: an injection that costs R$ 70. 'I stopped eating, myself, because I couldn't afford to buy it. The doctor says that in order to stop it [the disease], we have to buy the injection, to let it come from Belo Horizonte [the state capital] and give it to him here'.

Their water and electricity were cut almost one year ago, because she is not able to pay the bill, so that they get water and electricity from the neighbours, whose help is essential for the family's survival. She has no regular job because she cannot leave the children alone at home (there are not enough public crèches or kindergartens in the town, certainly not in her neighbourhood). She survives by doing odd jobs for neighbouring families: collecting firewood or transporting buckets of water on her head from the wells.

Dona Quitéria's case is illustrative of how different kinds of suffering are intertwined. The lack of public health service turns every disease into a sort of biblical plague with terrible effects on the life of the individual and the whole family. In this case, the

shame provoked by the disease and the humiliation inflicted by his schoolmates and by other adults drove the boy to leave school and therefore led to the loss of his allowance. At the same time, his mother could have gone to court either in order to force the health system to pay for the injections or to revert the suspension of the allowance, but being illiterate, she had no idea that she could do so and did not know whom she might ask for help (e.g. the Federal Public Advocacy, who would have helped her free of charge). This cascade effect ends up deepening the suffering.

2. Lack of a regular job and very irregular income. The women we interviewed, as well as their husbands, were either chronically unemployed or did very irregular, occasional jobs. Most women had never worked outside of their home (of course, we do not refer here to chores or activities connected to their status of wives and mothers, but to wage labour done for individuals outside the family), because they married and had children still very young. Sometimes they and their husbands would get what they call *bicos* or *beliscões*, i.e. odd jobs on a quite irregular basis, normally badly paid and physically demanding, such as working eight hours in the field for only R$ 10 (US$ 5 or EUR 3), as reported by women from Inhapí (Alagoas *sertão*). Sometime the men had seasonal jobs in other states, for instance harvesting sugar cane. In these cases, they had to leave their home and family for several months every year (this happens frequently in the Jequitinhonha River Valley). Generally speaking, this irregular and often informal labour does not guarantee sufficient income to support the family for the whole year and casts tremendous uncertainty for the future of the people involved. Almost all the women we interviewed expressed the desire for a regular job: officially registered, with benefits etc. When people manage to work autonomously (e.g. those who own small plots of land and dedicate themselves to subsistence farming), they often face insurmountable obstacles such as a shortage of material

resources, bad nutrition (and subsequent insufficient physical strength) as well as a lack of technical knowledge. The results of their efforts are disproportionally low compared to the human energy expended working the land. Furthermore, there is always the risk that natural phenomena (particularly draughts) would destroy or damage their crops.[23]

Travelling through regions like the Jequitinhonha River Valley or the Alagoas *sertão*, we were constantly reminded that poverty and unemployment are not a contingent phenomenon, but have deep roots in geography, in Brazilian history and in political decisions. For instance, who would open a factory in the middle of nowhere, hundreds of miles from the nearest port or airport, with bad roads suffering from the continual temperature differential between hot days and chilly nights (when they are not just dirt roads that become almost impassable with rain)? And most of all, who would open a factory in a region whose inhabitants are mostly uneducated and unskilled, who probably would find it difficult to read security advice and machine operation instructions? There is a high-tech factory in Delmiro Gouveia (Alagoas *sertão*), producing high quality textiles, that employs some 800 people (mostly from other regions), but this exception merely highlights the difficulties in creating jobs in these regions for uneducated people, whom the Brazilian State has simply neglected for hundreds of years.

