Liberal Brutality: The Illusion of Difference within Liberalism

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Abstract

Hobbes argues that liberal orders protect individual freedom and enable subjects to live in different ways, but he is clear that only certain differences are tolerable: those who challenge the legitimacy and solidity of the order are not just different but radically different, they must be classed as ‘enemies’ and treated violently. Since Hobbes, however, liberal thinkers have emphasised diversity, not violence. Whilst they rarely advocate a fully inclusive order in which even liberalism’s enemies can live freely, they do claim that liberalism enables differences to flourish. This thesis aims to demonstrate the illusory nature of this claim. It shows that post-Hobbesian thinkers offering liberal visions of flourishing diversity conceal the number of subjects who will be classed as radically different and are likely to experience exclusion, assimilation and normalisation as a consequence.

It explains first that Locke, Mill and Rawls privilege rational, deliberative individuals in their ideals but ignore the subtle violence experienced by those who diverge from this model of subjectivity. However, the thesis focuses on three more radical theorists: William Connolly, Bonnie Honig and Chantal Mouffe. They admit that liberalism cannot escape radical difference and violence, but they attempt to limit this violence by theorising a liberal order invigorated by institutions for ‘agonistic contest,’ into which those who differ can channel their resistance and through which they can create spaces for difference. However, it is shown that, despite their aims, these theorists, in different ways, also conceal the number of subjects who will be treated violently in their visions because they diverge from liberal subjectivity. The thesis thus reveals that even radical
liberals claiming to acknowledge and confront liberalism's violence conceal the number of subjects treated violently behind an illusion of difference. It concludes by exploring the potentially devastating implications of this analysis for liberal political theory and practice.
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Introduction

This study began as a sympathetic analysis of three contemporary proponents of ‘agonistic’ conceptions of democracy, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig and Chantal Mouffe. They start from the premise that all social and political orders are ambiguous, that they do “violence to selves even while enabling them to be.”¹ This leads them to criticise all forms of order that claim to be consensual or harmonious for ignoring the violence experienced by subjects within the order. They are particularly sceptical about the liberal claim that liberalism enables subjects to live as they wish; this offers the pretence of flourishing individuality and difference, they suggest, but obscures the violence experienced by many within the liberal order. They argue, therefore, that liberal orders should be radicalised by ‘agonistic contest,’ the kind of contest that thinkers such as Nietzsche, Arendt and, to a lesser extent Foucault, identified in the practices of Ancient Greece.² As Nietzsche makes clear in perhaps the defining essay on the agon, ‘Homer’s Contest,’ the Greeks did not shy away from the competitiveness and envy driving humans, but instead channelled these instincts into contest with one another – contest that would push individuals to excel whilst also creating a more glorious and successful City.

Connolly, Honig and Mouffe contend in different ways that the agon is an appropriate device for invigorating social and political orders such as liberalism. Agonistic contest does not pretend that a liberal order can exist without treating some subjects violently; instead it provides these subjects with channels through which they can contest that violence and renegotiate the order. It thus benefits the individual by allowing them to contest violence and create spaces for difference, and it protects the liberal order by ensuring that grievances and frustrations do not develop into antagonisms that threaten it but instead are tamed. It quickly became clear, therefore, that although Connolly, Honig and Mouffe are critical of liberalism and draw on a variety of non-liberal and anti-liberal ideas – not just those of Nietzsche and Foucault, but also those of Machiavelli, Schmitt, Deleuze, Derrida and Lacan, amongst others – their agonistic visions are firmly rooted in the liberal tradition. Their goal is not to fundamentally challenge liberalism and expose the ineradicable violence concealed behind the claim that liberalism enables individuality and difference to flourish, but to rework liberal orders, to ensure that those who differ, who experience violence within the liberal order, have agonistic institutions through which they can channel their concerns and renegotiate the order. And even more interestingly, it gradually became clear that these thinkers are actually forwarding a new version of liberalism that, in different ways, continues to present the very same illusion that they identified in the first place – a more politicised and radical liberalism certainly, but nevertheless a version of liberalism that, as we shall see, continues to give the illusory impression that difference can flourish within it in much the same way as liberals have arguably done since Hobbes.
1 The Liberal Illusion

For in the *Leviathan*, the founding text of liberalism, Hobbes was emphatic that the rights of the multitude could only be protected by a powerful sovereign who “hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to conforme the wills of them all.” 

Indeed, he was clear that some subjects could not be tolerated, that those who challenged the authority of the leviathan must be classed as ‘enemies’ and treated violently. Since Hobbes, however, the emphasis on the brutality of liberalism has been minimised and it has been portrayed by liberal political thinkers as a form of political order in which individuality, diversity and difference can flourish. Classical liberal democratic theorists such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill, for example, introduced innovations, now seen as key features of liberal democracy, aimed at shifting power away from the state and allowing diversity to flourish. Locke argued that individual freedom could be guaranteed not by extending state power but by strictly limiting it to the protection of rights and ensuring that all actions of the state were consented to by the majority. Mill, concerned that society might continue to discriminate against eccentric individuals and minorities, argued for a liberal society where genius and individuality could flourish by ensuring that individual freedom of discussion and action were strictly protected. He suggests that “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any other member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.”

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In the early- to mid-twentieth century the classical liberalism of Locke and Mill, amongst others, was challenged by the ‘new’ liberalism of Green, Hobhouse and Marshall. They argued that classical liberalism’s stress on guaranteeing the ‘civil’ rights needed for individual freedom – “liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice” – did not create the conditions for individual freedom. The “right to freedom of speech,” for example, “has little real substance if, from lack of education, you have nothing to say that is worth saying, and no means of making yourself heard if you say it.” They introduced the idea, therefore, that if real rather than formal freedom is to be realised then the liberal society must not just guarantee and protect civil rights but also ‘social rights,’ “from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” – rights which can be best provided not through a limited state that leaves individuals alone, but through a liberal state that actively develops subjects’ capacities through education and welfare.

Classical and new liberals introduce different features but their vision is the same: a liberal society in which individuality and freedom can flourish, without coercive power, discrimination, or arbitrary constraints. Many contemporary liberal theorists offer a similar vision. Isaiah Berlin, for example, distinguished between negative and positive

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7 Marshall, Ibid., 8.  
8 Ibid., 2.  
9 Ibid., 8.
liberty – between freedom as acting without interference and freedom as acting in accordance with some higher principle such as rationality or the common good – to defend a classical version of liberalism similar to Mill’s ideal. Berlin contended that, rather than pretending that “the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realized,” a classical liberal order based on negative liberty recognises that “the ends of men are many, and not all of them are . . . compatible with each other” and therefore allows a plurality of ways of life to flourish. 10 Robert Nozick, in Anarchy, State and Utopia, extended Locke’s work, arguing for a “minimal state that treats us as inviolate individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources.” This, Nozick contended, “allows us . . . to choose our life and to realize our ends and conceptions of ourselves.” 11 John Rawls, conversely, develops the new liberal tradition, contending that it enables freedom, individuality and pluralism to flourish. In A Theory of Justice he explicated liberal principles of justice – including civil and social rights – that he contended will enable citizens to pursue their own conception of the good as they wish within a shared framework. 12 In his later work, Rawls goes further, arguing that his conception of ‘political liberalism’ enables individual freedom and diversity to thrive. He introduces concepts such as ‘reasonable pluralism’ ‘norms of reasonableness,’ the ‘political conception of justice,’ an ‘overlapping consensus,’ among others, to argue that

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The problem of political liberalism is to work out a political conception of political justice for a constitutional democratic regime that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, may freely endorse, and so freely live by.¹³

It is not just classical and new liberal thinkers who contend that liberalism, if appropriately configured, enables diversity to flourish. During the 1990s ‘liberal multiculturalism’ emerged in the work of Will Kymlicka, Chandran Kukathas, Joseph Raz, Charles Taylor and Iris Marion Young, amongst others.¹⁴ This is critical of classical and new liberalism. Taylor and Kymlicka, for example, contend that cultures are valuable sources of identity and dignity for subjects and provide contexts within which individual choice is possible; but, they argue, classical and new liberalism, by centring on universal rights, fail to ‘recognise,’ and often discriminate against, cultural attachments and practices. Young criticises the ‘difference-blind’ nature of liberal citizenship which, she argues, implausibly requires citizens to “assume the same impartial, general point of view transcending all particular interests, perspectives, and experiences”¹⁵ — a requirement implicitly discriminating against minorities. Liberal multiculturalists, therefore, reform liberalism to ensure that it is more accommodating toward minorities. Taylor seeks to ensure that subjects’ distinct cultural beliefs and practices are given formal recognition by liberal institutions, whilst Kymlicka argues that in addition to civil and social rights, the liberal society ought to guarantee minority

rights that protect minority cultures from domination by the majority. Thus, liberal multiculturalists are critical of liberalism's treatment of difference, but argue that with the introduction of new liberal innovations this discrimination can be ameliorated. Hence Kukathas claims that despite his criticisms, "Liberalism is the most plausible modern response to the fact of moral, religious, and cultural diversity. It is a response which says that diversity should be accommodated, and differences tolerated."\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, as suggested already, the agonistic theorists proposing a more radical liberalism also argue that liberalism, if appropriately reworked, can enable individuality and diversity to flourish. For Mouffe, Connolly and Honig, however many liberal innovations are introduced into the liberal order there will always be those Honig calls 'remainders,' subjects with unconventional practices and beliefs that differ from and perhaps even contradict those promoted by the liberal society.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the liberal order will always be based on "antagonism, violence, power and repression" as a means of suppressing these remainders so as to ensure that they do not challenge the liberal order.\textsuperscript{18} But they argue that if liberalism is invigorated by institutions and practices for agonistic contest there will not only be democratic channels through which the remainders of liberal society can challenge the violence they experience and create more spaces for difference, but this will also ensure that these remainders do not emerge in other ways that fundamentally threaten the liberal order. They do not, it must be emphasised, suggest that violence toward difference will be eradicated: some subjects will have to be excluded from agonistic contests, and the interests and desires of those

\textsuperscript{16} Kukathas, \textit{The Liberal Archipelago}, 249.
\textsuperscript{18} Chantal Mouffe, \textit{The Return of the Political}. London: Verso, 1993: 141.
who are engaged in agonistic contest cannot necessarily be reconciled. However, they
make it clear that by moving away from classical, new and multicultural liberalism
considerably, significantly strengthening democracy within liberalism, and invigorating
it with institutions not typically combined with liberalism, we will arrive at what
Connolly calls "an alternative, militant liberalism" which will "provide the guarantee
that individual freedom will be protected against the tyranny of the majority or the
domination of the totalitarian party/state."\(^{19}\)

This stylized chronology of liberal thought from Hobbes to Honig indicates that, whilst
it might crystallize around core features such as individuality, rationality, individual
rights, tolerance, the limited state and democracy, liberalism is a "historically
evolutionary, culturally contingent, and internally diverse 'family' of partisan political
ideas."\(^{20}\) However, it also indicates that, since Hobbes, liberals – from classical liberal
democrats to radical liberals – have seen liberalism as a form of political order in which
difference, diversity and individuality can flourish. Certainly, different liberal theorists
contend that different versions of liberalism are the most tolerant of diversity. But there
nevertheless appears to be a consensus amongst liberal thinkers that liberalism is the best
way of organising diverse societies; all they debate, therefore, is which version of
liberalism ought to be adopted.


And their claims in this respect have indeed been effective. In both political theory and practice liberalism is now seen as the only way of organising society if diversity is to flourish. In political theory, for example, there is no Marxist approach to diversity or anarchist position on multiculturalism. The principal critics who insist that liberalism does not enable diversity to flourish or is in some way violent toward difference are liberals themselves, who, as we have seen, are attacking one version of liberalism only to assert their alternative liberal theory. These intra-liberal arguments constitute the principle debates on multiculturalism in political theory. Indeed, the only alternatives to liberalism on these issues are nationalist, communitarian and conservative approaches, which, in the name of unity and solidarity, seek to reduce the amount of diversity and individuality of liberal societies. Thus, liberalism has hegemonised theoretical discussions of diversity; it has become established as the only form of political order that enables diversity to flourish.

This is clear, too, in political practice, where debates about multiculturalism in liberal democracies are simply debates between competing liberal positions. France’s prominent debate about Muslim girls wearing headscarves in schools, for example, revolves around two distinct liberal positions: between liberal multiculturalism, which (like Kymlicka’s theory) suggests that religious minorities ought to have the right to practice their beliefs and have them recognised by public institutions; and political liberalism, which (like Rawls’ theory) claims that the state ought to treat all subjects equally and therefore should not give one religion or culture special rights or exemptions.

but instead should simply accord individual rights. The increasingly vociferous debates about the strengths of multiculturalism and assimilation emerging in liberal democracies such as Britain following the attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 are also structured along these lines. Thus, in practical discussions about the accommodation of diversity, as much as in theoretical ones, there is now no alternative to liberalism.

2 Argument and Structure

The purpose of this thesis, however, is to demonstrate that the claim forwarded by numerous liberals since Hobbes – that liberalism enables difference to flourish – is misleading. It is argued, firstly, that although liberalism may allow various forms of difference to flourish there are clear limits to this. Liberalism requires subjects to live and act within the constraints of liberal subjectivity; those who have desires or beliefs that diverge from this, who are not just different but *radically different*, cannot be tolerated but must be treated violently by the liberal order. It is demonstrated in the rest of the thesis, however, that, whilst Hobbes may have clearly defined who he considered radically different and was candid about the need for violence toward them, successive liberals have ignored or concealed the full extent of this violence. This is not to say that they claim that *all* differences can flourish. Most liberal thinkers admit that those who are radically different because they are in some way illiberal or antidemocratic cannot be tolerated. But the number of differences that are categorised as intolerable radical differences and consequently subject to violence are far greater than they admit. Thus, these liberals present an illusion of flourishing difference which conceals the range of differences that are subtly treated violently.
Chapter 1 provides a detailed account of why violence toward radical difference is inherent to liberalism. This is outlined initially through the work of Hobbes. It is shown in some detail that he recognises that the liberal state cannot tolerate the radically different and thus advocates treating them violently. The chapter then outlines what is meant by a liberal order, why liberal orders require liberal subjects, what is meant by difference, radical difference and divergent subjects, why liberal orders can tolerate the former but not radically different or divergent subjects, and explains the parameters of the argument being forwarded. Finally, the chapter uses Douglas, Balibar, Foucault, Rousseau and Bourdieu and Passeron to outline why liberal orders respond to radical difference with violence, and the forms of exclusionary and assimilatory violence this might entail. Chapter 2 offers a number of explanations for why the radically different will exist within any liberal order. After a discussion of Nietzsche it offers – through Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan (and Žižek) – poststructural and psychoanalytic accounts of why there will always be subjects with divergent desires or beliefs that exceed the limits of liberal subjectivity.

Chapters 3 to 7 demonstrate that since Hobbes successive liberals have ignored or concealed how many subjects will be treated as radically different and in need of violent assimilation of exclusion. The initial concentration is on the work of three classical and contemporary liberal democratic theorists since Hobbes: Locke, Mill and Rawls. However, the principal focus is on the agonistic liberalism introduced by the three radical liberals, Mouffe, Connolly and Honig. They begin with poststructural and psychoanalytic premises similar to this thesis, viewing radical difference as inescapable and criticising liberal democratic thought for ignoring the extent to which those who
differ from liberal forms of subjectivity are normalised, disciplined, marginalised or excluded. But ultimately, even though they recognise the presence of the radically different within the liberal order, and even though they often acknowledge that some of these subjects will have to be treated violently so as to maintain the liberal order, they never fully admit the range of subjects who will be treated violently in their radical, agonistic liberal orders. Thus it becomes clear that even radical democratic liberals who try to shatter the illusion of difference within liberalism obscure the full extent of violence toward those in the liberal order whose subjectivity radically differs.

Chapter 3 thus concentrates on the innovations of limited, consent-based government and the protection of individual liberty vis-à-vis the majority by the classical liberal democrats Locke and Mill, showing that these visions of liberal society are premised upon violence toward those who have desires that diverge too far from their ideals of liberal subjectivity. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the work of the prominent contemporary liberal democrat John Rawls obscures the violent assimilation and exclusion of those who do not conform to the ideal of the deliberative, rational subject. Crucially, though, it uses the work of the radical agonistic liberals who are the focus of later chapters to forward this critique, since they see radical difference as inescapable and consequently are critical of liberal democrats like Rawls precisely for obscuring the violence toward divergent subjects within their liberal visions. Chapters 5 to 7, however, demonstrate that, despite their aims, the radical agonistic theorists conceal the range of subjects who will be treated violently in their visions.
Chapter 5 analyses Chantal Mouffe's 'agonistic pluralism.' For Mouffe, differences are ineradicable from liberal orders but are suppressed by the supposed consensus on liberal values. In order to avoid these differences exploding into antagonisms directed against other subjects or the liberal order Mouffe seeks to channel differences into democratic institutions through which they can be tamed; the key task of democratic politics is thus to "transform antagonism into agonism," to transform aggressive confrontations between enemies into restrained contests between adversaries.22 This requires establishing contestatory institutions so as to bring conflicts to the fore, but it also requires those subjects who are involved in such contests to endorse a set of 'ethico-political principles' based around the values of liberal democracy. However, although Mouffe acknowledges that a violent hegemonic project will be needed in order to establish adherence to these ethico-political principles, and that those who refuse must be excluded from engaging in democratic contest, she conceals the extent of exclusion, surveillance and normalisation that will be needed to maintain the order.

Chapter 6 examines William Connolly's 'ethical agonism.' Connolly contends that if the liberal order is to make space for difference it ought to be conceived 'rhizomatically' – as composed of multiple, overlapping minorities – so as to ensure that divergent subjects are not normalised and treated as deviants. A rhizomatic society will enable differences to flourish, but it will also produce more conflicts and clashes between different subjects. Therefore he suggests that subjects need to engage in public negotiations and, if this is not to spiral into aggressive conflicts, then subjects must also cultivate a

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22 Although this phrase is Mouffe's, Connolly makes the same point, saying that politics must "strive to convert an antagonism of identity into an agonism of difference." See Mouffe, On the Political. London: Routledge, 2005: 20; Connolly, Identity/Difference, 178.
pluralist ethos – a radicalised, pluralised version of liberal tolerance – that pushes them to engage with others respectfully and responsively. He recognises that some subjects who reject the ethos – those whom he calls ‘fundamentalists’ – will have to be excluded, but most will be able to cultivate the ethos to a sufficient degree voluntarily. However, like Mouffe, Connolly fails to appreciate the significance of radical difference being inescapable. Although subjects should voluntarily cultivate the pluralist ethos rather than it be enforced through a hegemonic project, there will be a normalising pressure on subjects compelling them to conform to the pluralist ethos. Moreover, the number of subjects who diverge from the ethos may be far greater than Connolly admits, meaning not only that many more subjects will need to be excluded from political negotiations but that excluding easily identifiable fundamentalist minorities simply fixes the blame on them, turning them into scapegoats for the failings of agonistic negotiations.

Finally, Chapter 7 turns to the ‘political agonism’ of Bonnie Honig. Like Mouffe and Connolly, Honig suggests that because liberalism treats divergent subjects violently democratic, agonistic channels need to be available through which they can contest the violence and create spaces in which they can live differently. However, unlike the former two agonists, Honig rejects the idea that political negotiations must be accompanied by a set of principles or an ethos. Instead, Honig embraces the agon as a place in which contest and resistance is ongoing, in which divergent subjects are not excluded for failing to adopt a particular form of subjectivity, and in which radically different subjects who attempt to dominate the agon or undermine liberalism are not prohibited but challenged by others. She thus suggests that the political agon need not exclude radically different subjects and will enable some to create spaces in which they
can live differently from liberal subjectivity. However, this not only ignores the threat posed by those who will not engage in the agon, who resist it radically and seek to destroy it. More importantly, Honig introduces political agonism into liberalism without demanding anything of the subjects' ethical sensibilities or principles, or requiring a degree of equality in their education, political skills, status and wealth. As such, all the inequalities and hierarchies between subjects present in liberalism are also present in the agon, making it unlikely that agonistic contest will be an effective way for divergent subjects to contest the violence they experience. Thus, Honig's more 'political' approach simply obscures the way in which subjects treated violently in the liberal order will continue to experience violence in political agonism.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that, contrary to its current portrayal as a form of political order that enables differences to flourish, liberalism is actually violent toward certain forms of difference – it is just that these dynamics have been obscured by liberal claims to the contrary. Certainly, it is shown that not all liberal visions are equally violent; some treat more subjects as radically different than others and thus treat more subjects violently, and some use much more direct forms of violence than others. But all these liberal visions rely on violence, all of them fail to acknowledge this violence to some degree, and as such all present an illusion of difference. This conclusion has a number of implications. Firstly, it indicates that violence toward difference is the dark underbelly on which liberal political thought – from classical to radical variants – relies, but which it cannot articulate. Secondly, it is not just liberal theories but also existing liberal societies that conceal the extent of violence toward difference within them. They make explicit the exclusion of anti-democratic and anti-liberal groups, but conceal the
subtler violence experienced by those who diverge from the norms of liberal subjectivity: women wearing the *niqab*, gypsies, those with mental health problems, underachievers and the socially awkward, for example. Thirdly, this arguably means that liberal political thinkers ought to be more candid about liberalism. Rather than offering an illusory vision of flourishing diversity, they ought to reveal exactly who will be treated as radically different and subject to violence. This is especially the case, it is suggested, for agonistic thinkers who justify their visions on the basis that they are more candid about the fate of divergent subjects in the liberal order. Finally, it is suggested that such honesty is important because if the violence experienced by divergent subjects is consistently ignored or concealed then this might lead the excluded subjects of liberalism to undertake a radical, shattering act that not only unsettles but destroys the liberal order.

3 The Normative Dimension

The thesis offers a robust critique of liberalism. It is important, however, to make explicit its normative underpinnings. Firstly, this thesis is *not* arguing for an alternative to liberalism, for a superior vision of political order that does what liberalism promises, enabling difference to flourish. The lesson of poststructural and psychoanalytic thought is that *all* political orders are ineradicably violent toward radical difference. There can, therefore, be no political order without violently assimilating or excluding radical difference, and consequently this thesis does not look to an alternative vision of society in which violence is eradicated. Secondly, this thesis is *not* underpinned by an unspoken normative claim that all violence is necessarily, categorically unjustifiable. It may well be, in fact, that violence – even some of the acts of liberal brutality catalogued here –
can be justified. It might be, as Hobbes insists, that a world without political orders would be a chaotic world of war of all against all, a far more violent world than a world with political orders. And the violent assimilation or exclusion of those subjects who threaten the continuation of society might be necessary for ensuring less violence overall, as Mouffe and Connolly suggest. However, these issues of if, how and when violence is justified raise questions and arguments beyond the scope of this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is more modest: to draw to attention the violence that liberalism does toward radical difference. And it does so, not because some alternative is better or because there is no normative justification for this violence, but because post-Hobbesian liberals claim that their visions of society allow difference to flourish, but this conceals the full extent of violence toward divergent subjects within their visions. In this sense, what is objected to is not necessarily the violence but the deception, the fact that the extent of the violence toward difference is not even acknowledged let alone justified, but is actually concealed, by post-Hobbesian liberals – a concealment that enables them to present the illusion that difference can flourish within the liberal society. The normative argument running through the thesis, then, is that the full extent of liberalism's violence toward difference must be acknowledged rather than hidden; it is only possible to consider its legitimacy and justifiability once it has been revealed.

4 Originality and Justification

The central contention advanced in this thesis, as well as many of the additional ideas and arguments it develops, are drawn from a range of literatures. It is useful at this stage, therefore, to situate the thesis within the most important of these – to outline its relation
to the work of Schmitt, Nietzsche, poststructural and psychoanalytic theorists, Foucault, Marx, liberal multiculturalists, and proponents of and commentators on agonistic conceptions of democracy.