We would like to stress that the people we interviewed want more from life than mere survival. They want a regular income in order to improve their own and their families' situation. We heard often complaints like: 'I couldn't go to school because it was very

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[23] Many women pointed out the importance of governmental programs such as the Crop Insurance Programme (*Seguro Safra*), which has improved the situation of small landowners.

far from my house' or 'Father took me out from school because he needed me to work'. The culture of our society, which is based on wage labour and on a work ethic epitomized by St. Paul's infamous aphorism 'He who does not work, neither shall he eat', penetrated deeply in their psyches, and they felt ashamed for not having a regular job and for being dependent on social programmes (on "public charity" as some of them said, echoing the prejudice of the Brazilian middle-class). On the other hand, they are aware that they have no chance on the job market because of their lack of skills and education, and they seemed resigned to the situation, whilst at the same time hoping that their children would have better possibilities thanks to formal education. We would like to mention two positive examples in this sense. In the town of Piri-Piri (Piauí) we met a family whose parents were completely illiterate, but the daughter was studying at the state university in Terezina thanks to a local programme aimed at preparing children coming from PBF families for college admission tests. On the outskirts of São Luis (Maranhão), we met a grandmother who used the allowance to pay for the daily bus ride to and from the city centre for her grandchild, who had remarkable artistic ability and was able to attend art school, from which he graduated successfully.

One of the most widespread prejudices against the PBF beneficiaries is that they would give up their jobs in order to live on the allowance. As we already mentioned, this is a preposterous accusation. Here is a statement on this topic, by Dona Palmira, from Araçuaí (Jequitinhonha River Valley). She claimed that without the PBF she and her children would have starved to death, 'because what we earn here is too little. I work three days a week and earn twenty-five *reais* [US$ 12]. Three full days in order to get twenty-five reais'. We asked what kind of job it was and she answered: 'I work as a housemaid, doing everything'. 'And you just get twenty-five *reais*,' we asked? 'For three days. The lady

pays me. Three days without complaints. I do the washing, the cooking, all the three days, I do the ironing and the cleaning in the house. You can do the maths and see how much I'm earning a-day'. 'It is not even nine *reais* per day,' we reply. 'She said this is what she can pay, I said that I agree. So, it is twenty-five *reais*. So I said, well I'll go for it, since it's better than nothing. I don't like to laze about, no way.[24] The boy gets up early in the morning, he wants some bread, how can I do? I cannot buy it. His father doesn't help. He slipped away, the father of these three boys. So, what can I do? I have to work to earn twenty-five *reais* or even ten *reais*, and if someone should say: I'll give you nine *reais* if you wash my clothes today, I'll go for it'.

Another example of hard work is that of Dona Joana, from Maragogi (Alagoas coast), a slim black woman in her early fifties (but appearing to be in her late sixties), with long curly hair braided in a thick tress, the tendons of her neck as thick as a rope, big eyes full of life and energy. She is a grandmother and receives the allowance because her grandchildren live with her. She claims emphatically: 'My entire worth lies in my molluscs in the tide', since she earns her living fishing for clams– a job most people in this town consider to be humiliating and shameful for some reason. 'When I come back, I am all to pieces. I can't endure it no longer. You have to stay on your knees the whole time till the bucket is full [of clams], a big bucket, on your back, when I arrive, this here [she indicates her back], my back can't take it no more. Today, I had to grab them, to wet them, and I came back shivering from cold, my back couldn't endure it'. She sells the clams for R$ 10 per kilo (US$ 5), a ridiculously low price.

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[24] One can notice how the ideology of labour that characterises our society has been interiorised by this woman.

Among her customers are luxury resorts that will serve the clams in their restaurants for an astronomically high price.

One could claim that the allowance frees these people at least in part from the tyranny of slave labour imposed on them from the same middle class that accuses them of laziness when they refuse to work for starvation wages. On the other hand, they have interiorised so much of the ideology of work of our society that they normally feel ashamed for being unemployed even when there is no work available. In this sense, there is nothing the PBF can do to relieve them from this stigma, if they are not able to change their perspective and begin to see the allowance as a right they are entitled to as citizens (actually, Brazilian society at large should embrace this view).