Schmitt

The argument that liberal political orders conceal the full extent of violence toward the radically different resonates strongly with the critique of liberalism advanced by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*. Schmitt argues here that ‘the political’ consists in relations between ‘friends’ and ‘enemies.’ An enemy, he makes clear, is not “merely any competitor. . . An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity.” In particular, for Schmitt, the enemy is another state or nation which is “existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.”

23 The political is unlikely to disappear: states and nations will always define others as enemies. It is the essence of politics. The problem is, however, that on Schmitt’s reading, liberals pretend otherwise. Liberalism’s emphasis on limiting the government’s power so as to guarantee individual freedom and extend rights weakens the power of the state, the sense of shared identity, and gives the false impression that there are no enemies, that everybody can be friends.

But, as Strauss explains, for Schmitt, “Liberalism has thus killed not the political but only understanding of the political, sincerity regarding the political. In order to remove the smokescreen over reality that liberalism produces, the political must be made

apparent as such and as simply undeniable." This is important not only because, as Schmitt notes, the "high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy," but also because failing to distinguish the enemy is dangerous: "everywhere in political history, in foreign as well as in domestic politics, the incapacity or the unwillingness to make this distinction is a symptom of the political end." This thesis follows Schmitt's counsel. It does not reveal 'the political' as such, the other collectivities against which liberal states define themselves and which define themselves against liberalism. But it does reveal that behind the smokescreen of an order committed to flourishing diversity are various subjects within the liberal order who are implicitly categorised as 'different and alien,' as subjects who are too different to be tolerated, who need to be controlled, normalised or excluded – who, perhaps, are subtly categorised as enemies. Thus, in making the full extent of violence toward difference in liberalism clear the thesis follows the same logic as Schmitt's critique.

**Nietzsche**

However, the thinker to whom this thesis is most indebted is Nietzsche; many of the ideas and criticisms discussed herein draw from his work. This is the case not only because Nietzsche is the author of 'Homer’s Contest,' one of the most significant essays on agonistic contest, which is mentioned at various points in the thesis and is analysed in detail in Chapter 7. In addition, this thesis's central argument, that liberalism always contains a radical difference, is an idea expressed in many of Nietzsche's works, most

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notably Beyond Good and Evil and On the Genealogy of Morals. This is a point that will be explored in Chapter 2, but a cursory outline is useful here. For Nietzsche claims that modern European societies dominated by ideas such as liberalism, socialism and democracy create subjects who adhere to a ‘herd morality,’ a way of thinking that ensures that they conform and are obedient. Such societies force subjects to suppress their ineradicable passions, their “instinct for freedom,” their natural desire to live in creative, spontaneous ways. It is only by suppressing these divergent instincts – by taming and domesticating them – that the liberal order can be established and maintained. This strategy of repression is effective for the majority of subjects; their “instincts” are crushed and forced to “turn inward,” making them resentful and bitter.

But Nietzsche proclaims that a small minority of “exceptional human beings” of aristocratic not modern birth is not tamed or leveled down by the violence of the liberal order. Their instincts burst through; they live in creative, excellent, truly individual ways. They are an even more radical difference than the instinct for freedom present in everyone – they are radical differences that cannot be dealt with.

In many ways this thesis uses Nietzsche’s broad critique of liberalism to undertake detailed analyses of particular liberal thinkers, showing that their liberal visions are far more reliant upon the suppression of inescapable radical differences than they recognise. However, whereas Nietzsche has a specific view of the kinds of instincts that are

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27 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, 523.

28 Ibid., 520.

29 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 366.
suppressed – the desires for greatness, power, glory, independence, and so forth – here the desires that are suppressed can be of any kind at all. They might be desires for conformity, custom, tradition or certainty – singular desires that exceed liberal forms of subjectivity, but would also be rejected by Nietzsche. Further, unlike Nietzsche, whose principal concern is with the suppression of the desires of the minority of subjects who may be capable of greatness, here excess desires circulate through all subjects, not just exceptional human beings; as such, everybody can, potentially, be the focus of violence in the liberal order.

Poststructuralism and Psychoanalysis

It is for this reason that the thesis draws more on poststructural and psychoanalytic theorists such as Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan for its ideas about radical difference than Nietzsche. These theorists, especially poststructuralists as we will see, build upon and develop Nietzsche’s thought in the way just described, insisting that all attempts to order the world will be exceeded by radical differences which cannot be subsumed, whether these are singularities or differences-in-themselves as is the case for Deleuze, différence as for Derrida, the Real as with Lacan, or resistance for Foucault. However, although these thinkers provide explanations for why these radical differences are inescapable, and although they touch on and criticise liberalism, none provides the kind of detailed critique of liberalism forwarded here. Hence, their accounts of the inescapability of radical difference form the basis upon which this thesis advances a more detailed critique of liberalism.
Foucault and Marx (and Capitalism)

Perhaps the poststructural thinker whose arguments are most similar to that advanced here is Foucault in his analyses of madness and punishment. Whilst Foucault's focus is not explicitly on liberalism, a key theme in these critical histories is that as modern societies became increasingly reliant on industry there was a need to create capitalist subjects, that is, to assimilate subjects into the capitalist order so as to ensure that they become docile workers contributing toward production. Diversity, therefore, can flourish within capitalist society, but there are limits to that diversity — limits which are circumscribed by the needs of capital. Those who cannot work, who refuse to work, who steal, who challenge effective production — who, in short, are radically different — must be assimilated or excluded. Thus, in *Madness and Civilization* Foucault notes that although leprosy largely disappeared from Europe in the fifteenth century "the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and 'deranged minds' would take the part of the leper." 30

Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault charts the rise of disciplinary power — power aimed at normalising and subtly moulding subjects — and shows that through disciplinary power prisons delivered docile subjects to the 'apparatus of production,' "producing individuals mechanized according to the general norms of an industrial society." 31

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31 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1979: 242. Foucault's understandings of power are central to this thesis and will be explored in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2.
Marx also offered a critique with which this thesis resonates. Marx, along with the numerous Marxists who have interpreted and reinterpreted him, was less concerned than Foucault about the way in which capitalism requires capitalist subjects and more concerned with the direct violence the capitalist economy – which he argued the liberal order supports – does to subjects. Marx, of course, rejected the claim that liberalism and capitalism enable diversity to flourish, arguing, on the contrary, that the liberal claim that it allows diversity to flourish is illusory. A limited freedom in the form accumulation and wealth may be available for the bourgeoisie, but the vast majority, the proletariat, experience capitalism as a violent system that alienates them from the means of production, impoverishes them and leave them with little time, resources or capacity for other activities. But ultimately he sees this as the contradiction that will destroy capitalism: as the proletariat becomes increasingly impoverished they will gradually develop class consciousness, resist and overthrow the violent capitalist order: “What the bourgeoisie . . . produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers.”

This thesis offers arguments that clearly parallel the critiques forwarded by Foucault and Marx. However, unlike Foucault, who contends that capitalist orders require capitalist subjects, the focus here is on the way in which liberal orders require liberal subjects. And unlike Marx, who contends that violence is inherent within capitalism (for which liberalism is but a cover), this thesis contends that the violence is inherent to liberalism, not capitalism. Thus, the thesis is founded on the idea that liberalism and capitalism are distinct, that liberal subjects and liberal orders are not reducible to capitalist subjects and capitalist orders. This is perhaps a controversial idea and requires some explanation and

qualification: to say that liberalism and capitalism are distinct is not to say that the two are entirely separate, or to say that we can consider liberal subjectivity or evaluate the violence toward subjects who diverge from it without also considering capitalism; it is simply to say that liberalism and liberal subjectivity are not identical to capitalism and capitalist subjectivity and the violence experienced by subjects who diverge from liberal subjectivity is distinct from and cannot be reduced to the fact that they diverge from capitalist subjectivity.

In the first place, we can distinguish between liberalism and capitalism conceptually. Liberalism is portrayed by liberal theorists as a form of political order based around values such as freedom, individualism, equality and tolerance which will provide a framework within which subjects can live as they wish and in which, therefore, diversity and difference flourish. Capitalism, by contrast, can be defined, relatively uncontroversially, as an economic system that entails “private ownership,” “paid employment” and the “Creation of goods – or the offering of services – for profit via a system of exchange, i.e. the market.”

Moreover, we can also distinguish between liberalism and capitalism in practice as capitalism frequently exists without liberalism – China presents a compelling contemporary example of this but the emergence of capitalism across Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often under similarly illiberal conditions. That said, however, liberal states arguably cannot exist without capitalism. For as classical liberal political theorists such as Hobbes and Locke make clear (as we will see to some extent in Chapters 1 and 3), capitalism is both a

33 Simon Tormey, *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner’s Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2004: 10. This is an uncontroversial definition in that, as Tormey continues, it “is a pretty anodyne definition . . most of those who take some ‘professional’ interest in the matter would regard it with a shrug of the shoulders.”
means of ensuring that subjects will remain committed to the liberal state and a way of protecting individual freedom. Liberalism thus needs capitalism.

Liberal ideals of subjectivity are also distinct from but connected to the forms of subjectivity most appropriate for capitalism. As we will see, liberal subjectivity is presented by different theorists in different ways, but it tends to involve rationality or reason, deliberation, toleration, reflection, autonomy and, in more radical thinkers, openness toward difference and a willingness to engage in public deliberations. Capitalism, by contrast, requires self-interested subjects who are directed toward wealth accumulation — 'possessive individualism,' as Macpherson characterises capitalist subjectivity. But again, despite being distinct, the models of subjectivity that we find in the work of liberals from Locke through to Rawls often overlap considerably with the kind of subjectivity most appropriate for the capitalist economy. In Locke, for example, the liberal subject — the subject who can engage in politics — is also the rational, capitalist subject who thrives on accumulating wealth. Macpherson develops his concept of 'possessive individualism' precisely through his analysis of Locke. Similarly, in Rawls the liberal subject would also be the most successful subject in capitalist society — a subject who plans her life, who reflects on her future, who is thoughtful, reflective, sensible. There is a distinction between capitalist and liberal subjects, then, just as there is a distinction between capitalism and liberalism, but it is not clear-cut.

And this indicates that one cannot fully consider the violence experienced by those who diverge from liberal subjectivity without also considering capitalism. The subjects whose political views are excluded from consideration in Locke’s vision, for example, are the subjects who are viewed as irrational; but this category includes those who have failed to acquire property and work instead as wage labourers in the capitalist economy. Moreover, as we will see at various points in this thesis, many of the radical differences that emerge and challenge the liberal order stem from the differences produced by the capitalist economy. Intolerance, racism, an attachment to tradition, the desire for security, for a powerful state, for the abolition of private property – all of these threaten the liberal order to some extent and, although they might have a variety of causes, a major one is the inequalities created by capitalism. Indeed, as we will see, Honig’s agonistic attempt to reduce the violence experienced by ‘underachievers,’ ‘misfits’ and other divergent subjects in the liberal order is undermined by the inequalities and hierarchies present in liberal, capitalist societies. Thus, there are clear interconnections between capitalist and liberal violence.

Indeed, whilst there is not enough space to do justice to this interconnection in this thesis, many of those divergent subjects who experience violence in the liberal order are likely to be the very same subjects who experience violence in the capitalist economy. A contemporary example of liberal violence occasionally discussed in this thesis is that many devout British Muslims experience violent assimilation and exclusion because their identity and religious and cultural practices are perceived to differ from the norm of liberal subjectivity. However, the violence they experience is not simply a consequence of having different subjectivities within liberal society but is compounded by the
violence of capitalism – by the fact that British Muslims are not only misrecognised and
discriminated against because of their religion and identity, but typically also have
poorer housing and more limited resources and opportunities than other British citizens.
Moreover, these two types of violence cannot be disconnected: the relative poverty of
many British Muslims contributes toward their identities being viewed as other, just as
their being viewed as other contributes toward their poverty.35

In sum, then, to say that liberalism and liberal subjectivity are distinct from capitalism
and capitalist subjectivity is to say that, although liberalism remains intertwined with
capitalism, it cannot be reduced to it. As such, the violence experienced by divergent
subjects in the liberal order does not simply stem from the capitalist economy or from
the way in which the subject deviates from the model docile worker, although these
factors are often complicit; the violence also stems from the way in which a liberal
society intended to enable subjects to live freely is dependent upon the violent
assimilation or exclusion of differences that exceed and challenge liberal forms of
subjectivity.

**Liberal Multiculturalism**

The logic of the critique forwarded here is similar to that of Marx and Foucault, then,
but the focus is on liberalism not capitalism. However, there is another literature which
does focus on liberal subjectivity and violence: the work of the liberal multiculturalists

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35 For a recent account of the varied problems facing British Muslims see Tahir Abbas ed., *Muslim
inequality and discrimination see, respectively, the chapters by Muhammad Anwar, ‘Issues, Policy and
discussed earlier, Young, Taylor, Kymlicka, Kukathas and Raz, amongst others. As seen, they argue that classical and new versions of liberalism treat religious, cultural and ethnic minorities violently by ignoring cultural attachments and practices, implicitly privileging Western forms of subjectivity above others, and failing to offer institutional recognition to religious, ethnic and cultural minorities. As such they debate various ways of reforming liberalism to make it more accommodating toward minorities and thus ameliorate this violence (at least for those who not differ too far from and challenge the liberal order), from according institutional recognition of minorities to protecting minority rights and providing minorities with a voice in democratic fora. The arguments of the liberal multiculturalists appear to overlap with this thesis, then, since their contention is precisely that liberalism treats those subjects that diverge from the liberal order violently.

However, there are key differences between their critiques of liberalism and that advanced in this thesis. First, although they recognise that liberalism treats divergent subjects violently, they see this as a feature of 'traditional' liberalism, not a feature of liberalism per se. This thesis demonstrates that it is not specific forms of liberal order, but liberalism itself, that is inherently violent. As such, whereas for liberal multiculturalists liberalism can be reformed and this violence eliminated, the argument here is that reform is impossible as violence toward difference is inherent to liberalism. Second, liberal multiculturalists see divergent subjects as members of particular cultural, ethnic and religious minority groups. Here, however, following the insights provided by

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36 There are clearly many other liberal multiculturalists but, given the sheer number it is impossible to discuss all of these, hence the focus on four of the most prominent. For a more detailed analysis of many of the liberal multiculturalist critiques and debates see Kenny, *The Politics of Identity*. 
radical difference, divergence from liberal subjectivity can be fleeting desires and urges that occur within all subjects; distinct minorities are therefore not the sole focus of this thesis. Finally, liberal multiculturalists argue that divergent subjects experience violence in the form of intolerance and misrecognition, but they rarely envision these subjects resisting. Toward the end of this thesis, however, it is suggested that violence and resistance are intertwined: resistance, it is argued, whilst not inevitable, is a possible reaction to violence.

**Agonistic Democracy**

Perhaps the only theorists who have used the notion of radical difference to demonstrate that violence toward divergent subjects is inherent to liberalism are those radical, agonistic liberals on whom this thesis concentrates — Mouffe, Connolly and Honig. However, they are not just critical. They acknowledge liberalism’s violence toward radical difference, but then attempt to reform liberalism by invigorating it with agonistic contest so as to enable subjects to negotiate differences and create spaces for divergence. But in so doing they make the same mistake as the liberal democrats of whom they are critical. As such, although agonists to some extent reveal the violence hidden within

37 There are, in fact, another two proponents of agonistic democracy — James Tully and David Owen — but both are excluded from analysis. Tully is not examined because although he draws attention to the violence toward divergent subjects inherent in liberalism he does not spell this out as systematically as Mouffe, Connolly and Honig. His focus is on modern constitutionalism generally rather than liberalism specifically. Moreover, when he draws to attention this violence he does so from the perspective of ‘value pluralism’ rather than radical difference, meaning that his whole theoretical orientation toward order and violence differs from that explicated here. Owen is excluded because his support for Nietzschean agonistic contest does not appear to be an attempt to reform or rework liberalism. Owen ultimately appears to see the agon as an alternative to liberalism. For Tully’s agonistic politics see: James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; ‘The Agonic Freedom of Citizens,’ *Economy and Society* 28, no. 2 (1999): 161-82; ‘Recognition and Dialogue: The Emergence of a New Field,’ *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (2004): 84-106. For Owen’s agonism see: David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason*. London: Routledge, 1994; *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason*. London: Sage, 1995.
liberalism, they do not recognise the extent to which it is also inherent to their own radical visions.

Those commenting on agonistic democracy also overlook the violence within agonistic ideals. For, although there is a growing secondary literature on agonistic democracy, it largely focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of agonistic contest as an alternative model of democratic politics to deliberative democracy.\(^{38}\) Whilst such a focus is legitimate, it overlooks the fact that agonistic democracy is also a strategy for reworking liberalism. It is because of this that the secondary literature on agonism receives only limited attention in this thesis. Indeed, it is because of this gap that it is necessary to provide a detailed, critical account of how and why agonists seek to rework liberalism, demonstrating that even their reworked liberalism fails to create a liberal order in which the violence toward all radical differences are either acknowledged or eliminated.

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Unlike the violence within capitalism, then, the full extent and concealment of violence toward difference within liberalism has not been recognised, not even by those literatures that touch upon or try to deal with such issues. A detailed demonstration of the violence toward radical difference inherent in the work of diverse liberal theorists—especially those radical theorists who confront such issues—is, therefore, an original line of research. Finally, such an analysis is justified because it challenges the misleading but currently unquestioned claim that liberalism enables difference to flourish. For, as discussed already, liberalism has become hegemonic in both practical and theoretical discussions of diversity; it has become established not as one possible way of ordering societies so that difference and individuality can flourish, but as the only way of doing so. The analysis offered in this thesis, therefore, is critical. By reminding liberals of their Hobbesian origins and locating the ways in which even apparently radical forms of liberalism conceal the full extent of violence toward divergent subjects in their ideals, the thesis fundamentally challenges liberalism’s hegemony, illustrating the illusion of difference within liberalism.
the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firm form was not only
instituted by an act of violence but also carried to its conclusion by nothing but acts of
violence—... the oldest 'state' thus appeared as a fearful tyranny, as an oppressive and
remorseless machine, and went on working until this raw material of people and semi-
animals was at last not only thoroughly kneaded and pliant but also formed.²

All Nation-States are born and found themselves in violence. I believe that truth to be
irrecusable. This foundational violence is not only forgotten. The foundation is made in
order to hide it; by its essence it tends to organise amnesia.²

Introduction

This thesis demonstrates that those who claim that liberalism enables differences to
flourish ignore or conceal the number of subjects who are treated violently by liberal
orders because they appear to diverge from, to be radically different from, liberal forms
of subjectivity. The aim of this chapter is to outline the parameters of this argument in
detail, explaining what is meant by such terms as political orders, liberal orders, liberal
subjects, divergent subjects, difference, radical difference, violence, exclusion and
assimilation. First, though, we must turn to Hobbes. Whilst successive liberals may have
concealed the brutality of liberalism, Thomas Hobbes did not—he was explicit about
who was too different to be tolerated and must therefore be treated violently.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, edited and translated
² Jacques Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, translated by Mark Dooley and Michael
1 Power, Violence and Difference: Hobbes's Leviathan

As scholarship on and the historical understanding of Hobbes's work has progressed, especially during the twentieth century, the *Leviathan*, originally published in 1651, has been recognised not only as "a masterpiece of English political thought" but as the founding text of liberalism. Certainly, Hobbes does not talk about many of the features that have come to be associated with liberalism since Hobbes, individual freedom or limited government, for example – or, at least, when he does talk about them he does so in terms that contemporary liberals might not instantly recognise. However, he nevertheless sets out the fundamental aim of liberal government, to which all other features added since his work are intended to contribute: that the role of the state is to protect the rights of individuals. It is for this reason that Leo Strauss, one of the foremost analysts of Hobbes, writes that:

If we may call liberalism that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as distinguished from the duties, of man and which identifies the function of the state with the projection or safeguarding of those rights, we must say the founder of liberalism was Hobbes.  

However, as we will see in what follows, Hobbes's begins from pessimistic premises about the ineradicable passions of human nature, about the individual's ceaseless desire

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for power and the consequent war of all against all, and contends, because of this, that the only way of eliminating the violence of the state of nature is by establishing a powerful, violent state that will force a multitude into obedience. In this sense, as Foucault recognises, the leviathan uses the fear of violence to bring an end to violence between subjects. Whilst Hobbes certainly does not envision the leviathan moulding the multitude into an undifferentiated homogeneous people, he explicitly recognises that a liberal society does require a liberal ‘people’ and that, therefore, there are certain differences that cannot be tolerated, namely, those subjects who are radically different and challenge the legitimacy of the leviathan.

**The State of Nature**

Whilst *Leviathan* begins with an outline of Hobbes’s materialist account of natural philosophy, the most significant place to discern his reflections on founding and maintaining order is in later chapters, in which he argues that, without any kind of power ruling over them, the natural state of humankind – the state of nature – is war. As he puts it, “during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called WARRE; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.” Hobbes continues:

> In such condition, there is no place for Industry . . . no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation . . . no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no

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Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.⁶

One reason why Hobbes concludes that the natural state of mankind is war, as Tuck stresses is that, for Hobbes “Good and Evill, are names that signifie our Appetites, and Aversions” rather than being objective; therefore “divers men, differ not onely in their Judgement, on the senses of what is pleasant, and unpleasant to the tast, smell, hearing, touch, and sight; but also of what is comfortable, or disagreeable to Reason, in the actions of common life.” Such differences often result in conflicts. Hence he notes that it is “From whence arise disputes, controversies, and at last War.”⁷

More fundamentally for Hobbes, the state of nature is war-like because individuals are driven by self-interested passions and desires — by the desire for material gain, glory, and happiness. In relation to the latter, for example, Hobbes contends that felicity does not stem, pace Aristotle, from the life of the mind. “Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later.” This means that

the object of mans desire is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. And therefore the voluntary actions, and the inclinations of all men, tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life (p.70).

Hobbes is aware, however, that individuals seeking current and future happiness are continually impeded by the fact that "they have appetites for things which they cannot enjoy in common, and of which there is such scarcity that all who want them cannot have them," as Macpherson puts it. As such, Hobbes recognises, firstly, that

if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their owne conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another (p.87).

Secondly, he is clear that in order to avoid this, in order to ensure that they are not destroyed by another individual and their life and happiness thereby ended, individuals will be engage in a constant war so as to attain power over and against others, thus immunising themselves from the attacks of others. It "is not alwayes that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power; but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more" (p.70). Indeed, "there is no way for any man to secure himselfe, so reasonable, as Anticipation; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other great enough to endanger him" (pp.87-8).

However, Hobbes also recognises that "Nature hath made men . . . equally, in the faculties of body, and mind," meaning that "when all reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to

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himselfe any benefit, to which another man may not pretend, as well as he" (p.86-7).

Therefore, as Foucault explains:

The primitive war, the war of every man against every man, is born of equality. Even a man who is a little weaker than other men, than the other man, is sufficiently similar to the strongest man to realize that he is strong enough not to have to surrender. So the weak man never gives up. As for the strong man, he is never strong enough not to be worried and, therefore, not to be constantly on his guard. The absence of natural difference therefore creates uncertainties, risks, hazards, and, therefore, the will to fight on both sides.⁹

Thus, individuals need to attain power so as to gain security and happiness, but individuals never achieve the security they desire, there are always others who can and will challenge them, and as such a war of all against all emerges. Hence Hobbes writes that "I put to a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death" (p.70).