3. Child labour and school leaving. The poor begin to participate in the economic life of their family very early. Children start working very young, both at home (caring for younger siblings, helping the mother with chores, collecting firewood for the stove, tending to domestic animals in the yard etc.) and outside. This very often means that they have to leave school, perpetuating the traditional lack of literacy and making it almost impossible to overcome poverty through education. Dona Luisa from Inhapí (Alagoas sertão) reported that she spent a short time at school, but 'I left immediately, because I came from the country', as if her rural origin had irremediably determined her fate. She never learnt to read and write. On the same note, Dona Palmira of Araçuaí (Jequitinhonha River Valley) told us that she was at school for three years, 'then my father took me out to work in the field'. For this reason, it is very important that the PBF, which is a CCT programme, require that the children be sent regularly to school. However, the main problem is the very poor quality of public schools in Brazil – and this is a consequence of political choices made by local powers (both at municipal and state levels),

since the constitution make them responsible for primary and secondary education.[25] The Federal government itself, however, tends to consider education merely as a form of professional or vocational training, rather than a way of widening one's personal horizons and knowledge. The lack of contact with realities other than those of their family and immediate neighbours, which is marked by destitution and dire need, makes it very difficult for the children of poor families to imagine that another kind of life is possible and to think that one day they would be able to leave that environment or to change it. Sometimes the only contact with another world is offered by TV and the omnipresent soap operas, which describe a reality that seems to come from another planet but confronts them with different lifestyles and models of behavior. In this sense, its omnipresence in the households we visited can have sometime the positive effect of widening the horizons of its watchers. In any case, the PBF does have the positive effect of forcing the families to keep their children in school, creating at least some potential future for them.

4. High birth rate. It is traditionally thought that poor families tend to have many children because they represent future sources of income and a possible help for the parents in their old age. At the same time, however, the presence of many children increases the economic demands on the family, particularly when they are still very young and cannot yet work or when the job market does not offer enough job possibilities. This leads to a vicious circle, as

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[25] The federal government has limited jurisdiction regarding public school funding. At one point, an attempt was made to increase the quality of teaching by introducing a minimum wage for teachers. Some states (amongst the richest ones of the Union) filed a grievance against this law which was then rejected by the Constitutional Court. These states then decided to pay their teachers only the minimum wage without any further supplements (for qualification, seniority etc.), leading to a *de facto* salary reduction.

noted by Dieterlen.[26] Our research, however, showed that the high birth rate in the regions we visited is less due to this quite instrumental motivation but rather to a lack of information about birth control. Pregnancy occurs frequently with no former planning, due to misinformation, to the family situation and sometimes to religious faith. Women's part in an extremely patriarchal society deprives them of any control over their body. Some of the women referred to their frequent pregnancies and to the large number of children as 'presents from God' (such as Dona Luisa from Inhapí, mother of eight). On the other hand, we met women who had either undergone sterilisation or expressed a desire to do so. Dona Claudineide of Povoado da Cruz (Alagoas *sertão*) told us that she could not cope with birth control pills and was allergic to latex (therefore to condoms). So, last time she gave birth (by Caesarean section), she asked the doctor (a woman) to remove her ovaries. She smiled (for the first time during the several interviews we had with her) while she telling us: 'The doctor showed me my pulled out ovaries. Now I don't risk anymore getting pregnant. I told the doctor: for God's sake, help me, I can't have no children no more'.

The question of birth control is quite ambiguous and does not present any clear conclusions. In most cases, however, the women are not able to freely choose whether they want to become pregnant or not. They are, rather, victims of their husbands and family as well as of the priests of their church. This lack of freedom results in the impossibility of exercising such a basic functioning as the capacity to plan one's life or to be master of one's own body.

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[26] Dieterlen, *La pobreza*, op. cit., p. 37.

5. Accidents. The poor are more prone to accidents due to the precarious nature of their lodgings and facilities (e.g. unsafe electrical wiring), due to the low quality of building materials (generally their houses are built from a mixture of adobe, metal sheets, wood planks, more rarely bricks), to the dangerous location of their houses (e.g. close to river banks or directly by the roadside). Furthermore, the roads and paths in the regions we visited are not adequately maintained, so that many family homes become quickly inaccessible during bad weather. The father of Dona Luana, from Peroba (Alagoas coast), suffered an accident when he worked as a sugar cane cutter: 'He sat in the truck of the cane cutters and the truck tipped over and he was sitting on the top. So, he was injured. Nobody died, ok? But he got injured'. He broke one arm and a hand, and as a result he was no longer able to work. This greater tendency to accidents represents a lost of freedom and autonomy, and subsequently of many valuable functionings. In this case the PBF cannot do much, since the allowance is too low to permit the beneficiaries to improve the quality of their lodging, as mentioned above, or to buy adequate means of transportation, even if some newspapers have reported that beneficiaries would allegedly use the allowance to buy motorcycles by instalments (this would represent a form of increasing their mobility and safety on the road – as far as driving a motorcycle on unpaved or damaged roads can be considered to be safer than biking or walking on the roadside in the dark).