Hobbes's claim that the natural passions of and equality between individuals produces a state of nature characterised by the war of all against all leads him to suggest that all individuals have the equal natural right to protect themselves by whatever means they can. As he puts it

The Right of Nature . . . is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of his doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall

⁹ Foucault, Society Must be Defended, 90-1.
conceive to be the aptest means thereunto. . . And because the condition of Man is a condition of Warre of every one against every one; in which case every one is governed by his own Reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemyes; It followeth, that in such a condition, every man has a Right to every thing; even to anothers body (p.91).

But each individual’s right to live as she wishes cannot be realised: because the ultimate end of the individual is to protect herself and her happiness, in the state of nature – where all have the right to do anything at all to protect themselves – “there can be no security to any man” (p.91), life is ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short,’ and the individual’s right to secure their own existence is forever undermined.

**From the Multitude to the People**

Hobbes contends, therefore, that if individuals are to realise their desires and protect themselves from ‘violent death’, they must leave the state of nature and create, or contract into, a political and social order, a *Commonwealth*, that will guarantee order and peace. Hobbes’s idea is that although individual rights are *natural* rights and therefore inalienable, individuals will agree to ‘transfer’ their rights to a sovereign – to a monarch, political leader or elected assembly – who will exercise those rights in their stead with the aim of providing security and protection for all individuals. Although each individual’s liberty will be significantly reduced, precisely because of this, their security will be increased:

> The finall Cause, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in
Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from the miserable condition of Warre (p.117).

However, Hobbes recognises that if the Commonwealth is to be maintained then it needs to transform a mass of self-interested, passionate individuals into liberal subjects – into subjects who identify and behave in accordance with the Commonwealth. Or, to put it in Hobbes’s terms, it needs to transform the ‘multitude’ into the ‘people.’ Hardt and Negri explain this distinction:

*The people* has traditionally been a unitary conception. The population, of course, is characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the population a single identity: ‘the people’ is one. The multitude, in contrast, is many. The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences.¹⁰

However, although the aim of Hobbes’s leviathan is to transform the multitude into the people, to transform the “many” into the “one”, as he puts it, this does not entail stripping the multitude of their differences and desires, nor does it require homogenising them (p.114). Individuals’ passions are ineradicable and, as we will see, Hobbes encourages them to flourish in the Commonwealth. However, there are certain passions that he recognises cannot flourish. For if the Commonwealth is to successfully end the

war of all against all – if the order is not to crumble – then it needs individuals with a particular form of subjectivity: it needs a ‘people’ composed of liberal subjects, subjects who may have different and conflicting interests or desires but who accept the legitimacy of the social contract and are united around their commitment to the Commonwealth.

This means that the leviathan’s major role is ensuring that the ineradicable passions of individuals do not diverge too far from liberal subjectivity and challenge the liberal order. Hirschman explains how Hobbes suggests that this can be done. He notes that various political and economic thinkers in early modern and modern Europe began to argue for capitalism and the state on the basis that individual’s have ineradicable passions that can never be eliminated but which can be tamed. He identifies numerous strategies suggested by these thinkers: some argued that passions should be ‘repressed,’ others that they should be ‘harnessed’ for other purposes such as wealth creation, some argued that passions ought to be confronted by ‘countervailing passions,’ whilst others claimed that passions should be transformed into ‘interests.’

Hobbes’s thought, Hirschman suggests, is “Notoriously difficult to pigeonhole,” but elements of each strategy are present in *Leviathan.*

On the one hand, Hobbes argues that the leviathan must establish a market so that individuals’ ineradicable passions can be channelled into economic accumulation and trade. This not only means that individuals expend their passions in the market rather

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12 Ibid., 15.
than in more rebellious or uncontrollable ways, but it also pitches individuals with opposing passions against one another, and transforms them into much less passionate and uncontrollable 'interests.' Thus, there will still be a multiplicity of differences, with subjects pursuing their own interests and desires as they wish, often against others. However, more radical differences – passions and desires that might challenge or threaten the Commonwealth or push individuals to engage in war with others – will be less likely to emerge because these kinds of destructive passions have been channelled into and tamed by the market.

On the other hand, however, Hobbes recognises that the market alone will not be enough to ensure that the passions of the multitude do not emerge as uncontrollable desires or resistance to the Commonwealth. As we will see, they will still have passions and desires that lead away from liberal subjectivity. As such, he claims that when subjects transfer their rights to the sovereign they give to the sovereign unlimited power. To Hobbes,

> it appeareth plainly . . . that the Sovereign Power, whether placed in One Man, as in Monarchy, or in one Assembly of men . . . is as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it. And though of so unlimited a Power, men may fancy many evil consequences, yet the consequences of the want of it, which is perpetuall warre of every man against his neighbour, are much worse (pp.144-5).

This power is needed because the passions of the multitude can only be kept in check through a powerful, violent, coercive state which can induce terror and fear to such a degree that despite their passions for power, glory and wealth, individuals have a greater
desire not to break the laws of the Commonwealth or diverge too far from liberal subjectivity — the immense power of the state mean that it is no longer in their interest to do so. Hence the sovereign “hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to conforme the wills of them all” (p.120).

More specifically, Hobbes recognises that despite the displacement of passions into the market, individuals might continue to have passions or desires that lead them to act in ways that diverge from the requisite form of subjectivity, to break the rules and laws of the Commonwealth. He gives numerous examples of individuals’ desires and passions that can lead them to commit such crimes: being “Stubborn, Insociable, Froward, Intractable” (p.106); ‘vain-glory,’ or the presumption that one has great riches, friends and wisdom (p.205); “the Passions, of Hate, Lust, Ambition, and Covetousnesse” which are “so annexed to the nature . . . of man . . . that their effects cannot be hindered” (p.206); claiming absolute propriety over one’s goods, even above the sovereign (p.224), greed (p.228); and the propensity to follow charismatic leaders (p.229). As he puts it, in sum:

though Soveraignty, in the intention of them that make it, be immortall; yet is it in its own nature, not only subject to violent death, by forreign war; but also through the ignorance, and passions of men, it hath in it, from the very institutions, many seeds of a naturall morality, by Intestine Discord (p.153).

In order avoid ‘Intestine Discord,’ therefore, Hobbes suggests that there must be a “coercive Power, to compel men equally to the performance of their Covenants, by the
terror of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by breach of their covenant” (pp.100-1). The fear of violence is the only plausible approach:

The force of Words, being . . . too weak to hold men to the performance of their Covenants; there are in mans nature, but two imaginable helps to strengthen it. And those are either a Feare of the consequence of breaking their word; or a Glory, or Pride in appearing not to need to breake it. This later is Generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuers of Wealth, Command, or sensuall Pleasure; which are the greatest part of Mankind. The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear (p.99).

This fear of violence will ensure that individuals will be reluctant to disobey in the first place. And it means that those who do commit crimes, whose passions lead them to transgress the rules of the Commonwealth, are punished extensively so that they – and “others by his example” (p.240) – will obey in the future. This, indeed, is precisely how Hobbes defines punishment: “A PUNISHMENT, is an Evill inflicted by the publique Authority, on him that hath done, or omitted that which is Judged by the same Authority to be a Transgression of the Law; to the end that the will of men may thereby the better be disposed to obedience” (p.214). The Commonwealth aims to pre-emptively ensure conformity through manifest coercive power, then, and, therefore, “the aym of Punishments is not revenge, but terour” (215-6).

On the Enemy

If the Commonwealth is effective then fear will ensure that there is little crime, and what there is can be dealt with through punishment. Certainly, if there is too much crime then ‘Intestine Discord’ might result, in which case the leviathan will have to respond to these
deviant passions more violently. But overall Hobbes does not appear too concerned about these private acts of disobedience. However, he distinguishes another form of resistance that is less manageable, which cannot be tolerated, which will always have to be responded to violently: resistance aimed at subverting the Commonwealth itself. Hobbes realises these ‘public’ rather than private acts of resistance, these acts of ‘rebellion,’ might emerge for a number of reasons: from the influence of charismatic leaders and other figures (p.229); because individuals seek to imitate neighbouring countries with alternative forms of government (p.225-6); or because of the excessive power and wealth of particular cities within the Commonwealth (p.230). Such factors, he suggests, lead some subjects to have passions for power, glory or wealth that entail challenging not just others in the market or particular laws but challenging the social contract, the Commonwealth, itself. And the key point for Hobbes is that this is a difference too far.

The leviathan can tolerate the flourishing of differences with the market. It can even tolerate those who break the laws of the leviathan, within limits. But it cannot tolerate subjects who diverge so far from liberal subjectivity, who are so radically different from the rest of the people, that they do not just have particularistic or even criminal passions, but actually have passions that challenge the leviathan. Acts of “hostility against the present state of the Common-wealth, are greater Crimes, than the same acts done to private men: For the dammage extends it selfe to all” (p.212); and, as such, “the severest Punishments are to be inflicted for those Crimes, that are of most Danger to the Publique; such as are those which proceed from Malice to the Government” (p.240).
Thus, the leviathan’s response to public acts of rebellion, to subjects whose passions lead them to be radically different from the unity of the people and challenge the leviathan, must be far stronger, more violent and spectacular than the punishment of private criminal acts, since public resistance can undermine the Commonwealth itself and, in so doing, the protection it provides for everybody. Hobbes thus goes as far as to say that

if a subject shall by fact, or word, wittingly, and deliberately deny the authority of the Representative of the Common-wealth . . . he may lawfully be made to suffer whatsoever the representative will: For in denying subjection, he denies such Punishment as by the Law hath been ordained; and therefore suffers as an enemy of the Common-wealth (p.216).

The particular punishment the enemy ought to receive is decided by the sovereign. However, Hobbes gives an example to indicate the severity he envisions. He contends that

the vengeance is lawfully extended, not only to the Fathers, but also to the third and fourth generations not yet in being, and consequently innocent of the fact, for which they are afflicted: because the nature of this offence, consisteth in the renouncing of subjection; which is a relapse into the condition of warre, commonly called Rebellion; and they that so offend, suffer not as Subjects, but as Enemies. For Rebellion, is but warre renewed. 13

13 Hobbes, Leviathan, 219. Indeed, Hobbes goes further, arguing that the rebel makes himself an outcast not simply of the Commonwealth but of all societies since he cannot be trusted to live with others. “He therefore that breaketh his Covenant, and consequently declareth that he thinks me may with reason do so, cannot be received into any Society, that unite themselves for Peace and Defence, but by the errour of them that receive him; nor when he is received retained in it, without seeing the danger of their errour; which errours a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security; and therefore if he be left, or case out of Society, he perisheth” (p.102).
In sum, then, individual rights can only be protected if the multiplicity of passions within the multitude is tamed through the market and fear of a violent state. Differences will thus flourish within the liberal order, but Hobbes is explicit that there are certain differences that cannot be tolerated. Those subjects who publicly resist the leviathan, who have passions that exceed liberal subjectivity, who continue to diverge from and rebel against the Commonwealth – who for various reasons want to overthrow or destroy it – cannot be tolerated. They are radically different subjects who diverge too far from the unity of the people. They are not just challenging elements of the order but challenging the order itself. They, consequently, are subject to massive, spectacular acts of violence and terror, in which they are excluded from the leviathan so as to ensure that they do not undermine it. Hobbes is thus clear that the liberal order can tolerate a variety of differences but that those who are radically different from the kind of liberal subjectivity needed – namely, subjects who are committed to the liberal order – must be violently excluded; the existence of the liberal order is dependent upon it.

2 Liberal Orders and Divergent Subjects
As will be argued in this thesis, however, violence toward those who differ radically from liberal subjectivity is not just a feature of Hobbes’s liberal order. All liberal orders, it is contended, require subjects to conform to a model of liberal subjectivity of some kind – often a much more demanding kind than in Hobbes’s leviathan – and those who are perceived to diverge too far from this are treated violently. It is shown, though, that Hobbes’s successors have obscured, ignored or concealed the full extent of this violence. They present the illusion that liberal political orders enable diversity to flourish, but they do not acknowledge the number of subjects that are categorised as radically different in
their vision of liberal order and who, consequently, will be treated violently. It is critical, therefore, to step back and set out the parameters of this argument explicitly, to explain what is meant by a liberal political order; why liberal orders require liberal subjects; what is meant by difference, radical difference and divergent subjects; why liberal orders can tolerate the former but treat the radically different, the divergent subject, violently; and what kinds of violence are deployed against these subjects.

**Liberal Orders and Liberal Subjects**

In using the term 'order' the *OED* definition is followed, in which to 'order' is to "arrange methodically," to "set or keep in order," to "regulate; govern; manage; settle." In introducing the term 'political' to this equation it is meant that the orders with which the thesis is concerned are *attempts to order human subjects*. These can take diverse forms: identities, representations, binary oppositions, systems, boundaries, ideologies, categories, and states, amongst others – all are attempts to order human subjects, to govern, arrange, manage or regulate them. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear when they say that "every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics," political orders are always maintained at two interconnected levels. They do not just require political institutions (an elected executive, regular elections, a parliament, bureaucracy, for example), but also subjects whose desires, attitudes, affections and

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14 This is not to say that attempts to order the world do not extend beyond human subjects. Deleuze and Guattari have been particularly concerned with the order and disorder inherent within organisms, cells and the environment, and with demonstrating the link between biology, the body and the political. This cross-over emerges occasionally in this thesis, but it is not the major focus. For an excellent account of the relation between micropolitics and the materiality of 'things' see Jane Bennett, 'The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter,' *Political Theory* 32, no. 3 (2004): 347-72.
allegiances conform to and support these institutions. Macropolitics is thus underpinned by and cannot be separated from micropolitics, and both are integral to political orders.

Liberal orders are specific forms of political order, which arrange and govern subjects in particular ways. As we will see, there is no single way in which liberal orders govern subjects: the liberal order theorised by Hobbes is very different from that theorised by Rawls which is very different from that theorised by Connolly. But common to all liberal orders is that they are simultaneously macropolitical and micropolitical; not just requiring liberal institutions but also ‘liberal subjects,’ agents who act, think and live in liberal ways, since liberal institutions can only persist if subjects adopt a liberal form of subjectivity. This is not only recognised by Deleuze and Guattari but by numerous other liberal theorists. Hobbes, as we have seen, is clear that the leviathan requires a liberal ‘people’, subjects who might have diverse interests and passions but who are nevertheless committed to the existence and the aims of the leviathan. And as the contemporary liberal democrat William Galston explains

To pursue its understanding of justice and the human good, liberal societies have over time developed their characteristic institutions and practices. . . Sustaining these institutions and practices, in turn requires of liberal citizens specific excellences and character traits: the liberal virtues. These virtues are by no means natural or innate. Liberal communities must,

then, be especially attentive to the processes, formal and informal, by which these virtues are strengthened and eroded. 16

There is not, of course, one model of liberal subjectivity to which all liberal orders require subjects conform. The kind of liberal subjectivity different theorists contend that subjects should adopt within liberal orders varies considerably: as will be seen, Locke, Mill and Rawls in different ways stress rationality and deliberation as central to liberal subjectivity, whilst Connolly emphasises an ethos that leads subjects to engage responsively and respectfully in public dialogue with those who differ. But, despite their differences, liberal theorists always require subjects to adopt some form of subjectivity, even if this is not fully acknowledged.

Difference, Radical Difference and Divergent Subjects

Liberal orders are not totalising, however, they do not have or aspire to have absolute control over the way subjects live their lives, think, act and interact (even if such total control were possible). Nor do they require homogeneity. Liberal orders allow a range of different interests, practices, and ways of life to flourish. Indeed, as we have seen with Hobbes, the liberal order aims to subdue the passions of subjects which might otherwise be directed against the state or into antagonistic relations by displacing them into different activities such as trade, accumulating wealth, or other private interests. Thus, although liberalism requires liberal subjects, a liberal people, it enables a multiplicity of differences to flourish too. 'Unity, cannot otherwise be understood in Multitude,' as Hobbes puts it (p.114).

But, whilst liberal orders allow a range of differences to flourish, they place limits on those differences. Those who are not just different from other subjects because they have distinctive beliefs, or passions, or desires but are seen to be \textit{radically different} because they have desires or beliefs that diverge too far from or contradict the form of liberal subjectivity on which the order is based, cannot be tolerated. This is a point we have seen through Hobbes, who recognises that different passions, desires and interests can be tolerated insofar as they do not challenge the liberal order, but subjects who rebel or resist, who reject the order, must be excluded. Žižek makes this distinction between difference and radical difference clear too, when he notes that whilst liberal democrats claim that their vision provides a framework within which difference can thrive, actually all that “Liberal ‘tolerance’ condones” is “the folklorist Other deprived of its substance – like the multitude of ‘ethnic cuisines’ in a contemporary megalopolis; however, any ‘real’ other is instantly denounced for its ‘fundamentalism’ . . . the ‘real Other’ is by definition ‘patriarchal,’ ‘violent.’”\footnote{Slavoj Žižek, ‘Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,’ \textit{New Left Review} I, no. 225 (September-October 1997): 37.} Thus, liberalism allows differences to flourish, but only insofar as the differences are not too threatening, not too different – insofar as they are perceived to be compatible with liberal subjectivity, not radically different from it.

Mill, for example, as we will see, encourages differences to flourish, but his vision puts great pressure on subjects so as to ensure that these differences are the outcomes of subjects rationally, reflectively questioning tradition and custom, being eccentric and engaging in ‘experiments in living’; those who want to live in ways that do not conform
to his model of reflective, deliberative individuality – who want to live by tradition or
custom – are pressured into suppressing their unreflective impulses and assimilating.
These forms of subjectivity that differ radically from Mill’s model of the rational,
deliberative subjects challenge his liberal vision of society and therefore are treated
violently. His liberal order thus allows differences to flourish, but creates parameters
within which difference can flourish but which it cannot exceed. It allows for difference,
but not radical difference.

It is important to recognise, however, that when talking about radical difference, about
subjects who diverge from the liberal order, we are not necessarily talking about those
who are explicitly rebelling against the liberal order, about the ‘enemy,’ as Hobbes put
it. Nor are we necessarily talking about illiberal or anti-liberal minorities: religious
fundamentalists, cultural conservatives forcing their daughters into marriage or female
circumcision, members of the Old Amish Order, or any of the other so-called ‘hard
cases’ of multiculturalism that liberals use to discuss minorities within liberal societies. 18
Although divergent subjects may challenge and differ from the liberal order in these
ways, often radically different subjects do not pose any great threat to the liberal order –
at least not on their own. Honig demonstrates, for example, that those who are classed as
radically different by Rawls are often ‘underachievers,’ ‘oddballs,’ ‘eccentrics’ and
‘misfits’. They do not fundamentally challenge liberalism; but Rawls implicitly treats

18 For prominent examples of the liberal preoccupation with ‘hard cases’ such as these see the discussions
by Barry, Kymlicka and Kukathas: Brian Barry, Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of
Multiculturalism. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000; Will Kymlicka, Multicultural
them as radically different subjects because they exceed and threaten the solidity of his order.

Moreover, in talking about the radically different we are not necessarily talking about subjects *qua* individuals. Divergence from the liberal order can take innumerable different forms: subjects acting or thinking in ways that differ from the liberal ideal, identifying with or believing in illiberal values, or desiring goods that conflict with or undermine the liberal conception of the good. This will become clearer once the various notions of radical difference have been explored in Chapter 2, but the point is that it will often be only small elements of one's subjectivity – particular practices, fleeting desires, unconscious urges – that diverge from the ideal of the liberal subject and render one radically different. Foucault recognises that one need not support Mussolini to be fascist, "to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us," since "fascism is in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior." Similarly, one need not be a virulent anti-liberal to diverge from liberal subjectivity. Indeed, one can be a committed liberal and still diverge from it: divergent desires, practices and thoughts are 'in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior.' Thus, the distinction between tolerable differences and intolerable radical differences is not one between liberals and illiberal minorities. It is one between the desires and beliefs of subjects that are tolerable and those which appear to exceed and challenge the form of subjectivity implicitly required by the liberal order.

As is perhaps clear, therefore, this distinction between difference and radical difference is not rigid. There is always fluidity between the differences that are perceived to be tolerable and those that are viewed as intolerable. This is clear in Hobbes. He suggests that there are innumerable differences that the Commonwealth can tolerate: those private differences and passions of subjects that flourish in the market and individual pursuit. And he is clear that there are other radical differences that cannot be tolerated: those divergent subjects who deny the legitimacy of the leviathan and want to rebel. But there are also differences that fall somewhere between these positions: the passions and desires that lead subjects to engage in private acts of criminality. These subjects can be tolerated, they are not so radically different that they fundamentally challenge the liberal order and need to be responded to with the spectacular violence and exclusion required for rebellious subjects. But they cannot be tolerated easily: they need to be punished; coercion must be used against them to secure their, and others', obedience. And if circumstances change, if these kinds of differences – if theft, murder and petty law breaking – were to flourish, they would become intolerable radical differences since they would lead to ‘Intestine Discord.’ Thus, there is not a clear line or boundary between what counts as tolerable and intolerable difference; clearly tolerable differences and clearly radical differences will be separated by a range of more ambiguous differences that can be perceived in different ways at different times.

This is important because it is at this boundary that post-Hobbesian liberals conceal the extent of violence within their theories. As we will see, all liberal theorists (with the possible exception of Honig) admit that some differences are too radical to be tolerated, that they must be treated violently to ensure that they do not threaten the liberal order. In
this sense, liberals rarely contend that liberalism can be inclusive of all differences. However, as will be seen repeatedly in this thesis, unlike Hobbes, they conceal the number of subjects and desires that they treat as intolerable radical differences – and they do so by subtly treating as radically different a variety of subjects and desires that they explicitly claim are only different, not radically so. This is what we find Rawls, for example, who contends that ‘misfits’ can be tolerated but subtly polices and normalises them. It is what we find in Mouffe, who claims that only a minority of anti-liberal democrats will need to be excluded but overlooks much more extensive exclusion and normalisation of subjects. It is what we find in Mill, who argues that only those who harm others are to be treated violently, but theorises a society in which harmless subjects who diverge from his ideal of deliberative rationality are subject to normalisation. And it is what we find in Locke, who claims that some subjects are radically different and need to be excluded from politics because they are ‘irrational,’ but does not acknowledge the huge numbers of others that would also be subtly excluded on this basis. It is at the nebulous boundary between difference and radical difference, then, that we can identify the way in which all these liberal theorists subtly class more subjects and desires as radically different, as intolerable, than they acknowledge.

3 The Violent Response

What happens when subjects or desires are identified as divergent, as radically different? Hobbes, as we have seen, is clear that if the leviathan is to be maintained the ‘multitude’ must be made into a ‘people’ by using coercion and terror so as to ensure that subjects who diverge radically do not threaten the order. Subjects can thus live as they wish insofar as they are committed to the leviathan but those who rebel against, resist or
refuse it must be excluded and made into an example. Hobbes thus recognises that liberal order must confront radical differences that challenge the liberal order with what we might term *violence*.\(^{20}\) This will not necessarily be a physical act of violence, "the exercise of physical force so as to cause injury," as the OED describes violence, or "the more or less intended, direct but unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individual with the bodies of others," as John Keane, in a recent analysis of political violence, put it.\(^{21}\) Although physical force on subjects' bodies might be part of the process of founding and maintaining order, often in contemporary liberal orders violence more broadly will be used, in the form of forcing and constraining subjects so that radical differences do not emerge and trouble the liberal order. This is an understanding that follows the OED's alternative definition of violence as an "act of constraining or forcing unnatural change upon something."

**Exclusionary Violence**

This broader definition of violence enables us to identify two specific kinds of violence that might be used by liberal orders to protect the order from the threats posed by radical differences. Firstly, there is what might be called *exclusionary violence*, in which divergent subjects are forced out of or excluded from the order in some way. This is precisely the violence that Hobbes explicitly employs. He advocates a powerful state, not one that uses physical violence against subjects necessarily, but one that uses the fear

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20 As will be seen in what follows, there are good reasons for suggesting that liberal orders responds to radical difference with violence, but nothing hangs on using the term 'violence.' The strength of the argument would not be reduced if the term violence was largely omitted and 'assimilation,' 'exclusion,' 'normalisation' and 'alienation' were used instead. All of these terms are used throughout the thesis; it is just that 'violence' provides a boarder category into which they can all be subsumed.

of physical violence to force out and to exclude from the Commonwealth radically
different, rebellious subjects so as to maintain the unity of the liberal people and the
longevity of the Commonwealth. As we will see, post-Hobbesian liberal theorists do not
actually exclude divergent subjects from the liberal state entirely. However, they often
find some reason to exclude them from political life and contest: their irrationality
perhaps, their unreasonableness, or their refusal to endorse liberal principles – and the
number of subjects who are categorised thus is often far higher than they acknowledge.

Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, provides an explicit example of this exclusionary
violence. Rousseau’s aim is to theorise a political order in which “each individual, while
uniting himself with others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before.”
They can do this, he contends, by submitting to the ‘general will’ – what all citizens
within the community would will if they were concerned only with the common good,
rather than their individual, private desires. Rousseau claims that if, when individuals
are involved in legislating for the community, they all will what is of the general
interest, then they will all will the same thing since what is good for the community is
objectively so; there are no private, individual perspectives on it. Whatever the general
will decides, therefore, is what every individual would also decide about the common
good.

To arrive at the general will the citizens must reach decisions about what is in the
common good democratically. However, although Rousseau hopes that each individual

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will learn the skill of "detaching his interest from the common interest," Rousseau does not think this necessary. If individuals continue to have private wills, "if we take away from these same wills, the pluses and minuses which cancel each other out, the sum of the difference is the general will." Thus, although ideally individuals would will the common good themselves, Rousseau allows that the general will can be arrived at by offsetting citizens' private wills. Rousseau is also clear, however, that private interests will only cancel each other out insofar as individuals hold them; once individuals group together in society, forming "sectional associations at the expense of the larger [political] association" then they no longer cancel one another out. Instead, the interests of more powerful associations will dominate, and "there ceases to be a general will."

It is here that Rousseau first recognises that an order in which the general will remains sovereign can only be maintained through forced exclusion. Realising that if factions developed in the community then the general will would be distorted, Rousseau contends that if individuals cannot submit to the general will but instead continue to form sectional associations, then all associations will have to be banned: "if the general will is to be clearly expressed, it is imperative that there should be no sectional associations in the state." Thus, the formation of trade unions, voluntary groups, employers associations must be prohibited so as to prevent some dominating and thus distorting the general will — the formation of the general will is reliant upon their subjugation. Moreover, Rousseau also proposes a second act of exclusionary violence, this time to ensure that individuals adhere to the decisions reached by the general will.

\[24 \text{ Ibid., 150.}\]
\[25 \text{ Ibid., 72-3, 72.}\]
\[26 \text{ Ibid., 72.}\]
For Rousseau, as we have seen, “the general will is always rightful and always tends to the public good,” since the general will is, by definition, what is in the common interest. Anyone who disagrees with it, therefore, is ignoring the common good and favouring their private interests. Hence he suggests that “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be constrained to do so by the whole body.” The individual who disagrees with the decisions of the general will must be excluded from engaging in those deliberations over the common good and made to adhere to the general will. Rousseau justifies this by saying that this “means nothing other than that he shall be forced to be free.” But, nevertheless, this is an act of force, whereby the individual is physically excluded from debating the general will and made to adhere to decisions she does not accept.

Thus, Rousseau acknowledges that those who have sectional interests or who disagree with the general will are radically different from the kinds of subjects needed to maintain an order in which the general will is sovereign and as such their exclusion is the condition of the general will existing. As we will see in subsequent chapters, many liberal theorists also exclude divergent subjects from political debate to ensure that the liberal order can persist, but unlike Rousseau they do not acknowledge the full number of subjects who will be classed as radically different and treated violently.

**Assimilatory Violence**

The broader definition of violence – as an ‘act of constraining or forcing unnatural change upon something’ – alerts us to a second form of violence liberals use against divergent desires and subjects: *assimilatory violence.* Rather, than excluding them from

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27 Ibid., 72, 64.
political life (or the state) this entails attempting to mould them or force them to become liberal subjects by constraining and limiting those divergent desires that might lead them to be radically different. Assimilation is, of course, not necessarily violent. As the OED makes clear, assimilation is a two-way process: an order does not simply use strategies “to adapt” subjects, “to bring [them] into conformity” with the order, but, in addition, subjects themselves voluntarily assimilate the precepts of the order by “incorporating [them into their] own way of thinking or acting.” However, when the liberal order is confronted by those who are radically different, who have desires that contradict and challenge liberal subjectivity, then it might actively engage in assimilation as a means of altering, suppressing or shearing off the divergent desires to ensure that subjects fit into and live in conformity with liberal subjectivity. This, of course, is rarely violence in the limited sense of physical harm against the body. It is violent in the broader sense of ‘constraining or forcing unnatural change upon’ subjects through processes of assimilation which strip them of their radically different desires.

Exclusionary violence thus acts after the fact; it is a response to radically different subjects that is used once their divergences have manifested themselves and been identified. Assimilatory violence is preemptive. It aims to constrain subjects, to suppress their radically different desires before they manifest themselves. Indeed, following Foucault’s distinctions, we might understand exclusionary violence as an effect of ‘sovereign’ or ‘repressive’ power and assimilation as an effect of ‘productive’ or ‘disciplinary’ power. Rather than “think of the individual as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom or some multiple, inert matter to which power is applied, or which is struck by power that subordinates or destroys individuals” – the view expressed
in the image of a sovereign power violently excluding individuals to maintain order – the idea of productive power enables to see that "one of the first effects of power is that it allows bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires to be identified and constituted as something individual. The individual is, in other words, not power’s opposite number: the individual is one of power’s first effects." This understanding of the subject as a product of power will be discussed further in Chapter 2. The point here is that assimilation is a process through which the desires of the subject are shaped and moulded, in which divergent desires are constrained or tamed, and through which liberal subjects are produced. It is only if this assimilatory violence fails, if radical differences emerges, that exclusionary violence is needed.

Foucault provides a compelling example of assimilatory violence that, as we will see, is subtly in operation in much liberal political thought. He argues that in early modern Europe the state used acts of physical control and spectacular displays of power to ensure the obedience of its subjects. However, in the modern era normalisation, a subtle technique of power whereby a norm is established and the subject’s conformity to it is continuously measured, monitored and assessed, “becomes one of the great instruments of power” – the central technique used to discipline subjects and to ensure their obedience to the political order. Normalising institutions such as schools, prisons, factories and hospitals have proliferated, the aim of which is to normalise the population, to ensure that subjects conform and obey, to ensure that they do not have desires that

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diverge too far from the order – to ‘produce’ obedient subjects.\textsuperscript{30} Specifically, normalising societies produce obedient subjects in two ways.

Firstly, unlike the Hobbesian image, normalisation does not force subjects to conform to the norms of the order for fear of punishment; rather, through constant training, examination, supervision and monitoring it ‘creates’ subjects who are obedient because they automatically act and think in ways that conform to the norms and who, therefore, will judge themselves against those norms and suppress divergent desires if they emerge. It thus produces self-policing subjects. It is for this reason that the ‘panoptic,’ in which subjects behave because they suspect (but never actually know) they may be under surveillance, is the motif of normalising power.\textsuperscript{31} Secondly, though, Foucault does not suggest that normalisation creates a homogenous, obedient group of subjects, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 2; subjects will conform to norms to different degrees. But those who do not conform fully will often be put under significant pressure by normalising institutions and other normalised subjects to assimilate and conform – pressure that arises because those who differ from the norm are seen as inferior, as “fundamental threats, deviations, or failures in need of correction, reform, punishment, silencing or liquidation.”\textsuperscript{32} Thus normalising societies maintain obedience to the norms of the order by producing self-policing subjects and pressuring deviants into conformity.


\textsuperscript{31} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 195-228.

As we will see, normalisation is a crucial tool used to assimilate subjects with divergent desires into the liberal order. However, it is important to note another example of assimilatory violence, one that is even more subtle and preemptive than normalisation: symbolic violence, as perceived by Bourdieu and Passeron. Symbolic violence is that "power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force."  

It thus enables a dominant class or group to impose its meanings, symbols and ideas on the rest of society in such a way that that the rest of society accept them. Symbolic violence is most effective when the symbols being imposed are perceived as entirely natural: "it is never more total than when totally unconscious." And for Bordieu and Passeron the aim of symbolic violence is the reproduction of the social order and the inequalities and hierarchies therein. For, by rendering meanings of the dominant group natural in the eyes of the rest of society, their dominance can continue unfettered.

For Bourdieu and Passeron symbolic violence is exemplified by the education system in liberal bourgeois societies. It enables the children of the bourgeoisie to succeed since they already have a grasp of the bourgeoisie values and symbols disseminated through the education system. And it thus reproduces and perpetuates the dominance of this class whilst inculcating the sense amongst the rest of society that it is 'natural' that those who succeed in liberal society do so. As such, the education system not only "ensures the profitability of [bourgeois] cultural capital and legitimizes its transmission by

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34 Ibid., 13.
35 This is not simply a speculative claim: *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* is primarily an empirical analysis of the symbolic violence inherent to the French education system.
dissimulating the fact that it performs this function,” but as a consequence has the crucial role of “ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly.” Simultaneously, however, in order to make bourgeois values appear natural – and, indeed, to ensure that it is not resisted – the education system suppresses and ultimately leads to the disappearance of divergent values and beliefs that stem from different cultural, religious or local habits.

Symbolic violence thus brings subjects into conformity with the liberal order before they diverge from it. Just as normalisation is intended to ensure that subjects come to think and act in certain ways, symbolic violence aims to “produce” in subjects “a permanent disposition to give, in every situation . . . the right response . . . and no other.” And like normalisation again, symbolic violence “is a substitute for physical constraint” because it “is in the long run at least as efficacious as physical constraint.” For the latter tends to produce only a fleeting effect on the subject whereas process of symbolic violence produces a much longer-lasting, natural, even unconscious, conformity to the social order in which radically different desires are suppressed by the subjects herself before they even materialise.

*The Ineradicability of Violence*

Although violence might not be a political order’s only possible response to radical difference, assimilatory and exclusionary violence are often used in liberal orders to protect the order from radical differences that might challenge it, even by those liberals

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36 Ibid., 210.
37 Ibid., 36.
who claim otherwise, as we will see. Mary Douglas, in her analysis of culture, provides a good account of why this is the case. She suggests that cultures are ways of ordering a complex world, "a chaos of shifting impressions." However, she recognises that "Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies"; that, in other words, there will always be events, objects, ideas and so forth that do not fit. These anomalies pose a significant threat to the culture, revealing that it is not exhaustive. As such, "any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence." She identifies several ways of treating anomalies, but these are largely negative, with them being classed as 'dirty.' Dirt is therefore used to refer to an "object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications." "Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained." The marking of anomalies is thus a way of censuring those kinds of actions and events: they become not just unclean and dirty but also impure, unnatural, immoral; they come to be seen as polluting or taboo.

Thus, Douglas demonstrates that those actions which cannot be assimilated into the order must be dealt with, indicating that those subjects who cannot be assimilated into

38 There are not many examples of political orders responding to the radically different in ways other than violence. Bonnie Honig appears to suggest that it is possible to respond to radical difference without violence, but as we see in this thesis her claims in this respect are deceptive. Perhaps the only other example of a non-violent response to radical difference can be found in the work of Wendy Brown, who argues that democracy must engage with its anti-democratic opponents since this will strengthen and sharpen the position of democrats. It is possible, however, that her suggestion is susceptible to the same weaknesses as Honig's. See Wendy Brown, 'Democracy against Itself: Nietzsche's Challenge,' chapter 6 in Politics out of History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001: 121-37.
40 Ibid., 39.
41 Ibid., 36, 40.
the liberal order must also be dealt with. In talking about violence, then, we are talking about what Étienne Balibar and Johan Galtung call 'structural violence.'

By structural violence, we generally understand an oppression inherent in social relations which (by all means, from the most ostentatious to the most invisible, from the most economical to the most costly in human lives, from the most everyday to the most exceptional) breaks down that resistance which is incompatible with the reproduction of a system. In that sense, it is an integral part of the life of the system, or accompanies it like a shadow. ⁴²

Conclusion

Hobbes recognises that violence toward those that are not just different but radically different, that resist and threaten the liberal order, that threaten the unity of the people, is a structural necessity – it is an integral part of the life of the leviathan. And thinkers such as Rousseau, Foucault, Bourdieu and Passeron, Balibar and Douglas enable us to conceptualise this violence more clearly; they enable us to see why violence is needed, and why, if assimilatory violence fails, then exclusionary violence becomes necessary. The problem is, however, that liberals since Hobbes have ignored or concealed the full extent of violence toward radical difference within their liberal orders. From Locke onwards they have presented liberalism as a vision of political order in which differences can flourish. They rarely deny that radical differences must be treated violently. But they conceal the number of different desires and subjects who will be

subtly classed as radically different and treated violently, as will be seen in the chapters that follow.
Chapter 2 The Inescapability of Radical Difference

Introduction

We have seen that if there are radically different subjects within the liberal order then they must be treated violently, and we will see in subsequent chapters that liberals since Hobbes have ignored or concealed the full extent of the violence toward them. But these arguments assume that in any liberal order there will be some radically different subjects, some subjects with desires that diverge from liberal subjectivity. What if, however, there are no divergent subjects in a particular liberal order? What if the multitude can be transformed into a liberal people without excess or remainder, without there being subjects who have desires that are radically different from liberal forms of subjectivity? If this were the case then the liberal order would not need to violently assimilate or exclude them. We need to consider, therefore, why liberal orders will always contain subjects who differ from the norm of liberal subjectivity – we need to consider why radical difference is inescapable.

One explanation is that of ‘value pluralism’ advocated by a number of contemporary liberal thinkers.1 As Gray explains, although this idea has roots in the work of Mill, Isaiah Berlin was the original, clearest and most explicit exponent of value pluralism.

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The cornerstone of Berlin’s thought is . . . his insistence that fundamental human values are many, that they are often in conflict and rarely, if ever, necessarily harmonious, and that some of these conflicts are among incommensurables – conflicts among values for which there is no single, common standard of measurement or arbitration.  

Value pluralism thus insists that a liberal society will often contain subjects with a variety of different values, some of which are incompatible, perhaps even incommensurable, with other subjects’ values and perhaps even radically different from those promoted by the liberal society. Ultimately, however, value pluralism offers a limited account of the ineradicability of difference. For as Kekes suggests, value pluralism is based on a description of “contemporary Western circumstances,” on the basis that Western societies enable diversity to flourish and as such “the ends of men are many,” as Berlin put it. Value pluralists thus simply entreat us to survey liberal societies, suggesting that we will find subjects motivated by different moral and non-moral values which will often conflict with one another. But beyond this positivist empirical survey value pluralism offers little analytical, conceptual or theoretical explanation for why differences in values are ineradicable. This not only means that value pluralism is not a particularly rich explanation for why there will always be radical differences. It also means that value pluralism does not tell us that radical differences are ineradicable, only that they are likely: it is unlikely that we will find a liberal society without radical differences since the ends of men are many; but it is possible.

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Rather than turning to value pluralism, therefore, we might consider a variety of richer conceptual explanations for why there is always an excess, a radical difference, that cannot be subsumed into any order and why, consequently, liberal orders will always contain divergent subjects. In what follows we begin briefly with Nietzsche's account of ineradicable radical difference, but, for reasons that will be made clear, the focus is on the poststructural and psychoanalytic explanations for the ineradicability of radical difference forwarded by Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan. Each of these thinkers is examined respectively. In the process we will see why liberal orders will always be confronted by radical differences and understand the perspectives that the agonistic liberals discussed in later chapters build upon.

1 Nietzsche and the Instinct for Freedom
As we saw briefly in the introduction, Nietzsche does not just provide an explanation for why the liberal order will always contain the radically different, but his thought is fundamental to the work of poststructuralists and the agonistic thinkers who are examined in the thesis. We can begin by noting that, for Nietzsche, humans are not naturally members of society or community. As he makes clear in the Genealogy of Morals, the human has an "animal soul," they have the "instincts of wild, free, prowling man." As such, human beings are animals driven by instinctive desires for greatness, victory, independence, originality – by what Nietzsche calls, amongst other things, "an instinct for freedom." These human, all-too-human drives are common to all; they are the natural state of human being. But, for Nietzsche, a minority has them in excess.

6 Ibid., 523.
These subjects – whom he calls ‘noble spirits,’ ‘free spirits,’ ‘the overman,’ amongst other things⁷ – have within them the capacity to allow their instincts to break out and enable them to achieve greatness, glory, power, success, recklessness, creativity, independence: drives that are all-but alien to the majority. Such independence, he notes, “is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong.”⁸ Most, as we will see, are incapable of such independence.

However, Nietzsche suggests that modern European societies are dominated by democracy, liberalism and socialism⁹ – “modern ideas” that emphasise values such equality and community rather than individuality, contest and inequality.¹⁰ This is tragic for Nietzsche because the instinct for freedom – in both the majority and the nobles – cannot thrive in liberal societies. Noble spirits have always developed in “an aristocratic society”; they need “a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man” since the distance between subjects encourages the “the craving for . . . even higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states.”¹¹ This, indeed, is why Nietzsche celebrates the ‘agonistic contest’ practiced by the Ancient Greeks. As we will see in some detail in Chapter 7, he suggests that the Greeks supported the agon because they recognised that humans are

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⁸ Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 231.

⁹ He suggests this at various points. See especially, Nietzsche, Beyond good and Evil, aphorisms 201, 202 and 203 (302-8); see also Beyond Good and Evil, aphorisms 221 (327-9), 253 and 254 (381-85).

¹⁰ Nietzsche refers to liberalism, democracy and socialism as ‘modern ideas’ that promote equality, community and conformity on numerous occasions in Beyond Good and Evil. See, for example, Beyond Good and Evil, 308, 327, 381, 396.

¹¹ Ibid., 391.
instinctively competitive and envious, that they strive for greatness and victory, and the agon encourages this, providing channels through which they can be expressed. As he suggests, in the agon "jealousy, spite, envy, incite men to activity but not to the action of war to the knife but to the action of contest." Thus, "Strife and the pleasure of victory were acknowledged; and nothing separates the Greek world more from ours." Conformist, egalitarian liberal societies manifestly fail to provide these conditions of inequality and competition; as such, the conditions in which the instinct for freedom in the majority, and in noble spirits, can develop are lacking in modern societies and instinctive human desires for greatness are consequently suppressed.

This produces amongst the majority "a smaller, almost ridiculous type"; for Nietzsche, "a herd animal has been bred, the European of today." Because of the emphasis on equality and community, that is, the majority of Europeans have developed a 'herd morality' composed of 'virtues' such as conformity, reciprocity, equality, prudence, uniformity, all of which ensure the survival of the herd rather than the excellence of the individual. These are "garrulous workers who will be poor in will, extremely employable, and much in need of a master and commander as their daily bread . . . a type that is prepared for slavery in the subtlest sense." As Honig puts it:

In authoring this domesticated world for ourselves, we authorize our own domestication. In refusing the world we refuse ourselves. Our moral values, herd values, do not spur us on to

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13 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 266.
14 Ibid., 366-7.
greatness, they enshrine mediocrity, that which is a prerequisite for herd membership. We become perfect instruments, obedient, unthoughtful, and fearful.  

These Europeans, these liberal subjects, “these socialist dolts and flatheads,” do not, however, lose their instincts for freedom. Just as Hobbes recognises that certain passions cannot be expunged and must therefore be channeled away from the state and into private activities, so Nietzsche realises that human, all-too-human desires must be externalised: “All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward.” It is the lack of channels for externalisation in the conformist, egalitarian liberal society that causes the emergence of a ‘bad conscience,’ of what Nietzsche terms ressentiment—a burning, often only partially-conscious resentment toward, others and themselves.

The man who, from a lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom, impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted and maltreated himself; this animal that rubbed itself raw against the bars of its cage as one tried to ‘tame’ it; this deprived creature, racked with homesickness for the wild, who had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness – this fool, this yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of this ‘bad conscience.’

However, Nietzsche recognises that whilst liberal societies might cage the instincts of and generate ressentiment amongst the herd, they create conditions under which the instincts and excellences of noble sprits might emerge. For Nietzsche, that is, liberalism

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16 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 308.
17 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 520.
reduces social inequalities and injustices and he thus envisions a time “when conditions become more fortunate and the tremendous tension decreases; perhaps there are no longer any enemies among one’s neighbours, and the means of life, even for the enjoyment of life, are superabundant.” Under these conditions, he suggests, “Variation, whether as deviation (to something higher, subtler, rarer) or as degeneration and monstrosity, suddenly appears on the scene in the greatest abundance and magnificence; the individual dares to be individual and different.”¹⁹ Many subjects will continue to be trapped by the mediocrity of the herd mentality; failing to achieve greatness, instead being unoriginal, resentful individuals acting within the limited parameters of the herd. But some subjects, those with the potential for nobility, will go beyond this, ‘to something higher, subtler, rarer.’ For, now that difference and individuality have developed it becomes permissible to strive to be different, individual, excellent, powerful, independent. As such, the instinct for freedom will, in a few noble spirits, “break out passionately and drive the individual far above the average and the flats of the herd conscience, wreck the self-confidence of the community, its faith in itself, and it is as if its spine snapped.”²⁰ Thus, modern liberal society may lead to results which would seem to be least expected by those who naively promote and praise it . . . The very same new conditions that will on the average lead to the leveling and mediocritization of man – to a useful, industrious, handy, multi-purpose herd animal – are likely in the highest degree to give birth to exceptional human beings of the most dangerous and attractive quality.²¹

¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 401.
²⁰ Ibid., 303.
²¹ Ibid., 366.
In this sense, then, liberalism might create the conditions for a resentful, conformist herd who strive to be different within the parameters defined by liberal society – through individual consumption, for example, by striving to be successful or wealthy, or by celebrating their religious or cultural identities. But liberalism also creates the conditions for ‘exceptional human beings’ who are not just different, not just variations, but go beyond the herd, ‘beyond good and evil,’ and threaten the fundaments, stretch the parameters, of liberal societies. These exceptional human beings are radically different from modern liberal orders – they are beings that are produced by but act and live in ways that exceed and challenge, that ‘wreck,’ the parameters of liberalism. Thus, Nietzsche provides a strong explanation for why there is always the possibility that there will be radically different, divergent subjects who exceed and challenge the liberal order.

Poststructural thinkers – particularly Deleuze and Foucault – have been influenced by Nietzsche in a number of ways.22 As will be seen in some detail, they claim that subjects contain within them ineradicable singular passions or desires that often exceed and differ radically from any order being imposed, in much the same way as Nietzsche. However, there are key differences which make it worth considering the poststructural accounts in some detail. Firstly, Nietzsche has a particular view of the kinds of instincts or desires that are caged by the modern liberal order – the desires for greatness, power, glory, independence, individuality, excellence. For poststructuralists, however, the desires that are suppressed can be of any kind at all. They might even be desires for conformity, custom, tradition or certainty – desires that exceed liberal forms of subjectivity, but

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would also be rejected by Nietzsche as those worthy only of the herd. Thus, poststructuralists alert us to the myriad of possible desires that diverge from the liberal order. Secondly, Nietzsche’s principal concern is with the suppression of the desires of the minority of subjects who may be capable of greatness. Poststructuralists, however, draw our attention to the excessive desires, practices, beliefs and instincts circulating in all subjects, not just exceptional human beings; consequently, everybody can potentially be radically different from the liberal order. As such, the focus in what follows is on the explanations for the inescapability of radical difference in the work of these thinkers.