6. Lack of credit. Poor people do not receive credit, since they have nothing to offer as a guarantee and cannot easily find guarantors. Most Brazilian poor do not have access to bank services and therefore to many other services. But it is not only a matter of financial credit, rather of personal reliability and trustworthiness. Dona Ines from Demerval Lobão (Piauí) claimed that shop owners started selling to her on credit when she began receiving the PBF. 'These persons trusted me, the [*Bolsa Família*]

card gave me credit. My card was the only thing that gave me credit in my whole life. Before, I did not have nothing. It is not enough, however, 'cause I'd like to have a better life. All you want to do in life has to be got by money, by paying for it. The allowance does not silence those who are in need. Being in need is not only when you don't have no food, no sir. It is when you want to eat something better and you haven't got it, you can't. It is when you want to have better clothes and can't, when you want to go to the ice cream parlour with your son and can't, when you see a toy in the shop and can't buy it for your child'. Here she broke down and cried.

Generally speaking, the women we spoke with had never had the experience of receiving a regular monetary income and the trustworthiness they gained among the shop owners in their towns after getting the PBF was a novelty for them. They felt this as a gain in respectability and consequently of self-respect, since being the object of mistrust provoked in them extremely negative feelings of shame and humiliation, causing personal suffering. The increase in credibility is one of most powerful effects of the PBF on their subjective experience and seems to confirm Simmel's idea of money as a source of freedom. In this case, the commodity represented by regular monetary income is converted immediately into a set of capabilities (reliability, trustworthiness, financial credit) leading to valuable functionings (perceiving oneself as trustworthy, getting credit from shop owners, developing self-respect, planning one's own future in term of consumption and expenditures).

7. Invisibility and silence. In urban areas the poor are often made invisible and cancelled from the city landscape. They generally live in slums at the outskirts or in segregated areas, far away from the elegant middle class neighbourhoods (Rio de Janeiro is quite an exception in this sense), in which

infrastructures are extremely precarious (no pavement, no playgrounds, poor street lighting, no sewage etc.). They use public transportation, if they can afford it at all, while the higher classes prefer to use the car. For all these reasons, their presence remains unnoticed in the everyday life of middle- and high-class people. In rural areas, poor people live in isolated houses or in villages situated normally quite far away from main or even from secondary roads. The great distance from the town hall and the other public offices often results in poor access to basic services such as health assistance, civil registry, banks, schools and etc. Sometimes they do not even have electricity, increasing their isolation, negatively affecting their quality of life, their health and even their subjectivity. Dona Bernardete, from Sítio Novo (Rio Grande do Norte), told us that she did not have electricity at home as a child, and that when the first street lamps were installed in the church square of a small village a few kilometres from her house, she went out every night to gaze at those distant and feeble lights, recalling that as 'the most beautiful sight I had ever seen'.

As mentioned above, the voice of the poor remains often unheard and their suffering is not taken into account. During our research we received many complaints about communication difficulties with the local PBF officials. We frequently heard that local authorities would send letters written in stodgy, incomprehensible bureaucratic language to illiterate people who are unable to read and understand them. In many cases this leads to dramatic consequences, with families losing their allowance for missing a deadline or not providing certain documents. This demonstrates, of course, that illiteracy represents a *de facto* loss of a central human functioning, namely communication, but the damage is exacerbated by the attitude of the authorities, which

represents a form of disrespect for and humiliation of the poor.[27] The muteness of the poor operates in tandem with the deafness of politicians and bureaucrats. Increasing one's literacy and education at school becomes therefore a priority and the PBF is effectively managing to keep participanting children in school (according to recent data, more than 95% fulfil the schooling requirements).[28]

What is worse, the women told us that they scarcely communicate with each other (let us remember that we are talking about persons living in rural areas, often in isolated houses), not even when they queue to register for or receive their allowance at the local branch of the *Caixa Federal* or *Banco do Brasil*. It would be very helpful if local authorities would organise meetings, where the beneficiaries could discuss their problems with each other and with public officials. We once participated in a meeting of BPF recipients in Itinga (Jequitinhonha River Valley). It was not a regular meeting, rather an informal gathering organised by a local social worker on the occasion of our visit. Interestingly, at the beginning, most women just formulated their complaints, speaking of their individual problems. As the discussion went on, however, they started to discuss more general questions, like the political situation in Itinga and in the country at large. Finally they began to discuss questions of rights and citizenship, even if they did not use these terms. Our presence

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[27] See Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity. Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and *Creating Capabilities. The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011).