2 Deleuze and Difference-In-Itself

Gilles Deleuze’s work includes (fairly) traditional analyses of Nietzsche and Bergson to meditations on cinema, perception and time, and radical works of political philosophy written with Felix Guattari.23 A key theme running through them is the prioritisation of difference. Deleuze thus goes further than other ‘first-generation poststructuralists’ such as Foucault or Derrida, explicitly privileging difference and multiplicity above identity and unity, hence there is more focus on Deleuze here than on the latter two thinkers.24

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This privileging can be seen most clearly in *Difference and Repetition*, the focus of analysis here.  

In this complex work Deleuze reveals the difference inherent within two central ideas of philosophical thought, identity and representation. The idea of *representation* finds its most explicit expression, for Deleuze, in Plato. For Plato, the truth resides in a set of Forms, or ideals, to which the world to some degree or another corresponds. The simulacra, the surface phenomena that we perceive, are simply representations of these ideals: copies of what is good, just, beautiful, and so forth. “The whole of Platonism,” Deleuze notes, “is dominated by the idea of drawing a distinction between ‘the thing itself’ and the simulacra” (p.66). For all but the enlightened philosopher, the world is merely a representation. As such, when Platonists talk about difference what they mean is how far the representation, the copy, differs from the true original. The centrality of *identity* to modern thought is evident, for Deleuze, in the work of Aristotle, Plato and Leibniz, but is presented most clearly by Hegel. For Hegel, history unfolds as a dialectic process whereby one idea (the thesis) opposes another (the antithesis), ultimately negating the difference and culminating in a synthesis. This idea is also central to Marx, but for Marx the motor of history is a dialectic of material forces. For Deleuze, however, both Hegel and Marx see the different forces as pre-determined, established identities. Contending ideas of political authority, for example, or opposing social classes, are well-defined identities that differ from and come into conflict with one another in certain ways. Difference thus refers to that which differs from a given identity in certain ways.

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For Deleuze, however, when we distinguish between an identity and its difference, or an object and its representation,

we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences. Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergencies and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities (p.50).

An opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, for example, is always ‘roughly cut’ from a multiplicity of shifting solidarities, social groupings, identities and feelings:

social classes themselves imply ‘masses’ that do not have the same kind of movement, distribution, or objectives and do not wage the same kind of struggle. Yet classes are indeed fashioned from masses; they crystallize them. And masses are constantly flowing or leaking from classes.26

“It is the same every time there is a mediation or representation. The representant says: ‘Everyone recognises that . . .’, but there is always an unrepresented singularity who does not recognise precisely because it is not everyone or the universal” (p.52). For Deleuze, then, identities and representations are always imposed upon a multiplicity of singular phenomena.

26 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 235.
It must be noted that he does not claim that there is, on the one hand, a multiplicity of singularities and on the other an entirely separate set of identities and representations which are imposed on them. The relation is more complicated, as Deleuze explains in *Difference and Repetition* through the concepts of the *virtual* and the *actual*. Deleuze, as seen, is opposed to the Platonic conception of a metaphysical realm of forms separate from reality; for Deleuze there is only the ‘real,’ that which exists. And he insists that there are two aspects to the real. There is the actual, that which we can directly experience and perceive. But there is also the virtual: a mass of singular ideas and alternatives that we cannot experience but which give form to the actual. The virtual, then, “must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged” (pp.208-9). For, although we do not experience the virtual, it is the matter out of which any actualised object is formed and thus is always present within it. “The virtual,” therefore, “is fully real” (p.208).

Any identity or representation, then, rather than being drawn from nowhere is an actualisation of *some* elements of the virtual. The Marxian division of capitalist society into two classes imposes one oppositional identity on a differentiated mass, but this is not an arbitrary imposition. There are innumerable singular characteristics, traits, allegiances and affiliations within and between the mass of subjects of capitalist society, and there are innumerable ways in which this mass might be divided and grouped. This is the virtual. Some of these are emphasised, connections are made between them and they are folded together to produce an identifiable class that is perceived. Thus, these elements of the virtual are actualised and this is what we see and experience as class. But the actualised class identity is always surrounded by a virtual mass of other singularities
that have not been actualised, a mass of differences that have not been knitted together, not been folded into some kind of identity, but rather remain largely unperceived singularities. That is what Deleuze means when he says that "difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing" (p.57). And it is why May describes the virtual as

swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific forms of identity. Those swarms are not outside the world: they are not transcendent creators. They are of the world, as material as the identities formed from them. And they continue to exist even within the identities they form, not as identities but as difference.27

For Deleuze, the existence of this virtual mass of singularities within any identity or representation leads to a number of problems. Firstly, it means that the identities and representations are not just found 'out there' in the world but are constructed precisely by people in the world. Secondly, Deleuze recognises that these oppositions and representations are often hierarchical constructs, in which "difference remains subordinated to identity, reduced to the negative, incarcerated within similitude and analogy" (pp.49-50). Representations, for example, are always an inferior copy of the represented. This is exactly the point of Plato's cave analogy, in which the cave-dweller sees only the shadows of the truth: dark, rough, imperfect copies, not the full beauty of the Form.

However, for Deleuze, the key problem with oppositions and representations being roughly cut from the multiple singularities of the virtual is that it leads us to view ‘difference-as-sameness’ rather than ‘difference-in-itself.’ For Deleuze, the majority of philosophers had subordinated difference to identity or to the Similar, to the Opposed or to the Analogous: they had introduced a difference into the identity of the concept, they had put difference in the concept itself, but not a concept of difference” (p.i).

Or, as Simon Tormey puts it: when we talk about difference, “Difference is always and inevitably ‘different from.’”28 However, these kinds of differences are a constructed, often hierarchical, imposition of an oppositional or representational logic on a multiplicity of singularities. What Deleuze suggests, therefore, is that we should try to perceive difference-in-itself. This requires “Overturning Platonism,” “denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections” (p.66) – “a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept” (pp.40-1). Specifically, Deleuze encourages ‘transcendental empiricism.’ “This empiricism teaches us a strange ‘reason,’ that of the multiple, chaos and difference (nomadic distributions, crowned anarchies).”29 It is an empiricism aimed at apprehending events in their singularity and uniqueness.

In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri, drawing extensively on Deleuze, give a good example of perceiving singularities, differences-in-themselves. They discuss "two Italian writers [who] go on vacation together in India, and each writes a book about his travels." The first concludes that there is no similarity between Italy and India – they are so very different he cannot even capture the difference in words. The second, conversely, explains that the two countries are similar since Indian life resembles Italian peasant life. Hardt and Negri contend that, despite their differences, both books approach the subject in the same problematic way. They attempt to understand and interpret India only by comparing it to some established idea or standard, namely, Italian (or, more broadly, European) identity. "India, however," Hardt and Negri point out, "is not merely different from Europe. India (and every local reality within India) is singular – not different from any universal standard but different in itself."

Within Deleuze's work is a distinctive idea about the world that leads him to see radical differences – differences that contradict, challenge or threaten certain forms of order or identity – as ineradicable. It has two components. First, on this view the world is constituted by a multiplicity of singularities, of differences-in-themselves, without which there would be no identities or representations. Hence Deleuze says that oppositions are 'roughly cut,' that "Everywhere couples and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organised oppositions presuppose radiations in all directions. . . Everywhere the depth of difference is primary" (p.50). But for Deleuze it is not just identities and representations that presuppose singularities. The world is composed of a multiplicity of

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singular energies, movements and events, and therefore any categories, systems or orderings are always an imposition on and depend on singularities. Or, better still, categories, systems or orderings are always and can only be an actualisation of a field of virtual differences.

Deleuze gives numerous examples of the world constituted by these singularities. Freud’s account of the Ego attempting to stamp control over the Id is an attempt to domesticate difference-in-itself: “The Freudian answer [to the play of pure difference] is that excitation in the form of free difference must, in some sense be ‘invested,’ ‘tied’ or ‘bound’” (p.96). Similarly, in A Thousand Plateau’s Deleuze and Guattari write that

The modern political system is a global whole, unified and unifying, but it is so because it implies a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems ... compartmentalizations and partial processes that interconnect, but not without gaps and displacements.31

Fundamental for Deleuze, however, is not simply that the world is constituted by a multiplicity of singularities but, secondly, that these singularities are unruly, disorderly, unsettling. Singularities are not in-themselves unruly. But for Deleuze, as seen, identities and representations are impositions of order on a multiplicity of singularities which are always ‘roughly cut,’ and as such there are always singularities and energies that exceed the impositions, and which threaten to undermine them. It is this excessive quality, the fact that some singularities exceed the orders imposed, that renders singularities unruly. This is why Deleuze and Guattari are sceptical of dichotomous class distinctions; for

31 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 231.
although social classes 'are indeed fashioned from masses,' because the actualised class-based identity is dependent on a multiplicity of virtual singularities the identity is never stable — the 'masses are constantly flowing or leaking from classes.' Similarly it is unruly singularities, radical differences, that, for Deleuze and Guattari, militate against a stable global order:

The more balanced things become between East and West . . . the more 'destabilized' they become along the other, North-South, line. There is always a Palestinian or Basque or Corsican to bring about a 'regional destabilization of security.' The two great molar aggregates of the East and West are perpetually being undermined by a molecular segmentation causing a zigzag crack . . . It is as if a line of flight, perhaps only a tiny trickle to begin with, leaked between the segments, escaping their centralization, eluding their totalization.\(^{32}\)

Thus, for Deleuze, attempts at closure are perpetually undermined by the incessant, lively play of pure difference — by the "tumult, restlessness and passion underneath the apparent calm" (p.42) — which gives rise to radical differences. Deleuze is clearest on this idea with the term 'lines of flight,' which he and Guattari use to describe the way in which "There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machines."\(^{33}\) Lines of flight are thus surprising events, energies or movements that exceed and run through all attempts to order the world, and that emerge because of interconnections between the unruly swarm of singularities that constitute and continually exceed those orders. Lines of flight are constantly resisting and subverting established orders, sending them in

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 237.

\(^{33}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.
unexpected, often unwanted, directions; because of these lines of flight order “flees all over the place.”

Look at Europe now, for instance: western politicians have spent a great deal of effort setting it all up, the technocrats have spent a lot of effort getting uniform administration and rules, but then on the one hand there may be surprises in store in the form of upsurges of young people, of women, that become possible simply because certain restrictions are removed (with ‘untechnocratizable’ consequences); and on the other hand it’s rather comic when one considers that this Europe has already been completely superceded by movements coming from the East. These are major lines of flight. 34

The point is that, for Deleuze, the world is constituted by a multiplicity of unruly singularities. Often these singularities remain hidden or in concordance with established identities or orders. But sometimes they exceed the established identities or orders, challenging them, contradicting them, altering them. When this occurs they are not just differences; they are radical differences – differences that resist established orders, that cannot be tolerated, that must be treated violently by those orders. There is thus always the possibility of singularities, of differences-in-themselves mutating into radical differences.

3 Derrida and Différence

Something similar to Deleuze’s idea can also be found in Derrida’s extensive work, and, in particular, is conceptualised in his complex notion of difféance. Différence is one of a plethora of terms Derrida has developed so as to provide a new approach to

34 Deleuze, Negotiations, 171-2.
philosophical thought that is independent of, and can be used to criticise, the assumptions of Western metaphysics. Derrida’s targets are the kinds of binary oppositions that pervade Western metaphysics and on which structural linguistics depend. The oppositions of metaphysics that Derrida criticises are those such as mind/body, reason/emotion, form/representation, identity/difference, masculine/feminine – oppositions which clearly distinguish two entities from one another. Structuralism, of course, is the approach to linguistics proposed by Saussure, in which there is no necessary or a priori correspondence between the word and the object it denotes, between the signifier and the signified. Rather, a word gets meaning, or what Saussure calls value, only because it stands in a relation of differences.

If Derrida’s targets differ from those of Deleuze, the main reasons for criticising them do not. Firstly, Deleuze is critical of identity and representation because that which differs is always seen as a deviation from the same, as an inferior, imperfect copy. Similarly, for Derrida binary oppositions are problematic because they are often hierarchical. As he explains, “in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc), or has the upper hand.” Secondly, Derrida is critical of binary oppositions, in philosophy and language, on the basis that the difference between two terms is always based on, and can only be

36 Indeed, as Currie notes, the critique of modern thought by poststructuralists such as Derrida and Deleuze (as well as Foucault and Lyotard) is roughly similar and “easy to characterise. There was a feeling, in the work of many thinkers after 1965, that . . . difference had become a machine for containing difference, for reducing it to similarity or packaging it neatly in the closure of the binary opposition.” See Mark Currie, Difference. London: Routledge, 2004: 15.
discerned because of, traces of innumerable other, semi-visible, terms. This is Derrida’s notion of *différance*, which refers to these unstable others that underpin all binary oppositions. And *différance* also corresponds in many ways to Deleuze’s understanding of the world as constituted by singularities that might at any moment give rise to radical differences.

This is perhaps expressed most clearly in Derrida’s lecture *Différance*, in which he expounds the notion.\(^{38}\) *Différance*, Derrida states “is literally neither a word nor a concept” (p.3), but refers to a multiplicity of silent terms on which any words or differences rely. As he puts it, “the play of difference, which, as Saussure reminded us, is the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign, is in itself a silent play” (p.5). Derrida uses the term *différance* because “the verb *différer* (Latin verb differre) has two meanings which seem quite distinct,” and he seeks to evoke both meanings (p.7). The first meaning is “the action of putting off until later, of taking into account, of taking account of time and of the forces of an operation that implies an economical calculation, a detour, a delay, a reserve, a representation.” “The other sense of *différer* is the more common and identifiable one: to be not identical, to be other, discernible, etc” (p.8). He chooses the term *différance*, then, not only to distinguish it from the idea of difference found in identity-difference dynamics – the observable, nameable other against which an identity is defined – but also to evoke the innumerable opposing, unnameable silent traces from the past and the future, which must be recalled, evoked, deferred to and dismissed whenever a sign functions.

It is because of difféance that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element (p.13).

A word has meaning, therefore, not by reference to itself or to an opposite from which it can be differentiated, but because of a multitude of silent, unnameable traces on which it depends and to which it must defer. Whilst such an idea is not identical to Deleuze’s difference-in-itself – and to treat it as such would be to elide the singularities of each and perceive them in terms of sameness – there is a clear similarity: for both there are multiple, shifting singularities and any identity, order or opposition is imposed on this.39

Secondly, though, for Derrida, like Deleuze, these multiple submerged terms are potentially unruly. Although they cannot be articulated and often are only partially visible, they are what Derrida calls ‘undecidables’.40 They are undecidables, in the first place, because they can never be fully and properly articulated or seen, they always remain in the shadows – traces, ghosts, that cannot be apprehended and named in their entirety. They are undecidables, secondly, because they mean that at no point will an identity be fully stable and final; it will always be haunted by these undecidables which

39 Moreover, Derrida recognises that différence is not antecedent to the oppositions imposed on them in much the same way as Deleuze recognises that singularities are not prior to the identities imposed. Hence Derrida writes: although the play of différence produces and differentiates words, this “does not mean that the différence that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified – in-difference – present. Differance is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name ‘origin’ no longer suits.” Derrida, ‘Différence,’ 11. However, arguably the poststructural thinker who makes this point clearest is Foucault who, as we will see, is emphatic that singularities, subjectivity and radical difference are all discursively produced.

40 Derrida, Positions, 43.
“can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution.”

They are undecidables, finally, because they mean that nothing can ever be resolved and stabilised completely; there is always the chance that the traces that haunt the opposition will break it open, subvert it, that current identity-difference dynamics will be replaced by others. In this sense, these traces are not just singularities or elements lurking beneath the play of language but are radically different terms on which the whole of language depends. Like the virtual in Deleuze’s thought, the play of différences often goes unnoticed. However, when they emerge, when they are perceived, they undermine the binary oppositions or the relations of difference by showing that they are only possible because of traces that exceed, that do not fit, that are radically different from these oppositions or relations.

4 Foucault and Resistance

There is much more to say about Derrida’s différences. However, it suffices to note that Derrida’s conception of différences evokes an idea also evident in Deleuze’s notion of difference-in-itself, that the world is composed of a multiplicity of unruly singularities

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41 Ibid., 43.
42 Indeed, Derrida’s project of deconstruction is aimed at precisely this, at playing with language and terminology so as to reveal the excess of terms, signs, and words that underpin an apparently stable text: to deconstruct is “to enter into the play of différences which prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern from the theological presence of a center the movement and textual spacing of differences.” Derrida, Ibid., 14.
43 For example: its relation to other terms in Derrida’s oeuvre; the significance of différences when we think about writing and speech; the way in which it appears to subvert our understanding of time and causality; and the relationship between différences and Deleuze’s conception of difference, a relation that might be argued to be more complex than the outline provided here indicates. For some interesting reflections on these and other issues see Paul Patton and John Protevi, eds., Between Deleuze and Derrida. London: Continuum, 2003.
that may sporadically burst forth as an excessive, resistant radical difference. It is worth considering a final poststructural account of radical difference; one that is arguably more politicised than those of Deleuze and Derrida: that of Foucault in his work on discourse and power.

Foucault sees discourses as articulating certain ideas and norms, certain forms of 'knowledge' about particular domains: in respect to crime, madness, religion, punishment, and so forth.

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. 44

As discourses become hegemonic and circulate through society they are accepted by subjects as 'true,' who then think, act and live in accordance with them. Discourses are thus a form of 'productive power' of the kind that we saw in the previous chapter; they do not repress or limit some kind of 'primitive' or true subjectivity but produce particular kinds of subjects. Discourse and power create subjectivities. 45 As Foucault illustrates in Discipline and Punish, for example, a range of legal, political and criminal discourses, closely aligned with mechanisms of discipline, emerged in industrial,

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capitalist society so as to mould subjects into obedient subjects who would act and think in appropriate ways.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, in the first volume of \textit{History of Sexuality} Foucault demonstrates the way in which sexuality and a sexualised population were not 'repressed' by the various discourses operating in industrial societies, but were actually created by them.\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, Foucault goes further than this, suggesting not only that particular forms of subjectivity are produced through discourse, but that subjectivity itself is produced thus:

This is the historical reality of this soul, which unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. . . On this reality-reference, various concepts have been constructed and a domain of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.\textsuperscript{48}

From Foucault's perspective, then, the very possibility of subjectivity, of agency, of thought and action, is dependent upon the discourses circulating in society, meaning that the person is entirely the creation of discourse. However, Foucault is clear that the discourses circulating in society do not create clones. He writes that

we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant


\textsuperscript{48} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 29-30.
discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies.\footnote{Foucault, The History of Sexuality 1, 100.}

The multiple discourses circulating in society, therefore, produce a multiplicity of different ideas, often of disparate and contradictory natures. As such, discourses not only create subjects and particular forms of subjectivity. They also make these subjects unique, composed of singular desires and beliefs. For although the subject is simply a composite of a variety of discourses, the way in which these various discourses are balanced, internalised and prioritised within the subject is unique to him and her. This is why Foucault recognises that modern power structures are both ‘individualizing’ and ‘totalizing’ – discourses are disseminated to all subjects but impact upon them differently.\footnote{Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power,’ in Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume 3: Power, edited by James D Faubion. London: Penguin, 1994: 332-6.} The subject, then, is a decentred, non-unified subject constituted by multiple discourses, but, because of the way in which each subject internalises and prioritises and balances them, she is not a clone but unique.

However, Foucault is also clear that discourses not only produce singular subjects but also an excess – radically different desires or radically different subjects that challenge or contradict discourses. One rather tame way of interpreting this is by noting that for Foucault there are multiple discourses circulating in societies and some of these will be radically different from others. We saw in the previous chapter, for example, that liberal societies tolerate (limited) difference; consequently the liberal society will not only contain a liberal discourse about how people should live, but will also contain various
other discourses about sexuality, crime, morality, religion, and so forth. And some of these may be radically different from and thus produce subjects who challenge liberalism.

However, Foucault’s point that discourses produce radical differences that challenge it is more interesting. He suggests that “Where there is power, there is resistance.” His point is not that wherever there is power subjects will necessarily resist but that, wherever power operates surprising forms of resistance often emerge. Firstly, he indicates that the multiple discourses within society may create singular desires within particular subjects that exceed any of the discourses in circulation. An example can be found in the memoir of ‘Alexina,’ discovered and published by Foucault under the title, *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite.* Alexina was brought up in a strict girl-only religious school but “was finally recognized as being ‘truly’ a young man. Obliged to make a legal change of sex after judicial proceedings and a modification of his civil status, he was incapable of adapting himself to a new identity and ultimately committed suicide.” But what makes Alexina’s identity so unique (and ultimately tragic) are not simply biological or libidinal impulses, but the fact that these impulses were enmeshed in a variety of medical, religious, legal and cultural discourses about sexuality and gender that led to he/r understanding he/r sexuality and gender, and he/r impulses, in a unique way that clashed with all those discourses. It was thus the interconnections between the

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51 Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1,* 95.
53 Michel Foucault, introduction to *Herculine Barbin,* xi.
various discourses that produced radically different, singular desires and characteristics within Alexina that exceeded and challenged those discourses. The multiplicity of discourses, to put it in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, create 'lines of flight,' unexpected, singular desires, within subjects that 'flee all over the place.'

Secondly, Foucault notes that discursive attempts to determine certain forms of behaviour and thoughts in subjects often produce unexpected, radically different forms of subjectivity that exceed the order. The various mechanisms of disciplinary power that Foucault shows are used to normalise prisoners and shape them into docile, obedient subjects, also produces 'delinquents' – subjects who have been policed, treated violently and been forced to band together in prison, and who leave prison to find that they are labelled as criminals, cannot find work and can only rely on former prisoners. Attempts to produce obedient subjects, then, actually produces new subjects, disobedient subjects, radically different subjects, with desires, practices and ideas that exceed and disturb the ordering discourse.

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54 This idea that resistant desires stem from surprising interconnections, it must be noted, is very different from the idea that unruly singularities exist in the gaps within this discursive matrix. This would imply that there is something beyond discourse, a singular subject beneath the discursive layer waiting to be liberated. But for Foucault there is nothing beneath discourse. Alexina does not have some unique form of subjectivity buried beneath discursive distortions. Alexina, with all her uniqueness and confusion, is just and only a product of the many and surprising effects of multiple discourses. If there are gaps between the multiple discourses, therefore, there are no singularities; there is nothing. This is why Foucault distinguishes his position from that of Sartre. Sartre “avoids the idea that the self is something given to us,” but ultimately he posits a true self lying waiting to be discovered when he suggests that authenticity lies in discovering one's true, radically underdetermined core. By contrast, Foucault says that “From the idea that self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.” See Michel Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,' in Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume I: Ethics, edited by Paul Rabinow. London: Penguin, 1994: 262.

55 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 265-8.
5 Lacan and the Real

For Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault there are always unruly singularities that might mutate into a radical difference that challenges, contradicts and resists orders such as the liberal order. In the following chapters these poststructural ideas about why radical difference is ineradicable are used to demonstrate how liberalism is violent toward divergent subjects. First, though, we might consider Jacques Lacan’s explanation for the inescapability of radical difference. Lacan’s teachings were primarily addressed to practitioners and intended for clinical use; it is only with the work of varied theorists who have developed his teachings that the political significance of Lacan’s work has been grasped. Thus, in exploring the Lacanian account of violence, resistance and radical difference, other prominent Lacanians, especially Slavoj Žižek, will be discussed. For Lacan, in short, subjectivity requires two different orders to exist – the imaginary and the symbolic orders – but these can only established by excluding radical differences and pushing them into what he calls the Real, an ineradicable area of radical differences that occasionally emerge and resists the imaginary-symbolic order.