[28] The data refer to 2013 and are obtained from the Federal Ministry of Education's data-base (http://frequenciaescolarpbf.mec.gov.br/presenca/controller/login/efetuarLogin.php).

served as a catalyst, provoking the debate with our questions or mediating between different positions, helping them to see previously unrecognised similarities. In the end, it seemed to us that they had entered the meeting as isolated individuals and left it as a group – maybe not yet fully organised, but at least on their way to a certain unity of intention and goals.

8. Internal inequality in the family. In extremely poor families the inequality among men and women, adults and children, young and old is often amplified. In poor, economically underdeveloped regions of Brazil, women have as yet very few chances of emancipation from marital oppression, mostly because they are submitted to a tight net of control by way of other family members – not merely the males (father and husband, primarily, but also brothers, uncles, cousins, in-laws) but also females (particularly mothers-in-law).[29]

Almost all of the women mentioned the positive benefits of having their name on the allowance card. The classical argument they used was that women are better at managing domestic expenditures, whilst men are incapable of using the money appropriately. They often accused the men of spending the money on drink. According to Dona Graciele of Inhapí, if her husband had received the money 'then he would take it and go drink *cachaça* [a Brazilian rum]', whilst Dona Neusa of Maragogi (Alagoas) claimed that if men received the allowance, 'that would be fatal! They are cunning. But we are more independent since the card is in our name'. On the other hand, this accusation often proved to be grounded more on hearsay than real experience. This is another example of how the poor frequently internalise

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[29] On the challenges faced by a critical theory of the condition of women see among others Brooke A. Ackerly, *Political Theory and Feminist Social Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

certain common prejudices held against them by the middle class and the elites.

We registered quite often the presence of a "morality of spending," to use Viviana Zelizer's expression:[30] poor women would spend the money according to a relatively rigid hierarchy of priorities, with the family's basic survival at the top, followed by the needs of the children (nutrition, health, school) and of the other family members according to age (with the youngest one having priority). When women admitted to having spent a couple of *reais* for a shampoo or a body cream, they often displayed a disporportionate and mostly unjustified sense of shame, since they only did this once the basic family needs were satisfied. This is another example of how the poor frequently internalise certain common prejudices held against them by the middle class and the elites, namely, that they do not know how to spend money and would waste it on useless shopping. At the same time, it also shows how poor women tend to assume unquestioningly the familiar role assigned them by their social environment.

Some women stated that the allowance provided the means for some women to free themselves from difficult marriages but, in fact, we met only one woman who separated from her husband, namely Dona Madalena of Inhapí (Alagoas). And by the following year she was once again living with him, although he had not given up drinking and was probably abusing her. It remains very difficult for these women to free themselves from marital oppression – for many reasons. First, the allowance is not generous enough to allow them to live alone with their children without economic help from the spouse or their parents (who

[30] On the 'morality of spending', particularly among poor people see Viviana Zelizer, "The Social Meaning of Money: 'Special Monies'," *American Journal of Sociology*, 95/ 2 (1989) 353.

often pressure them to stay with the husband). Secondly, they are subject to intense societal pressure, both from their family and from their environment (particularly from their church), to endure their marital ordeal. Finally, they are socialised not only to submit to men, but rather to *desire* such submission and subservience, as John Stuart Mill pointed out as early as 1869 in his essay *The Subjection of Women*.[31] In this sense, the PBF might encourage them to end unsatisfactory relationships, not so much due to providing full economic independence from their husbands, rather to the extent that it offered them a sense of greater autonomy and mastery over their lives.

Generally speaking, the PBF contributes to the empowerment of its participants, since it gives them a certain level of independence (in the Simmelian sense) and increases their power in the family. At the same time, many young girls, who under "normal" circumstances, would leave school very early and whose school attendance is now enforced by the program, stated that they do not want to share the fate of her mothers or older sisters, who were more or less condemned to marry and have children very early, sometime at ten or eleven years of age.[32] The schooling requirement educates these girls about other life styles and offers a potential emancipation from the traditional roles imposed on them by their social environment.

On the other hand, the situation of the husbands and fathers not only remains and will remain unchanged until definitive solutions to the problem of unemployment are found, but it might even worsen, since the allowance goes to the women,

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[31] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women* (London: Penguin, 2007).

[32] See the short documentary *Severinas* by Eliza Capai (accessible under: http://vimeo.com/73309361).

threatening the masculine position as (alleged) bread winners and heads of family. They might feel and often do feel as if they have become useless. This aspect, namely the humiliation and loss of self-esteem among the men, should be object of further studies and of specific policies.

9. Shame. Poverty provokes feelings of shame and low self-esteem.[33] Poor people are often considered and consider themselves to be responsible for their situation, even when, objectively speaking, there is nothing they can do to circumvent the lack of education or chronic unemployment resulting from external circumstances over which they have no control. In the regions we visited, poverty was not a matter of a temporary set of economic problems but a structural problem (and this shows how CCTs such as the PBF cannot solve the problem alone, if they are not coordinated with other public programmes and policies aiming at structural changes, such as some current federal and local schemes).[34] While interviewing the women we frequently sensed how very strong their shame was. Sometimes it expressed itself directly, like when they felt evidently ashamed of their poor houses and kept apologizing for not having proper chairs or tables. Sometimes it surfaced in a nervous gesture of the hand, in an embarrassed expression, in a shake of the body when certain topics arose.

As long as they consider the PBF to be a government favour, i.e. a form of charity, they will not stop feeling ashamed of their poverty. Some of the women claimed that the government has a duty to help the poor, but few thought they have a right to this support (as mentioned above). However, by way of the PBF, the

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[33] Cf. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 282 ff.
[34] There are more than fifty federal government social programmes, the PBF being just one of them, although the most important.

State is sending a signal, showing that it considers these people to be citizens and that it wants to include them fully in the political body. A stronger signal would be represented by the institutionalization of the PBF, which at present is just a governmental programme, subject to abandonment in the event of a political change of power.[35] The mostly negative attitude of public opinion (which in Brazil represents only a tiny minority, namely the so called middle class – actually just 10% of the population – and the elites) and of the media (owned by a few powerful economic groups) is probably the major obstacle to such institutionalization and exemplifies the absence of solidarity in Brazilian society. The middle class and the elites seem not to consider the poor majority to belong to the same political body: they have never shown any interest in the destiny of their poorest co-citizens and have regularly opposed any policy aimed at offering relief from misery (their backing of the military coup of 1964 is a good example of this attitude). This is why the PBF is considered by many women we interviewed as something completely unexpected, as a 'gift from Lula' or even as a 'gift from God'. The internalization of the stigma of poverty and, particularly, an attitude of contempt against the beneficiaries of the PBF is however particularly strong amongst the urban poor, as proven by some studies revealing that families living in the *favelas* and receiving the allowance are met with hostility and disdain by their neighbours.[36] The situation is different in rural

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[35] We shall not discuss here the possibility or necessity of introducing a universal, unconditional basic income. As a matter of fact, the Brazilian parlament has already passed a law in this sense, but it has yet to be implemented.

[36] Mani Tebet de Azevedo Marins "A construção de fronteiras simbólicas entre os "pobres": o caso do programa Bolsa Família" (PhD diss., Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2013).

areas, where almost every family depends for its own survival on the PBF or on the old age pensions of some of its members.