Alienation in the Imaginary-Symbolic Order

We can begin to understand this by considering Lacan’s account of the imaginary order. In ‘The Mirror Stage’ Lacan outlines the initiation of the child into the imaginary order, an alienating order which continues throughout the subject’s life. From the age of approximately 6 months the child begins to recognise themselves in the reflection of the mirror. Whereas previously the child was incapable of distinguishing her bodily movements, especially from her mother, during the mirror stage she begins to see that her movements, desires and drives belong to her. The child does not have control over
her body; "in relation to the still very profound lack of co-ordination of his own motility, it [the image] represents an ideal unity, a salutary imago."56 But despite continuing to lack the unity the image presents, the child enters into a process of identification with the mirror image, and becomes an 'I,' a discrete individual.

However, because the child identifies with an image of a unified, controlled individual but still has a 'profound lack of co-ordination,' her identification with the mirror image—which is central to the transition to subjectivity—is an alienating experience. The mirror image with which the child identifies does not represent her experiences. Thus, "the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself."57 Alienation in the mirror’s reflection, however, is just the precursor of alienation within the imaginary order that continues throughout the subject’s life. For once she begins to interact with other subjects, her identity continues to be defined through a reflection. But now her identity is reflected through the gaze of the other. She thus sees her identity as she is seen by her parents, by her teachers, by her colleagues, by children—by the people with whom she interacts. But, again, this identity is always mediated. Her image of herself is always the image that others have of her and as such, like the mirror image seen by the young child, it “remains something alien—and thus fundamentally alienating.”58

As Stavrakakis suggests,

57 Ibid., 19.
If the imaginary, the field of specular images, of spatial unities and totalised representations, is always built on an illusion which is ultimately alienating for the child, his or her only recourse is to turn to the symbolic level, seeking in language a means to acquire a stable identity. By submitting to the laws of language the child becomes a subject in language, it inhabits language, and hopes to gain an adequate representation through the world of words.  

After her alienation in the mirror image, then, the child turns to the symbolic order, to the order of language. Following Saussure, Lacan sees the symbolic order as the order provided by the signifying chain, by the system of signifiers that give meaning to objects in the world. It is only by submitting to this linguistic order, by engaging in language, that the subject can piece together her identity, engage with others, and be an agent. “If we must define that moment in which man becomes human,” Lacan says, “we would say that it is at that instant when, as minimally as you like, he enters into a symbolic relationship.”

Of course, the child’s turn to the symbolic order does not follow chronologically from her (failed) turn to the imaginary order; the imaginary and symbolic orders are interconnected. The child’s alienation in the reflection of the mirror is made possible only because of meanings attributed through language. The parents, for example, by naming the child, by treating her as an ‘I’ and by perpetuating a whole range of meanings through language give the reflection meaning. “The recognition of the image

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59 Ibid., 20.
can only come about within an already established matrix or topology of images by way of the symbolic.\textsuperscript{61} Secondly, the subject's alienation within the imaginary order continues throughout her life, as her identity is always reflected through the other, but interactions with the other through which she acquires her identity always take place through the medium of language. Moreover, the very meaning of the images and representations within the imaginary order stems from the symbolic order. One might identify oneself through the other as British, Scottish, a computer programmer, a wife, a cyclist and so on; but what identities are important depend upon the symbolic order which defines meaning. Whilst there is an analytic distinction between the imaginary and symbolic order, then, in practice it is more appropriate to speak of an imaginary-symbolic order.

However, we must maintain the distinction because the symbolic order is alienating in a different way to the imaginary order. The subject experiences the symbolic order as alienating, firstly, because her submission to it is forced: if the child wants to become a subject she has no choice but to learn to express herself in and through language. Moreover, this is a symbolic order over which the subject has no control:

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or

\textsuperscript{61} Peter Bratsis, \textit{Everyday Life of the State}. Boulder: Paradigm, 2006: 86.
renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet
and even beyond his death.62

But, more fundamentally, submission to the symbolic order is alienating because
language, like the image, never fully represents the subject. There are many examples of
this, but as Stavrakakis notes, for Lacan, the symbolic order fails to articulate what is
singular or unique about the subject. As Lacan puts it, “there is, in effect, something
radically unassimilable to the signifier. It’s quite simply the subject’s singular existence.
Why is he here? Where has he come from? What is he doing here? Why is he going to
disappear? The signifier is incapable of providing him with an answer.”63 As Bruce Fink
explains, the symbolic order is crucial to subjectivity since “If we are to express
ourselves to those around us, we are obliged to learn their language.” But language often
fails to express our singular existence and therefore

We have the sense, at times, that we cannot find the words to say what we mean, and that
the words available to us miss the point, saying too much or too little. Yet without those
words, the very realm of meaning would not exist for us at all. Lacan refers to this as our
alienation in language.64

62 Lacan, Écrits, 68.
Psychoses, 1955-6, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Russell Grigg. London: Routledge,
64 Bruce Fink, A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique. Cambridge,
MA: Harvard University Press, 1997: 86. This Lacanian view of language leads Jameson to suggest that
“the tragic symbol of the unavoidable alienation of language would seem to have been provided by
Truffault’s film, L’Enfant Sauvage, in which language learning comes before us as a racking torture, a
palpably physical kind of suffering upon which the feral child is only imperfectly willing to enter.”
The Real and Radical Difference

Submission to the imaginary-symbolic order is needed to become a human subject; without it subjectivity is impossible; but there is always a ‘gap’ between the image and the symbol on the one hand, and that in the subject which is being reflected or symbolised on other, since the elements of the latter have been excluded from the imaginary and symbolic orders for the latter to exist. This means that, as Žižek says, “The basic feature of the Lacanian subject is . . . its alienation in the signifier: as soon as the subject is caught in the radically external signifying network he is mortified, dismembered, divided.” 65 It means, in other words, that for Lacan, in the process of becoming a subject the singularities of the subject have been excluded from the imaginary-symbolic order.

However, these singularities do not disappear. As Žižek puts it, for Lacan, “what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real,” the third register on which Lacan understands human existence. 66 Lacan uses this term, the Real, to refer to the realm of those singular phenomena that are expelled from the imaginary-symbolic order. However, because reality, our ability to perceive and understand the world, our experience, stems from the meaning provided by the imaginary-symbolic order, that which is outside these orders, the Real, cannot be symbolised, understood, or interpreted.

66 Ibid., 72. Emphasis added. It is important to note the distinction between repression and foreclosure here: Lacan is not talking about singularities which remain confined and silenced within the order, but about singularities which are foreclosed, excluded entirely from, the imagery-symbolic order. It is these foreclosed singularities that return in the Real. For a good account of this distinction see Madan Sarup, Jacques Lacan. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992: 109.
Hence Lacan says that we can “define the real as the impossible.”\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, precisely because the Real refers to that which is outside the symbolic order, the Real “resists symbolisation – this is the definition of the Real in Lacan”\textsuperscript{68}. If this sounds obscure, that’s because it is: the Real is precisely that which exists but cannot be experienced because all experience is mediated by the imaginary-symbolic orders, it is ineradicable yet impossible. “Lacan takes pains to ensure that the real remains the most elusive and mysterious of the three orders, by speaking of it less than of the other orders, and by making it the site of a radical indeterminacy.”\textsuperscript{69} However, as Žižek explains, its obscurity is Lacan’s point:

the Real cannot be inscribed, but we can inscribe this impossibility itself, we can locate its place: a traumatic place which causes a series of failures. And Lacan’s whole point is that the Real is \textit{nothing but} this impossibility of its inscription: the Real is not a transcendental positive entity, persisting somewhere beyond the symbolic order like a hard kernel inaccessible to it, some kind of Kantian ‘Thing-in-itself’ – in itself it is nothing at all, just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility.\textsuperscript{70}

It is this gap within the imaginary-symbolic order, the Real, which constitutes the Lacanian notion of ineradicable radical difference. The Real, because it cannot be symbolised, represented, experienced, articulated is precisely that which is radically different from the imaginary-symbolic order. There are various arguments about this conception of radical difference in the literature and its relation to poststructural ideas of


\textsuperscript{68} Stavrakakis, \textit{Lacan and the Political}, 27.


\textsuperscript{70} Žižek, \textit{The Sublime Object of Ideology}, 172-3.
radical difference. But, as the editors of a recent collection on the subject say, behind both approaches "lies the claim . . . that there is always some difference escaping subsumption to identity or to any simple dichotomy between identity and difference"; hence they "refer to this difference as a 'radical difference.'" However, whereas poststructuralists see radical difference as constituted by incessant, destabilising flows of desires, Lacanians perceive radical difference as the Real, as that which cannot be symbolised and which is beyond experience. Indeed, because Lacanians 'define the real as the impossible' they do not describe radical difference at all, since "to describe it is ultimately to misdescribe it." Moreover, whereas for poststructuralists radical difference is that which exceeds the order, for Lacanians radical difference is simultaneously both excess and lack. That is, "the Real is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order – it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured." But, "the real is at the same time the product, remainder, leftover, 

71 Numerous theorists have debated the relation between the Lacanian and poststructural conceptions of radical difference. Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, for example, sporadically attacks poststructural accounts of language and difference, defining the Lacanian real in opposition to the nominalism and 'playfulness' of poststructuralism. Laclau, for his part, questions Žižek's distinction in his Preface to the *Sublime Object of Ideology*, contending that the division between the two is not as extensive as Žižek argues. A recent edited collection by Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, which includes a variety of papers on the similarities, differences, strengths and weakness of both conceptions is perhaps the most recent intervention in this debate, but Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey have also contributed some insightful critiques of the political implications of Lacanian approaches to radical difference. See: Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, eds., *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2005; Andrew Robinson, 'The Political Theory of Constitutive lack: A Critique. *Theory and Event* 8, no.1 (2005): 1-31; Andrew Robinson, 'The Politics of Lack,' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6, no.2 (2004): 259-69.; Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, 'A Tiklish Subject? Žižek and the Future of Left Radicalism,' *Thesis Eleven* 80, no.1 (2005): 94-107.


scraps of this process of symbolization, the remnants, the excess which escapes symbolisation and is as such produced by the symbolization itself.\textsuperscript{74}

For Lacanians, then, the Real is a radical difference – an unsymbolisable lack/excess – within the imaginary-symbolic order. This, certainly, is a different conception of radical difference to that of Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault. But fundamentally, just as poststructuralists recognise that behind any order is a multiplicity of singularities that sometimes exceed and disturb that order, so Lacanian theorists recognise that within any order is an unsymbolisable, radically different, void that militates against that order ever being sutured. Both sets of thinkers thus see orders as pervaded by ineradicable radical difference.

The Real, however, is not a radical difference that frequently troubles or resists the imaginary-symbolic order. On the contrary, the Real is unsymbolisable and as such is largely invisible, beyond experience. However, the Real occasionally manifests itself, causing subjects to have desires that unsettle, resist and are radically different from the imaginary-symbolic order. Of course, it is not the Real itself that has such effects; the Real cannot be apprehended or experienced.

The paradox of the Lacanian Real . . . is that it is an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of ‘really existing,’ taking place in reality), has a series of properties – it

exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects.

Indeed, this is "the precise definition of the real object: a cause which in itself does not exist – which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way. If the Real is the impossible, it is precisely this impossibility which is to be grasped through its effects." 75

The kinds of effects that the Real might have are numerous. An interesting example that Lacan discusses is 'aggressivity.' 76 During the mirror stage the subject develops his identity, but there is an alienating gap between the subject and the reflected image. Consequently, the subject has an image of himself that constitutes his identity, his ego, but there is a range of other radically different images that have been excluded from his consciousness and are pushed into and buried within his unconscious, as imagos that cannot be properly articulated. But despite their foreclosure from the imaginary, they occasionally emerge in the actions of the subject – and it is these actions that Lacan calls 'aggressivity.' For Lacan, "the slightest pretext is enough to arouse the aggressive intention . . . which has remained permanent at the level of . . . the subject's unconscious." 77 And these aggressive actions can take various forms.

One has only to listen to children between two and five playing, alone or together, to know that the pulling off of the head and the ripping open of the belly are themes that occur

75 Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 163.
76 Lacan 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis,' in Écrits, 8-29.
77 Ibid., 14.
spontaneously to their imagination, and that this is corroborated by the experience of the
doll torn to pieces.\footnote{Ibid., 11.}

However, Lacan contends that unconscious aggressivity continues into adult life, but,
rather than being manifest through childish acts of dismemberment or mutilation, once
enmeshed in the symbolic order aggressivity takes a domesticated form, “which in the
present stage of our culture is given to us under the dominant species of resentment.”\footnote{Ibid., 20.}
Thus, like Nietzsche’s contention that modern societies are pervaded by the
manifestations of the \textit{ressentiment} of modern subjects, so Lacan contends that imagos
excluded from the imaginary-symbolic order will often manifest themselves in the form
of resentment toward others and the order itself.

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Žižek, however, notes another, more radical, effect of the Real. For Žižek, because the
imaginary-symbolic order is always an alienating imposition, it is perpetually haunted
by the “\textit{nightmarish apparition}” of the Real.\footnote{Slavoj Žižek, \textit{Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates.}
London: Verso, 2002: 19.} Whilst these nightmarish apparitions
might produce divergent and radically different desires in subjects that affect the order in
relatively limited ways – as with aggressivity and resentment – occasionally, very
occasionally, the Real produces the desire in subjects to act in radical ways that might
actually destroy the symbolic order; this is what he calls ‘the act.’ As Žižek explains, the
act \textit{par excellence} is suicide.
Why is suicide the act par excellence? The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I 'accomplish' – after an act I'm literally 'not the same as before.' In this sense, we could say that the subject 'undergoes' the act ('passes through' it) rather than 'accomplishes' it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject. Which is why every act worthy of this name is 'mad' in the sense of radical *unaccountability*: By means of it, I put at stake everything, including myself, my symbolic identity; the act is therefore always a 'crime,' a 'transgression,' namely of the limit of the symbolic community to which I belong. The act is defined by this irreducible risk: In its most fundamental dimension, it is always negative, i.e., an act of annihilation, of wiping out – we not only don't know what will come out, its final outcome is ultimately even insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the No! of the pure act.**81**

But Žižek is particularly interested in the idea that the ineradicability of radical difference from liberal democratic societies will lead some subjects toward a more collective suicide in which subjects – driven by the constant, pervasive, unsettling sense that liberal society lacks something – will resist and perhaps subvert it through a "violent," "shattering ethico-political act."**82** For Žižek "The 'impossible' act . . . is what takes place in every authentic revolutionary process"**83** Although this radical political act might take numerous forms – a point to which we will return in the conclusion – Žižek favours a Leninist Revolution, on the basis that it provides a simple, and possible, alternative to liberal and poststructural political strategies which aim at creating an

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82 Ibid., 66.
increasingly inclusive form of political and social order (the strategy, as we will see, deployed by agonists such as Connolly and Honig). For poststructuralists, he suggests, the situation is always too complex; there are always more aspects to be accounted for; our weighing of the pros and cons is never over . . . against this stance, the passage to the act involves a gesture of radical and violent simplification, a cut like that of the proverbial Gordian knot: the magical moment when the infinite pondering crystallizes itself into a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no.’

Conclusion

The point is, then, that the will to act is a divergent desire that, like aggressivity, emerges because radical difference is ineradicable – because it has unexpected effects, pushing subjects to act in divergent, radically different, ways. This Lacanian explanation for why radical difference and divergent desires and subjects are inescapable differs from the Nietzsche’s contention that liberalism produces radically different, exceptional human beings and from the poststructural accounts forwarded by Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, each of which stresses, in different ways, that the multiplicity created by and underpinning the world might at any movement exceed the orders imposed and thus appear as radically different. Yet all of these accounts indicate that radical differences, divergent desires of some kind, are inescapable features of liberal political orders. It is not a question of whether there will be radical differences. It is just a question of what those radical differences will be and how far they will challenge the liberal order.

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84 Indeed, we will see the significance of Žižek’s notion of ‘the act’ as a distinct alternative to democratic agonism in the conclusion to this thesis, where it will be contended not that the act provides a more desirable alternative to liberalism, but that it might be an unavoidable alternative given the concealed violence experienced by divergent subjects.

85 Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, 101-2.
Chapter 3 The Illusion of Difference in Classical Liberal Thought

Introduction

The various accounts of inescapable radical difference outlined in the previous chapter will be returned to throughout this thesis, especially later chapters, helping us to understand why radical differences constantly haunt liberal orders. With these explanations in place, however, we can return to the central argument. It was suggested initially that, as Hobbes makes clear, liberalism violently assimilates or excludes those subjects who are radically different, but that subsequent liberals have ignored or concealed the full extent of this violence, misleadingly claiming that liberalism enables differences to flourish. The remaining chapters, therefore, locate the subtle, and not-so-subtle, violence toward divergent subjects in various liberal visions of political order. In later chapters there will be detailed analyses of radical, agonistic liberals; but this and the subsequent chapter demonstrates how liberal democratic theorists present an illusion of difference. The focus in this chapter is on two prominent classical liberals, John Locke and John Stuart Mill respectively, showing how they present visions of liberal societies which conceal the number of subjects who will be treated as radically different and violently excluded or assimilated.
1 Rights, Consent and Limited Government: Locke's Liberalism

Locke's theory of a limited, consensual liberal government is expounded in his most famous work, *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government*, the second treatise of *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1698.¹

**The State of Nature**

In this text Locke, like Hobbes, begins with the idea of a state of nature. For Locke, when we “consider what state all Men are naturally in” we find that it is “a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit.”² More specifically, for Locke “The Natural Liberty of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man” (p.284). For this reason, again building on Hobbes, he suggests that all men (and he means *men* specifically, not all people) have natural rights – rights that belong to them by virtue of being human. There are three such rights: ‘life, liberty and estate’ (p.323), what he collectively calls “by the general Name, Property” (p.350), his point being that the individual has a right to live and act as he wishes, and to his own land and capital, that cannot be overridden by any other power (except God).³

For Locke, again following Hobbes, the only earthly restriction on the ‘natural’ freedom of the individual whilst in the state of nature is that he follows what he calls the ‘law of

¹ It is commonly acknowledged to be have been written, however, largely prior to, and as a justification for, the Glorious Revolution of 1688. For a detailed account of this controversy and the evidence see Peter Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises of Government*, by John Locke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960: 45-79.
² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960: 269. Further references to the *Two Treatises* will be inserted parenthetically into the text.
³ Locke sometimes calls these three rights the individual’s ‘property,’ but sometimes uses the term ‘property’ simply to refer to the material acquisitions of the individual. This confusing, dual use of the term ‘property’ is central to Macpherson’s reading of Locke, as will be seen in more detail shortly.
nature.' This law, which Locke also terms reason or rationality, is simply that of self-preservation, that "Every one . . . is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his Station wilfully." Locke recognises, though, that self-preservation is most effective when individuals cooperate with and help preserve others too.

So by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the Preservation of the Life, the Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another (p.271).

Locke contends, therefore, that in the state of nature man has 'two powers': "The first is to do whatsoever he thinks fit for the preservation of himself and others within the permission of the Law of Nature." Secondly, men have "the power to punish the Crimes committed against that Law" (p.352). And so, in addition to self-preservation, "the Execution of the Law of Nature is in that State, put into every Mans hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that Law to such a Degree, as may hinder its Violation" (p.271). The exact form of punishment required will vary, but for Locke, again like Hobbes, "Each Transgression may be punished to that degree, and with so much Severity as will suffice to make it an ill bargain to the Offender, give him cause to repent, and terrifie others from doing the like" (p.275).

For Hobbes, then, the state of nature is a war of all against all. But for Locke the state of nature is characterised by competition and cooperation; both are integral to the preservation of individual freedom. Indeed, Locke contrasts the state of nature with a
'state of war,' which "are as far distant, as a State of Peace, Good Will, Mutual assistance, and Preservation and a State of Enmity, Malice, Violence, and Mutual Destruction are one from another" (p.280). A state of war emerges because one party wages war by using force against another, thus violating their rights and the law of nature. And such force, Locke contends, must be responded to in kind, for one may destroy a Man who makes war upon him . . . for the same Reason, that he may kill a Wolf or a Lyon; because such Men are not under the ties of the Common Law of Reason, have no other Rule, but that of Force and Violence, and so may be treated as Beasts of Prey, those dangerous and noxious Creatures, that will be sure to destroy him, whenever he falls into their power (p.279).

Once force is used, it is legitimate for the victim to respond with force; hence an act of war produces a state of war lasting until one party is defeated. And Locke is clear that the state of nature is likely to mutate into a state of war. All it requires is an act of force – or the perception of an act of force – by one party and a response by the victim and a state of war emerges. And in the state of nature, where there is no judge, umpire or arbiter to whom the parties can appeal or who can bring it to an end, "the State of War once begun, continues" (p.281).

The Creation of Civil Society and Government

It is because the state of nature is likely to degenerate into a perpetual state of war that Locke argues, like Hobbes, that individuals would contract into civil society, into an organised political community, rather than remain in the state of nature so as to preserve their life, liberty and estate.
The only way whereby one devests himself of his Natural Liberty, and puts on the bonds of Civil Society is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it (p.331).

More specifically, government is necessary because it corrects two tendencies that emerge in the states of nature and war. Firstly, although individuals have the power to punish those who transgress the law of nature in the state of nature, their passions may well undermine the consistency and moderation with which they carry out such punishments: “it is unreasonable for Men to be Judges in their own Cases . . . Self-love will make Men partial to themselves and their friends . . . Ill Nature, Passion and Revenge will carry them too far in punishing others. And hence nothing but Confusion and Disorder will flow.” Locke contends, therefore, that “Civil Government is the proper remedy for the Inconveniences of the State of Nature, which must certainly be Great, where Men may be Judges in their own Case” (pp.275-6). Secondly, if the state of nature slips into a state of war – as it easily does – then civil government is an effective way of resolving the conflicts:

To avoid this State of War (wherein there is no appeal but to Heaven, and wherein every the least difference is apt to end, where there is no Authority to decide between the Contenders) is one great reason of Mens putting themselves into Society, and quitting the State of Nature. For where there is an Authority, a Power on Earth, from which relief can be had by appeal, there the continuance of the State of War is excluded, and the Controversie is decided by that Power (p.282).
**Consent**

However, although Locke recognises that government is needed to enforce standard laws and to act as an arbiter between contending parties, he does not suggest that just any kind of government will suffice. Locke’s first key addition to Hobbes’s thesis is that only governments and laws brought into being through the consent of the individuals subject to them are legitimate. For,

> Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate and subjected to the political Power of another, without his own Consent.

The only way whereby one devests himself of his Natural Liberty, and puts on the bonds of Civil Society is by agreeing with other Men to joyn and unite into a Community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure Enjoyment of their Properties, and a greater Security against any that are not of it (p.331).

Locke, has, however, a specific understanding of what consent entails, as can be seen through a contrast with Rousseau. As seen in Chapter 1, Rousseau seeks to provide an outline of an order in which all individuals can explicitly consent to the political order and its laws. Locke, however, sees such unanimity as impossible and therefore proposes a more limited understanding of consent. Firstly, Locke realises that consent for particular laws is rarely unanimous because “the variety of Opinions, and contrariety of Interests, which unavoidably happen in all Collections of Men” (pp.332-3). Hence he recognises that

> it is necessary the Body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the consent of the majority: or else it is impossible it should act or continue one Body, one
Community, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should (p.332).