10. Culture of resignation. During the interviews we frequently faced what is called traditionally the culture of resignation. It emerged not only in the women's words (sometimes an adverb, an interjection, an adjective sufficed to communicate it), but also in the gestures, in the tiredness of the face and of the body, in the clouded gaze, in the bent shoulders. They seem to accept their situation as an unavoidable or even natural destiny, from which there is no escape (even if they still hope that their children might be able to have a different fate). This resignation goes hand-in-hand with the tendency to significantly lower their expectations. This phenomenon is well known in the literature on poverty under the term of "adaptive preferences".[37] Individuals who are scarcely able to satisfy the most basic needs will unlikely develop wishes and preferences surpassing the fulfilment of such needs. These persons are deprived not only of material means, but also of hope, of the possibility of dreaming and wishing for a different kind of life. Economic deprivation is accompanied once more by psychological suffering. However, the PBF seems to be cracking the solid straightjacket of resignation that surrounds them like a cocoon. They know that they can rely on the allowance every month, at least as long as there are no political changes, and that their children do not need to leave school in order to work to help the family. Furthermore, they are getting used to being the object of social policies and to be taken into account by the State.

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[37] See Amartya Sen, "Well-being, Agency, and Freedom. The Dewey Lectures 1984," *Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (1985), 191; Verónica Burstin et alii. *Preferencias adaptativas. Entre deseos, frustración y logros* (Montevideo: Fin de Siglo, 2010); Serene J. Khader. *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

They are aware that, for the first time in Brazilian history, they are stepping onto the political and social stage as leading actors and not just as extras.

11. Exclusion from citizenship. The poor are excluded from citizenship both in a formal and material sense. The material sense refers to the lack of employment and regular income, therefore of collective ties that go further than the family or the neighbourhood. Formal exclusion refers to the fact that many of them do not even have an identity card (and this make it impossible to register for the PBF). Being enrolled in the civil registry is a formal precondition to accessing basic services. Moves have been made to change this situation – both on part of the local and the federal authorities, but there is still a long way to go.

The same can be stated about political participation. As the above described meeting in Itinga shows, the programme participants may feel the urge to express to their opinions and claim improvements, but the PBF alone cannot help them to find their own voice as long as its management and implementation do not become more democratic (e.g. following the example of participatory budget, which is well known in Brazil).

V

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the poor have now taken centre stage in political discourse and public opinion in Brazil. The greatest challenge will be their transformation from mere objects of policies into political subjects. The first step has been taken by trying to include them more firmly in the political body and by freeing them from dire need. It would be desirable if this first

self-identification as citizens were followed by the development of a stronger sense of belonging to the national community. However, there are many obstacles to this development, with historical origins that cannot be reconstructed here. Generally speaking, one could claim that political participation among the poorest social classes in Brazil, particularly in rural regions, has historically been low, with the important exception of politically organized movements such as the *Movimento dos Sem Terra* (MST), whose impact may not be underestimated, but which did not manage to break with the status quo of land ownership in the country. In urban areas, there are phaenomena of communal organization around specific issues, but no nationwide political movement fighting for social justice or redistribution. The PBF seem to have changed something in the political conscience of its recipients, since they finally have the impression that their vote counts in the sense that the PT-led government is taking them and their problems seriously, in contrast to the local and national governments that they helped to elect for decades.[38] We have often heard complains about local politicians or politics in general: about corruption, inaction, lack of commitment, desrespect etc. But most women agreed that by voting for Lula things had changed for them and many expressed their intention of voting for those candidates who showed the intention to help them to come out of poverty. The behaviour of voters in the last presidential election (October 2014) seems to confirm that recipients of the PBF tend to support the PT and its allies, who champion their cause most directly, but it remains an open question whether this really represents a change in the political attitude of the poor or just a shift in their electoral favour.

[38] On the conservative or strict rightwing electoral behaviour of poor voters, particularly in North-Easth see Singer, *Os sentidos do lulismo*.

The most important effect of the PBF, however, was not one of its original goals, since it aims at fighting extreme poverty, not at modifying the personality of its beneficiaries. The PBF created opportunities for individual freedom and growing self-esteem, even if this phenomenon is still incipient and even if there is no mechanism leading automatically from receiving a regular monetary income to developing autonomy. We have tried to show in our research how this process appears to have started. We cannot yet foresee *how* it will continue, although we hope to have identified what Adorno called a social tendency[39] destined to go on and possibly to modify Brazilian society.

[39] Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Elemente einer Theorie der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008) 43.