Unlike Rousseau, then, Locke suggests that because individuals rarely agree but need to be united, laws are legitimate if just the majority of individuals consent to them. Majority rule is thus crucial. Secondly, unlike Rousseau, for whom consent had to be given by citizens explicitly, for Locke, consenting to government can be tacit. Certainly, he recognises that some individuals may have, “by actual Agreement, and any express Declaration, given his Consent to be of any Commonweal” (p.349); but these are relatively rare occasions. Largely, for Locke, an individual consents “where he has made no Expressions of it at all.” For

every Man, that hath any Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his tacit Consent, and is as far forth obliged to Obedience to the Laws of that Government, during such Enjoyment, as any one under it; whether this his Possession be of Land, to him and his Heirs for ever, or a Lodging only for a Week; or whether it be barely travelling freely on the Highway; and in Effect, it reaches as far as the very being of any one within the Territories of that Government (p.348).

Thus, Locke’s theory of consent is more limited than Rousseau’s, then, because it allows government by consent of the majority, and because it requires only tacit consent.

Limited Government and Justified Rebellion

Locke does not contend, however, that in giving tacit or express consent to government citizens consent to the sovereign having absolute power, as for Hobbes. For Locke, the
government's "Power in the utmost Bounds of it, is limited to the publick good of the Society. It is a Power, that hath no other end but preservation, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the Subjects" (p.357).

There are clear limits to what the government can do and to what, therefore, citizens are assumed to tacitly consent – limits circumscribed by the natural rights of individuals and the law of nature. For Locke, "The great and chief end . . . of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of Property" (pp.350-1). The broader significance of this will be explored in more detail shortly, but it suffices here to note that, because of this, government must establish three things: a "settled, known Law, received and allowed by common consent to be the Standard of Right and Wrong, and the common measure to decide all Controversies between them"; "a known and indifferent judge" who can deal with those who transgress the law; and the "Power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due Execution" (p.351). Thus, government must be limited to protecting individual rights through the establishment of a law, a judge and an executive, to each of which the people have consented.

Locke contends, moreover, that if the government oversteps these bounds, if it acts in ways that contravene the law of nature and threatens rather than protects life, liberty and estate, then the people can justifiably overthrow the government and form a new one. Locke outlines numerous ways in which government might overstep its bounds, and which therefore justify resistance: when unelected officials make laws; when arbitrary will replaces law; when laws are not executed; or when government invades the individual's estate or life (pp.408-12). If these and other situations arise, in which the
government breaches its citizens’ trust and threatens their rights, then Locke recognises that resistance is the natural, legitimate response:

The People generally ill treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavily upon them. They will wish and seek for the opportunity, which, in the change, weakness, and accidents of humane affairs, seldom delays long to offer itself (p.415).

Indeed, Locke contends that “Whosoever uses force without Right . . . puts himself into a state of War with those, against whom he so uses it, and in that state all former Ties are cancelled, all other Rights cease, and everyone has a Right to defend himself, and to resist the Aggressor” (p.419). This, he notes, applies as much to political leaders as private individuals for,

whenever the Legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the Property of the People, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power, they put themselves into a state of War with the People, who are thereby absolved from any farther Obedience, and are left to the common Refuge, which God hath provided for all Men, against Force and Violence” (p.412).

This does not simply mean that for Locke individuals can legitimately “resist Force with Force” (p.422) but, more specifically, that they can forcibly resist the government with the aim of dissolving it and establishing an alternative one that effectively protects their property. As Locke puts it, when the government breaches the trust of its citizens
they forfeit the Power, the People had put into their hands, for quite contrary ends, and it
devolves to the People, who have a Right to resume their original Liberty, and, by the
Establishment of a new legislative (such as they shall think fit) provide for their own safety
and Security, which is the end for which they are in Society (p.412-3).

Unjustified Rebellion, Enemies and Violence

However, Locke recognises that the people sometimes rebel against ‘Just Government,’
that is, against governments who protect rights and do not overstep these bounds
(p.418). For although Locke is clear that government acting arbitrarily – in ways to
which the people have not consented – is a likely catalyst of rebellion by the people, the
passions of individuals can also cause the dissolution of a just government:

I grant, that the Pride, Ambition, and Turbulence of private Men have sometimes caused
great Disorders in Commonwealths . . . But whether the mischief hath ofner begun in the
Peoples Wantonness, and a Desire to cast off the lawful Authority of their Rulers; or in the
Rulers Insolence, and Endeavours to get, and exercise an Arbitrary Power over the People;
whether Oppression, or Disobedience gave the first rise to the Disorder, I leave it to
impartial History to determine (p.418).

He suggests, however, that just as it is illegitimate for the government to overstep its
bounds, so it is illegitimate for individuals to rebel against just government. Those who
do rebel, therefore, cannot be tolerated; they diverge radically from the kind of subjects
that are needed in the liberal order, and must be responded to with great violence and
force in precisely the same way as governments who overstep their bounds must be
treated.
This I am sure, whoever, either Ruler or Subject, by force goes about to invade the Rights of either the Prince or People, and lays the foundation for overturning the constitutions and Frame of any Just Government, is guilty of the greatest Crime, I think, a Man is capable of, being to answer for all those mischiefs of Blood, Rapine, and Desolation, which the breaking to pieces of Government bring on a Countrey. And he who does it, is justly to be esteemed the common Enemy and Pest of mankind; and is to be treated accordingly (p.418).

Like Hobbes, furthermore, Locke is also emphatic that the violence turned toward these enemies must know no bounds:

Whosoever uses force without Right, as everyone does in Society, who it without Law, puts himself into a state of War with those, against whom he so uses it, and in that state all former Ties are cancelled, all other Rights cease, and everyone has a Right to defend himself, and to resist the Aggressor (p.419).

Thus, whereas Locke deviates from Hobbes by arguing that the state ought to have limited power and can in fact be resisted by the people if it oversteps its bounds, he very clearly follows Hobbes in suggesting that those who challenge or rebel against a just government must be treated as an ‘enemy’ who can be treated as if they are in a state of war.

_Freedom and Violence in Locke’s Liberal Order_

For Locke, then, individuals have natural rights to life, liberty and estate and it is in their nature to seek to preserve them and punish those who seek to violate them, meaning that
the state of nature is likely to degenerate into a state of war. The purpose of government is to provide an order in which individuals' natural rights are protected from this latter state. Unlike Hobbes, however, Locke contends that the government must operate on the basis of the consent of the majority and must not overstep its limited purpose of protecting life, liberty and estate; if it does so rebellion is justified. Locke thus presents a vision of liberal society that aims to achieve the same aims as Hobbes’s Leviathan, namely, protecting natural rights. However, because Locke does not see subjects as driven by purely self-interested passions but also by reason which leads them toward cooperation, he insists that government need not be an absolute, coercive power that can act as it wishes so as to guarantee the security of its citizens. Rather, in Locke’s vision government is strictly limited and based on consent; it does the minimum it needs to do to ensure that individuals can live as they wish and pursue their own interests without them being infringed by others. Individual freedom within the liberal society is thus not absolute; individuals cannot do whatever they wish, as they could (at least hypothetically) in a state of nature.

*Freedom of men under Government*, is, to have a standing Rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the Legislative Power erected in it; A Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man (p. 284).

This is not to say that Locke thinks that government can exist without coercive power or violence. Locke is clearly aware of the need for a powerful state that can and does treat violently those subjects who are radically different from and challenge the liberal order,
as we have seen in his Hobbesian argument that enemies, like arbitrary governments, put themselves into a state of war and must be dealt with accordingly. But these radically different subjects are exceptions; those who accept the legitimate authority of the liberal state do not experience this kind of violence but instead are free to live, within its rules, as they wish.

*Majority Rule and Tacit Consent*

However, Locke's introduction of consent and limited government as means of shifting power away from the state and securing the freedom of individuals actually comes at a price, and one that he fails to fully acknowledge. Indeed, whilst he never makes this explicit, ultimately his vision of a limited government based on consent can only be established and maintained by treating a large proportion of the population violently. This is clear, to a limited degree, in his conception of consent. As we have seen, Locke makes clear that government must be dictated by the consent of the people but, because there will never be unanimity, it is necessary that government is dictated by the consent of the majority. Like value pluralists, Locke thus recognises that there will often be irreconcilable differences and as such there cannot be absolute harmony; all of the citizens cannot be happy all of the time. However, Locke does not see this as problematic. For Locke, majority rule does not illegitimately suppress the interests and desires of the minority. Rather, he claims that when individuals contract into civil society and government they simultaneously consent to majority rule, to the possibility that they will diverge from the majority and be in the minority on occasions, since this is the only way in which the liberal society can have solidity and direction. As he puts it:
every Man, by consenting with others to make one Body Politick under one Government, puts himself under an Obligation to every one of that Society, to submit to the determination of the majority, and to be concluded by it; or else this original Compact, whereby he with others incorporates into one Society, would signify nothing, and be no Compact, if he be left free, and under no other ties, than he was in before in the State of Nature (p.332).

However, it is arguably the case that, because individuals need only tacitly consent to being governed rather than consent explicitly, those who are in the minority are experiencing more violence than Locke acknowledges. For as David Hume pointed out in the 1740s tacit consent is tantamount to no consent at all:

such an implied consent can only have place where a man imagines that the matter depends on his choice. Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artisan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives, from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean and perish, the moment he leaves her.4

If Hume is right, if individuals are not tacitly consenting to government as Locke assumes, then this means that those in the minority have not in fact consented to government and nor, therefore, to majority rule. As such, any majority decision could be argued to be illegitimate, to do violence to minorities because it excludes their opinions and interests from public policy and law when they have not consented to such exclusion. This is not violence toward subjects for diverging too far from Locke’s model

of subjectivity; those who are in the minority may quite feasibly be faithful and committed members of the ‘Body Politick’ – indeed, as we will see shortly, the only consent with which Locke is actually concerned is that of particular kinds of subjects; all those who do not conform to the liberal model of subjectivity he implicitly privileges are excluded from consideration entirely anyway. But it is nevertheless a form of violence not fully appreciated by Locke, in which the interests of some are excluded from consideration because they diverge from the majority.

*Lunaticks, Ideots, Madmen and Labourers*

However, there is a much more significant way in which Locke’s introduction of consent and limited government treat violently those subjects who diverge from the model of liberal subjectivity that, as we will see, is integral to his vision. This is not as spectacular or gruesome as the violence experienced by the enemies of the people, but is a far more widespread form of violence in which a large proportion of the population is categorised as diverging from the norm of the liberal subject.

We can understand this by recalling that he claims that it is both a law of nature and rational that individuals seek their own and, by extension, others’ preservation – for Locke “We are born Rational” (p.308). We do not automatically use this capacity; we come to realise that the law of nature, the desire for self-preservation, is rational as a consequence of time and parenting, through which divergent, radically different desires and instincts are suppressed. It is therefore innate within us, but we require this to be brought out of us (pp.308-9). However, Locke is also clear that not all subjects will attain rationality and live in accordance with the law of nature. Some subjects will
continue to have within them instincts that drive them to subvert the law of nature and live irrationally. These divergent subjects, Locke makes clear, must be constrained and treated violently. He is explicit about this in two ways.

He admits, firstly, that those who break the law act unreasonably and must be treated violently, in a way not dissimilar to Hobbes. For Locke, the law of nature stipulates that we must preserve our own well-being; just government, government that remains within its legitimate bounds, is, therefore, in line with the law of nature. To break the positive laws of a just government, consequently, is also to break the law of nature and “In transgressing the Law of Nature, the Offender declares himself to live by another Rule, than that of reason and common Equity,” meaning that

Every man upon this score, by the Right he hath to preserve Mankind in general, may restrain, or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to him, and may bring such evil on any one, who hath transgressed that Law, as may make him repent the doing of it, and thereby deter him, and by his Example others, from doing like mischief (p.272).

Secondly and more importantly, Locke suggests that if,

through defects that may happen out of the ordinary course of Nature, any one comes not to such a degree of reason wherein he might be supposed capable of knowing the Law, and so living within the Rules of it, he is never capable of being a Free Man, he is never let loose to the disposal of his own Will (because he knows no bounds to it, has not Understanding, its proper Guide) but is continued under the Tuition and Government of others (pp.307-8).
Such subjects, for Locke, include ‘Lunaticks,’ Ideots’ and ‘Madmen’ (p.308). They diverge too far from the rational individual which Locke sees as natural, and therefore must be under constant supervision and tutoring to ensure that they do not act of their own accord. This means, firstly, that unlike rational individuals in Locke's vision, these subjects ought not to be free to live as they wish. For Locke, an individual's freedom is conditional upon reason, since it is only by being in possession of reason, by knowing that there are certain limits to what he can and cannot do which are dictated by the law of nature, that he knows what actions will jeopardise his freedom. Thus "To turn him loose to an unrestrained liberty, before he has Reason to guide him, is not allowing him the privilidge of his nature, to be free; but to thrust him out amongst Brutes, and abandon him to a state as wretched, and as much beneath that of Man, as theirs" (p.309).

Secondly, therefore, because these individuals are under constant supervision, because they are unreasonable, impetuous and incapable of freedom, Locke is also clear that they must not have any say in political life; they must be 'continued under the Tuition and Government of others.' Thus, Locke is explicit that these divergent subjects must have no input into the process of consent on which Locke's liberal order is based. If they reject the government - whether explicitly by complaining or tacitly by refusing to acquire land, for example - their rejections will be ignored. Because they are unreasonable they are incapable of knowing the law of nature and thus incapable of recognising the need for a government that protects them and others; as such their opinions on political life are not worthy of consideration.

However, whilst Locke might be clear that those who diverge from the natural, rational subject must be constrained and excluded from politics, there are further aspects of this
categorisation and exclusion about which he is far less explicit. Firstly, Locke, as we have seen, justifies the exclusion and constraint of these divergent subjects on the basis that they are lacking in reason and hence must be governed. What he does not acknowledge, however, is that excluding these radically different, irrational individuals from political life is also fundamental to — indeed, a condition of — Locke’s liberal order, since without excluding these unreasonable, divergent subjects, consent-based government would be much more precarious than he suggests. For Locke theorises an order in which individuals unite together to form a political society that will protect their individual rights. But they consent to unite together only because they naturally or reasonably seek to preserve themselves and, by extension, others. The order exists only, therefore, because and insofar as subjects involved in consenting to its creation are rational subjects. Locke, therefore, cannot tolerate those lacking in reason: they may not seek to preserve themselves and others in the same way, and therefore may choose not to enter into a contract or may, at any moment, break it. As such, it is crucial for Locke to ignore their opinions, since only by excluding them from consideration can it be ensured that individuals will consent to a form of political order that will protect individual rights. The exclusion of the unreasonable is undertaken, therefore, not just because they are considered unreasonable; it is also a condition of the existence of Locke’s liberal order.

Moreover, although the exclusion of unreasonable subjects is explicitly claimed by Locke to apply to lunatics, idiots and madmen, he says that if ‘any one comes not to such a degree of reason wherein he might be supposed capable of knowing the Law, and so living within the Rules of it,’ they ought not to be able to use their will and must
instead be governed. There may, therefore, be more subjects treated as radically different in Locke’s order than he admits. And as Macpherson clearly demonstrates, this is certainly the case, for implicit in Locke’s work is the view that the propertyless, wage labourers, are also unreasonable.\(^5\) Macpherson contends, in short, that Locke considers individuals who acquire and own property in the state of nature as reasonable since they contribute toward their preservation; conversely, those who did not manage to acquire property in the state of nature, the propertyless, become viewed as unreasonable, as unable to understand the law of nature.

Locke considered private appropriation to be natural and rational from the beginning, and considered the propensity to accumulate beyond the limits of consumption and barter to be natural and rational after the introduction of money, which is, on his own recognition, the stage at which all land is taken up and some men have to begin to live without land of their own. From this time on, rational conduct consists in unlimited accumulation, and the possibility of accumulation is open only to those who succeed in getting possession of land or materials to work on. It follows that . . . Those who were left without property after the land was all appropriated could not be accounted fully rational. They had no opportunity to be so. Like the day-labourer in civil society they were not in a position to expend their labour improving the gifts of nature; their whole energies were need to keep alive.\(^6\)

It is not, therefore, just lunatics, idiots and madmen who are excluded from using their own will and whose political views are ignored; the propertyless are also excluded. And arguably the reason for this is because, again, Locke’s liberal order relies upon this exclusion – indeed, it is even more reliant upon this exclusion. For, without the


exclusion of the propertyless from those whose political opinions determine whether or not the liberal society is considered legitimate, a limited government aimed at protecting individual rights may never find consent. For why would the propertyless consent to a political order whose “great and chief end . . . is the Preservation of Property” (pp.350-1)? Why would they agree that “The Supream Power cannot take from any Man any part of his Property without his own consent” (p.360)? Arguably Locke realises that they may not consent to a limited government designed to protect property since they have no estate to protect – since, in fact, it would better serve the propertyless that existing acquisitions could be taken from their current owners by government and redistributed. In excluding the political opinions of the unreasonable from consideration, then, Locke does not simply exclude the infrequent and spectacular figures of lunatics, idiots and madmen, but, quite remarkably, also excludes labourers, since these various divergent subjects might not consent to a limited government committed to the protection of private property.7

Locke, then, offers a vision of a liberal order that he admits will require violence toward some subjects who differ too far from the rational subject, not only ‘enemies,’ but also those who break the law, and those who are unreasonable. However, as we have seen, there is more violence within this liberal vision than Locke admits. For Locke introduces the ideas of consent and limited government so as to ensure that government is not arbitrary, that it protects life, liberty and estate and cannot be an absolute coercive power of the kind that Hobbes suggests. But in order to ensure that individuals will consent to a

7 Of course, it is hardly remarkable that Locke, living in seventeenth century England, thought that labourers should be excluded from political life. What is remarkable, however, is that he justifies this exclusion on the basis that labourers are unreasonable and consequently do not conform to the basic law of nature so as to maintain bourgeois society.
limited government, Locke has to exclude the opinions of those who might reject this kind of order – not just lunatics, idiots and madmen but also labourers. Thus, Locke acknowledges that his order will treat some subjects as intolerable radical differences but he does not acknowledge the mass of others, the wage labourers, who are treated thus too.

2 Individuality, Rationality and Freedom: Mill’s Liberalism

It would be interesting to explore Locke’s concealment of violence toward difference further by examining two additional features that Locke helped introduce to liberalism, tolerance and secularism, which he expounds in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, since these are also intended to enable diversity to flourish but again obscure the violence on which they rely. However, rather than examining Locke further we will instead examine the principle of individual freedom developed in 1859 in *On Liberty* the by the later classical liberal thinker, John Stuart Mill. Such an examination is important not simply because this essay develops Locke’s themes of tolerance and secularism, not simply because “it remains the classic statement of the case for individual liberty,” nor simply because it has been hugely influential within liberal political theory and practice; it is also important because Mill argues here that if society respects individual freedom

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8 In *A Letter Concerning Toleration* Locke argues that individuals ought to be able to search for religious truths, and that this requires that the state be entirely separate from religious associations, thus ensuring that religious minorities are tolerated. If this were the case, for Locke, violence toward religious minorities would dissipate, as indicated by his comment that “if each of them [church and state] would contain itself within its own bounds – the one attending to the worldly affairs of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls – it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them.” What Locke ignores, however, is that this separation can only be established and maintained by excluding those religious minorities from political engagement who not only seek to use political institutions to extend their faith but also those who wish to bring their religious beliefs into public life or who see public and spiritual life as closely intertwined. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in The Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration, edited by Tom Crawford. Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Publications, 2002: 150.
in the way he theorises then a harmonious society would emerge in which differences, minorities and geniuses can flourish.\textsuperscript{9}

The Tyranny of the Majority

For Locke, government by the consent of the majority ensures that government power is constantly kept in check. Mill, following Tocqueville, argues that whilst government by majority-rule might eliminate the danger of tyrannical government, it produces another perhaps more dangerous phenomenon, the 'tyranny of the majority.'\textsuperscript{10} This was not a danger that Mill saw in the work of Locke necessarily (although it is clearly there), but, rather, in the work of "political thinkers of the Continent," by which Mill means Rousseau, Herder, de Maistre and others influenced by Romantic thought. By the tyranny of the majority Mill is referring to the tyranny the majority wields over peoples' opinions through social pressure. As he puts it:

Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrates is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any


individuality not in harmony with its ways, and to compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{The Harm Principle}

Because Mill wants to eradicate the tyranny of the majority he forwards a sustained argument in favour of individual freedom – and, in particular, freedom of discussion and action (which he often terms individuality). Mill, of course, does not argue for unfettered freedom. He contends that individual freedom must be governed by "one very simply principle," the 'harm principle': "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any other member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant" (p.14). In this sense, Mill is clear that those who harm others in some way must be constrained or punished, that these kinds of differences cannot be tolerated. Of course, the harm principle is not as simple as Mill implies, as we will see shortly. But Mill's point in \textit{On Liberty} is, nevertheless, to make the case for individual liberty insofar as other are not harmed.

\textit{Freedom of Discussion and Action}

Mill's argument for freedom of discussion is extensive, presenting four reasons why opinions and arguments should not be prohibited, all of which relate to the idea that allowing arguments and opinions to flourish will ultimately enable us to discern and appreciate truths about the world. Firstly, and most directly, he contends that "if any

opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true.” Secondly, he argues that

though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.

Thirdly, Mill contends that

even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds.

Finally, he argues that if this is the case then “the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct,” since it will be understood dogmatically rather than its rational grounds being appreciated (p.59).

For Mill, then, freedom of discussion is crucial. More pertinent to our discussion, however, is Mill’s argument for freedom of action. In this respect Mill contends, to begin with, that
the same reasons which show that opinion should be free, prove also that he should be allowed, without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own cost... As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so it is that there should be different experiments in living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them (pp.62-3).

But Mill forwards three further reasons why individuality is necessary. Firstly, he argues that the individual ought to be able to decide for himself how he wishes to live, since “He is the person most interested in his own well-being: the interest which any other person, except in cases of strong personal attachment, can have in it, is trifling, compared, with that which he himself has” (p.84). Indeed, “All errors which he is likely to commit against advice and warning are far outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constrain him to what they deem his good” (p.85). Secondly, like value pluralists, Mill argues that because people are so diverse there can be no model according to which all individuals can live and as such individuality must be allowed to flourish. As he puts it:

Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable (pp.75-6).

Finally, and most importantly, Mill argues that freedom of action is necessary because, although individuals are diverse, there is a crucial ingredient of well-being, progress and
human nature which can only be realised where individuals are free to act as they wish: this is being able to choose one’s own way life in a rational, reflective manner. This stress on the importance of rational, reflective choice is hinted at by Mill in his case for freedom of discussion, in which, as seen, he contends that we must reflect upon and know the reasons for holding a particular opinion rather than simply hold it dogmatically. But Mill’s emphasis on the need for individuals to be rational and reflective is made clearer elsewhere. We can see this to begin with by noting how Mill sees rational, reflective choice as integral not only to individuality, but also to human well-being and to social progress. As he puts it,

It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person’s own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress (p.63).

However, Mill goes further, claiming that reflective choice is a fundamental – perhaps the fundamental – aspect of human life:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgement to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision (p.65).
For Mill, then, to act according to custom, to imitate, to unreflectively and uncritically follow traditions, norms or set ways of living is to be 'ape-like'; being human, conversely, depends upon rationally, reflectively deciding to act in a particular way and deliberately, purposively doing so. Thus, Mill sees rational, reflective choice as central to happiness, to progress and to human being. It is for this reason that Berlin notes that "What [Mill] hated and feared was narrowness, uniformity, the crippling effect of persecution, the crushing of individuals by the weight of authority or of custom or of public opinion." And it is for this reason that Michael Oakeshott refers to Mill as a 'rationalist,' the "general character and disposition" of whom Oakeshott articulates very clearly:

At bottom he [the rationalist] stands (he always stands) for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of 'reason.' His circumstances in the modern world have made him contentious: he is the enemy of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional, customary or habitual. His mental attitude is . . . sceptical because there is no opinion, no habit, no belief, nothing so firmly rooted or so widely held that he hesitates to question it and to judge it by what he calls his 'reason.' . . .

With an almost poetic fancy, he strives to live each day as if it were his first, and he believes that to form a habit is to fail.13

**Flourishing Individuality and Difference**

Mill the rationalist, then, emphasises the rational, reflective chooser guided by their own critical mind rather than custom. And such individuality, he argues, can only flourish in a liberal society in which the individual’s freedom to act as they wish is protected, as we

will see shortly. Whilst Mill does not provide a blueprint of a liberal society, he is nevertheless clear that government must be limited to ensuring that individuals are free to act, think, associate, speak and live as they wish insofar as they do not harm others. Thus, liberal government exists to protect individual rights, little more: "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection" (p. 14). Mill’s contention is that this liberal society will create an atmosphere of freedom that will enable individuals to be bolder, exercise their individuality and live as they wish without being forced to conform to the will of the majority or be punished for failing to do so.

He gives the example of the 'genius.'

Persons of genius are, ex vi termini, more individual than any other people – less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character.

However, to some extent like Nietzsche in his critique of modern liberal societies, Mill argues that in a society where majority-opinion rules the genius will either be “forced into one of these moulds” and as such “society will be little the better for their genius,” or they will “break their fetters” and “become a mark for the society which has not succeeded in reducing them to a commonplace, to point at with solemn warning as ‘wild,’ ‘erratic,’ and the like.” For Mill, therefore, “Genius can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom” (p. 72). This does not require a hierarchical society in which
struggle and excellence abound, as for Nietzsche. For Mill, it is only when society protects individual rights, ensuring that all individuals can live as they wish (insofar as they do not harm others) that genius can flourish. This allows individuals to transgress majority opinion without fear of any legal sanction, and, because geniuses and eccentrics are able to live unconstrained, other individuals will begin to break away from custom and start to think for themselves, reflecting upon their tastes, beliefs and desires and deliberatively acting as they, rather than custom, dictate. Given this gradual development of individuality in the liberal society, Mill presents a glowing, harmonious picture of the liberal order:

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. There is a great fullness of life about his own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them (p.70).

14 Whilst Nietzsche and Mill offer quite disparate philosophical ideas and are rarely considered together, their interconnections have been drawn out by Kateb, who brings together these two figures with American self-reliance theorists such as Emerson and Thoreau so as to defend a liberal ideal of 'democratic individuality': the idea that a minimal liberal government allows individuals to excel, to be creative, spontaneous and eccentric. He thus moves individualism away from the rationalism of Mill toward the focus on greatness and exceptionalism of Nietzsche. See especially: George Kateb, The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992. For a critique of Kateb's liberalism for failing to acknowledge the violence it does to difference see: William Connolly, Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox. Expanded Edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002: 64-94; William Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 137-61.
Mill’s vision is of a harmonious liberal society burgeoning with individuality, eccentricities and experiments in living. It is a society in which those individuals whose beliefs, opinions or ways of life differ can live without being crushed by government or the weight of the majority's customs and traditions. It is not surprising that Berlin describes Mill as “the champion of heretics, apostates, and blasphemers... of the insulted and the oppressed.”¹⁵ This is not to say that Mill envisions an entirely harmonious society in which all differences can flourish. Just as Hobbes and Locke see limits to the kinds of difference that can flourish, strictly prohibiting those who challenge the order, Mill also sets limits. His concern is not with rebels and enemies but with those who harm others – the harm principle thus explicitly sets out what differences cannot be tolerated, making it clear that they must be constrained. Of course, there are questions about what constitutes ‘harm’ – whether it entails harming someone physically, psychologically or harming their interests – and about whether there is a meaningful ‘self-regarding’ area of a person’s life in which they can act without ‘harming’ others in some sense (p.90). These issues are discussed but never fully resolved by Mill in Chapter 4 of *On Liberty* (pp.83-103). But nevertheless Mill does make it explicit that not all differences can flourish, that some differences are too much to be tolerated; namely, those subjects who have

infringed the rules necessary for the protection of his fellow creatures [i.e., the harm principle], individually or collectively. The evil consequences of his acts do not then fall on himself, but on others; and society, as the protector of all its members, must retaliate on

him; must inflict pain on him for the express purpose of punishment, and must take care that it be sufficiently severe (p.88).

This, however, is the only kind of violence toward difference discussed by Mill. Insofar as subjects do not harm others then their different desires, interests and ways of life can flourish; indeed, Mill positively encourages such flourishing on the basis that the flourishing of difference fends off dogmatism and the tyranny of the majority.

On closer examination, though, Mill’s liberal order might actually class rather more subjects as radically different and subject them to violence than he acknowledges. This is not necessarily exclusionary violence or punishment. Rather, the violence found in Mill’s liberal order is pre-emptive assimilatory violence that domesticates and suppresses those desires and those subjects who differ from the model of the rational, deliberative subject before they emerge. In this sense, it subtly classes more differences as intolerable and radically different than Mill acknowledges. There are a number of interconnected ways we can identify this violence.

**Individuality and Alienation**

Firstly, we can identify this assimilatory violence by considering the process through which individuality based on rational reflection is achieved, for this reveals a dynamic in which elements of the subject that radically differ from the rational, deliberative ideal are alienated. For Mill, although it is inherent to human nature, individuals are not automatically capable of a life based on rational, reflective choice. Individuals have a range of desires and capacities and it is only when those capacities for rationality,
reflection and deliberation have been cultivated that they can achieve individuality. "Human nature is not," he says, "a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides according to the tendency of inward forces which make a living thing" (p.66). Indeed, Mill recognises that because individuals are constituted by a range of desires and capacities of which those required for a rational, reflective life are just one aspect, some individuals will never cultivate the capacities appropriate for freedom, or may cultivate others (p.14). Members of non-Western societies, for example, children, "or . . . young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood," must be taken care of as they are incapable of exercising rational, reflective choices about their own life (pp.14-5). Indeed, for Mill, history is characterised by the flourishing of different capacities:

[there] has been a time when the element of spontaneity and individuality was in excess, and the social principle had a hard struggle within it. To overcome this difficulty, law and discipline, like the Popes struggling against the Emperors, asserted a power over the whole man, claiming to control all his life in order to control his character.

Contemporary society, therefore, "has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the dangers which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency of personal impulses and preferences. . . In our times . . . every one lives under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship" (pp.67-8).
The point is that, for Mill, human nature is multiplicitous; rationality and reflexivity will emerge only if they are cultivated. What Mill does not stress, however, is the alienation inherent in this cultivation. We saw in Chapter 2 that for Lacan the subject is a bundle of particularities that must be excluded from the subject's consciousness so that she can establish an identity and submit to the imaginary-symbolic order; this alienation is a condition of submission to the imaginary-symbolic order. Similarly, for Mill, cultivating one's rational, reflective capacities requires particular desires and impulses that would undermine this to be excluded from one's consciousness so as to ensure that they do not undermine the functioning of one's rational capacities. The alienation of radically different desires is thus a condition of attaining rational, deliberative subjectivity. This is precisely Mill's point when he suggests that "desires and impulses are as much a part of a perfect human being, as beliefs and restraints," that "It is not because men's desires are strong that they act ill; it is because their consciences are weak" (p.66), and that "Society . . . has . . . the whole period of childhood and nonage in which to try whether it could make them capable of rational conduct of life" (p.91). His point is that individuals have innumerable desires and impulses and it is only by elevating one's capacity for a rational, reflective life and suppressing those radically different impulses that undermine this capacity – the urge to conform, to follow customs and traditions, or act unthinkingly – that one can become an individual in Mill's sense. Thus, violence toward and alienation of aspects of one's self that diverge from the model of the rational, deliberative subject is a condition of achieving individuality: it is only achieved by driving divergent desires and impulses out of one's consciousness such that one acts in accordance with one's rational reflective choices.
Education and Violence

Connected to this alienation are two further forms of pre-emptive, assimilatory violence operative in Mill’s liberal order. As seen, for Mill, without leading a rational, reflective life composed of deliberative, purposive choice one cannot be happy or fully human. As Gray puts it, for Mill, “individuality – which is to say, that form of life in which persons realise their peculiar natures in autonomously chosen activities – is the single most important ingredient in human well-being.”¹⁶ This implies, however, that insofar as one leads a life not based on rational, reflective choice – insofar as one’s radically different desires return, causing one to act in irrational or conformist ways – then one is missing out on the critical aspect of human life. Hence in Mill’s society all those individuals who wish to live according to tradition or religious precepts, who accept laws, norms, beliefs or arguments unquestioningly, would be seen as living a deficient life in some way. Mill does not conceal his contempt for such individuals. He sees uncritical adherence to custom and tradition as a “hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement” (p.78). Indeed, Mill explicitly sees uncritical adherence to custom and tradition as inhuman, as ape-like, as we have seen.

What would happen, then, to those individuals who lived in Mill’s order but who adhered to custom and tradition rather than cultivated a rational, reflective individuality? Prima facia the answer is nothing. As Mill makes clear, even if an individual eschews

the rational life and chooses to live according to custom or tradition, “All errors which he is likely to commit against advice and warning are far outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constrain him to what they deem his good” (p.85). Indeed, Mill argues that as society is responsible for educating and cultivating rational individuals, “If society lets any considerable number of its members grow up mere children, incapable of being acted on by rational consideration of distant motives, society has itself to blame for the consequences” (p.91). So long as in choosing to uncritically follow religion or tradition one did not harm other individuals, Mill’s society would not interfere with one’s actions. Mill even argues that the same indifference would be accorded to “A person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit – who cannot live within moderate means – who cannot restrain himself from hurtful indulgencies – who pursues animal pleasures at the expense of those of feeling and intellect.” They “must expect to be lowered in the opinion of others, and to have a less share of their favourable sentiments” (p.86). But Mill’s order would allow him to act as he wishes. They would not be excluded or punished if they made their divergence from the norm of the rational, deliberative individual explicit.

However, although Mill’s liberal vision would not treat those individuals who diverged from the ideal of a rational, reflective, deliberative individual violently in this sense, arguably these divergent subjects would nevertheless experience pre-emptive, assimilatory violence of a kind that would reduce the likelihood of them acting differently in the first place – a form of violence, moreover, which Mill does not make explicit. Firstly, divergent subjects will experience assimilatory violence through the education system. Mill makes clear that the purpose of education is to enable individuals
to cultivate their capacities for rational and reflective thought and action. However, as Oakeshott contends in his critique of rationalists such as Mill, this kind of education is provided at the expense of alternative forms of knowledge that are excluded from the curriculum. Oakeshott distinguishes between 'technical knowledge,' which includes rules, formulas and specific skills and 'practical knowledge' which includes those customs, traditions and particular ways of doing things that "cannot be formulated in rules."\(^{17}\) Rationalism, he argues, embraces the former kind of knowledge at the expense of the latter, and, he suggests, "a society which has embraced a rationalist idiom of politics will soon find itself either being steered or drifting towards an exclusively rationalist form of education" and thus "offering no place to any form of education which is not generally rationalist in character."\(^ {18}\)

Oakeshott's point is that rationalism is mistaken. But the significance of his argument is that it indicates that, in ensuring that individuals cultivate the appropriate capacities, Mill's rationalist order uses the education system to propound one form of education, one way of living, at the expense of others. Practical knowledge becomes what Foucault calls a 'subjugated knowledge' – one of "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges; naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity."\(^ {19}\) Indeed, Mill's rationalistic education thus executes what Bourdieu and Passeron call 'symbolic violence,' which, as we have seen, is "to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power

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\(^{17}\) Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 7-8.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 32.

relations which are the basis of its force." For a rationalistic education assimilates individuals into a rationalist way of living by teaching technical rather than practical knowledge exclusively, in the process either denying pupils awareness of alternative, possible ways of life based on tradition and custom, or disqualifying them by referring to them in disparaging terms. Thus, although those who diverge from the model of the rational, reflective individual might not be formally sanctioned in Mill's liberal order, there is a more indirect form of assimilatory, symbolic violence through the education system that establishes rationalism as hegemonic and subjugates alternative, divergent possibilities before they emerge.

**Individuality and Normalising Pressure**

Secondly, although Mill's liberal society does not explicitly treat violently those who do not harm others but diverge from the model of a rational, reflective life, it might do so more subtly by creating a normalising pressure to conform to this model. For Foucault, as we have seen, a normalising society is one in which a norm is established and the subject's conformity to the norm is continuously measured, monitored, assessed and judged. Certainly, Mill would not support such a technique of power, which would entail extensive interference in individuals' lives. However, Mill does present a normative ideal of a rational, reflective life, as we have seen: a way of living that is integral to progress, human happiness and being. To fail to conform to this norm, then, is to be deficient in various ways. As such, although those who fail to act in accordance with this model might not be compelled to do so by the liberal government, they may nevertheless

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experience disapproval, shunning or worse by the rest of the society on the basis that by following custom and tradition they are not living fully-human lives.

This, indeed, is commented on by Mill in his discussion of those who are rash, obstinate, and have a "lowness or deprivation of taste." These characters, he notes, "Though doing no wrong to any one . . . may so act as to compel us to judge him, and feel to him, as a fool, or as a being of an inferior order" (pp.85-6). But the same may apply to those who unreflectively followed tradition and custom. Given that they are undermining their own happiness and human advancement and are not fully human, perhaps they would also be seen by others as 'being of an inferior order.' Therefore, even though individuals who diverge from the ideal of the rational, deliberative individual are not explicitly compelled to conform to the model Mill prescribes, there is nevertheless a normalising pressure that ensures that individuals assimilate into to the norm of the rational, reflective deliberator – a pressure not greatly different from that exerted by the tyranny of the majority that Mill's vision of society was intended to counteract in the first place. 21

Conclusion

Locke and Mill, then, offer visions of liberal society in which they claim that individual freedom and difference can flourish. They do not deny the need for violence. Both explain that those who differ radically cannot be tolerated and must be treated violently.

21 Indeed, we might go further here and note the applicability of Carl Schmitt's discussion of the dangers that emerge when a group defines humanity in a certain way: "To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity." Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, translated by George Schwab. London: University of Chicago Press, 1996: 54.
Locke is explicit that rebels and enemies must be treated violently, whilst Mill is clear that those who harm others must be punished with great severity. However, both also conceal the fact that many of those who differ from the model of the rational subject, on which both of them base their order, will not be treated as different but as radically different – as intolerable and in need of violent assimilation or exclusion. Locke does not acknowledge it, but by constraining unreasonable subjects, he does not just exclude from public life lunatics, madmen and idiots but also labourers, and their exclusion is in fact a condition for the establishment and maintenance of his liberal order. Mill does not discuss the need to control or direct subjects who diverge from the model of the rational, deliberative subject and argues in fact that they can live as they wish; however, he nevertheless treats them as radically different, not just different, by attempting to preempt their divergence from the model of the rational, deliberative individual by alienating their radically different desires, subjugating alternative traditions and putting a normalising pressure on subjects to conform.

More subjects are treated as radically different and subject to violence in these classical liberal orders than Locke and Mill admit then. It would be interesting to explore the work of other classical liberal thinkers – to show that they also theorise liberal orders in which diversity and individuality can flourish but in which more subjects than they acknowledge are treated as radically different and consequently violently assimilated and excluded. However, it is perhaps more interesting to see that this concealment of violence continues in the work of contemporary liberals, not only liberal democratic thinkers but also radical agonistic ones who confront these kinds of problems. As such it is to contemporary liberal thought that we turn next.
Chapter 4 The Illusion of Difference in Rawls: The Agonistic Critique

Introduction

We have seen that although Hobbes acknowledges who must be treated as radically different and subject to violence within the leviathan, Locke and Mill are less candid, claiming that liberalism can enable individual freedom and diversity to flourish whilst concealing the number of subjects who are subtly excluded or normalised. This chapter demonstrates the illusion of difference in contemporary liberal democratic theory. Unlike the previous chapter, in this chapter the location of the violence in contemporary liberal democracy is sought through the work of the small number of radical democratic liberals – the agonists Honig, Connolly and Mouffe – who have recognised that violence is inherent within liberalism and who seek to acknowledge rather than smooth over it. For although their principal concern is with theorising a radically democratic liberal order, they nevertheless forward a critique of contemporary liberal democracy similar to that presented in the previous chapter: they begin from the perspective of radical difference, recognise that liberal orders will require violence toward divergent subjects, and criticise liberal democrats for concealing this violence.

As such, this chapter uses the work of Honig, Connolly and Mouffe respectively to criticise the work of one of the most influential contemporary liberal democratic thinkers, John Rawls. Whilst his work demonstrates significant continuity, Rawls’s work is often divided into two stages: the ‘early’ Rawls, stretching from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, and most importantly including *A Theory of Justice*, during which time Rawls was largely concerned with elaborating universal principles of justice; and
the ‘later’ Rawls, which stretched from the mid-1980s onwards, culminating in his 1993 work *Political Liberalism*, in which Rawls addressed questions about how citizens with diverse moral, philosophical and religious perspectives could coexist.¹ Each of the agonists provides a robust critique of Rawls’s thought: Honig challenges Rawls’s early work, Connolly criticises the model of the liberal individual on which Rawls’s early thought, and liberal discourse more broadly, is based, and Mouffe attacks his later theory. These critiques will be seen in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of this chapter respectively. For each, their understanding of radical difference will be outlined first, and it will then be demonstrated how this leads them to see Rawls’s visions of liberal order as obscuring the violence toward radical difference within it.

This chapter thus does two things simultaneously: it locates the violence toward divergent subjects within contemporary liberal democratic theory whilst also introducing the specific theoretical perspectives informing proponents of agonistic liberalism. This is important because we can only understand the critiques of Rawls forwarded by Honig, Mouffe and Connolly by looking in detail at their particular understandings of radical difference. Moreover, showing how the three agonists reveal the violence in the work of Rawls lays the groundwork for the second part of this thesis in which their alternative ideals are evaluated.

1 Honig, Remainders, Rawls

In an essay in democratic theory Bonnie Honig makes clear that she sees radical difference as critical:

Recent work in political and feminist theory . . . suggests that difference is not simply a different identity, nor is it merely (pace Hegel) the constitutive matter out of which identity is formed; it is also that which resists and exceeds the closure of identity. It signals not a difference from others but a difference that troubles identity from within. Pluralists and, more recently, multiculturalists tend to domesticate or conceal this sort of difference by taking group identities and affiliations as their starting point. Treating difference as simply a different identity enables them to affirm diversity that is potentially unruly but that is also reassuring insofar as it does not threaten to be ungovernable.

She insists, therefore, that

To take difference – and not just identity – seriously in democratic theory is to affirm the inescapability of conflict and the ineradicability of resistance to the political and moral projects of ordering subjects, institutions, and values. It is to give up on the dream of a place called home, a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place – an identity, a form of life, a group vision – unmarked or unriven by difference.²

Virtue, Virtù and Remainders

It is on this basis – because resistance and difference are ineradicable – that Honig forwards her critique of liberalism and defends agonistic contest in Political Theory and

the Displacement of Politics, the text on which this analysis focuses. Honig begins this text by noting “a mysterious phenomenon: the displacement of politics in political theory.”

Most political theorists are hostile to the disruption of politics. They confine politics (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities. They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements of political conflict and instability (2).

For Honig, those involved in the individualism-communitarianism debate are prominent, recent proponents of such (a)political theorising and she therefore focuses on three thinkers associated with this debate who she perceives as hostile to politics: Immanuel Kant, John Rawls and Michael Sandel. But she does not see political theory as exhausted by such apolitical thinking. Honig looks to Arendt, Nietzsche and Machiavelli for an alternative, “a perspective from which agonistic conflict is celebrated and the identification or conflation of politics with administration is charged with closing down the agon or with duplicitously participating in its contests while pretending to rise above them” (p.2).

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3 Bonnie Honig, Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993: 2. References to this text will primarily be placed parenthetically in the text in this section. Her other most significant work — Democracy and the Foreigner. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001 — in which she uses Rousseau, Ruth, Freud, the Wizard of Oz and the gothic genre to explore the symbolic significance of the ‘foreigner’ is not discussed here since it does not discuss her political agonism.
Honig labels the approach exemplified by Kant, Rawls and Sandel 'virtue' theories of politics, and the approach of Arendt, Nietzsche and Machiavelli 'virtù' theories.

The theories that displace conflict identify politics with administration and treat juridical settlement as the task of politics and political theory I call virtue theories of politics. The theories that see politics as a disruptive practice that resists the consolidations and closures of administrative and juridical settlement for the sake of the perpetuity of political contest I call virtù theories of politics. The terms 'virtue' and 'virtù' may call to mind Aristotle and Machiavelli but they are my own terms of art, drawn from Nietzsche and Arendt with Machiavelli in a minor, supporting role (pp.2-3).

Not all political theorists fall into one category or the other. Virtue and virtù are simply "negotiating positions, positions that enable the negotiation of dominant assumptions about politics that have sedimented so firmly in place that they appear to be indubitably true." Honig uses them to expose the dangers inherent within virtue theories of politics. Her point, as we will see, is that virtue theorists believe that a final order can be established in which all dissonance is resolved. They "assume that the world and the self are not resistant to, but only enabled and completed by, their favoured conceptions of order and subjectivity. This assumption undergirds their belief that modern disenchantment, alienation, pain, and cruelty would be diminished if only" their favoured political order were adopted (p.3).

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4 Honig, *Political Theory*, 3. For an exploration of how and why the categories of virtue and virtù are only partial rather than unambiguous or exhaustive categories, and indeed why they "threaten to sediment into problematic patterns of their own" (p.201), see the concluding chapter of *Political Theory* (200-11) in which Honig lays out the ambiguities associated with the categorisation. The necessary relation between virtue and virtù is also discussed in Chapter 7.
But for Honig such an assumption is thoroughly mistaken.

Unfortunately, the assumptions, goals, and yearnings of the virtue theorists tend to erase the resistance from political orderings and the struggle from subjectivity, eliminating the excess that haunts the formation of the self into a subject and expelling the disruption of politics. These are the sites on which virtù theorists make their stand. Whereas virtue theorists assume that their favoured institutions fit and express the identities or the formations of subjects, virtù theorists argue that no such fit is possible, that every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering. It is for the sake of those perpetually generated remainders of politics that virtù theorists seek to secure the perpetuity of political contest (p.3).

We can see from this that Honig sees virtue politics as problematic because of it overlooks the ineradicability of radical difference. Problems arise, that is, because 'virtue theorists tend to erase the resistance from political orderings and the struggle from subjectivity, eliminating the excess that haunts the formation of the self.' But, of course, such an erasure is impossible: 'every politics has its remainders' and thus there will always be differences that exceed and challenge virtue politics. Honig borrows this latter term 'remainders' from Bernard Williams, who uses it to refer to the choice not taken when moral dilemmas emerge. But for Honig, "remainders include a much broader array of resistances engendered by (a broader variety of) rather ordinary human attempts systematically to organise the world conceptually, categorically, linguistically, politically, culturally, and socially as well as morally" (p.213). Remainders, therefore,

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are the ‘others’ of all attempts to organise the world – those radical differences that do not fit such organisations.⁶

For Honig, however, the major problem with virtue politics is that, although they emphasise harmony, virtue theories of politics are founded and sustained by treating these remainders violently. They attempt to impose an order – a set of principles, a set of institutions, an identity – on a mass of subjects but this order creates remainders: energies, desires, subjects or groups that do not fit. And just as the anomalies of culture and those resistant to the capitalist system are, for Douglas and Balibar, treated violently because they threaten a given system (as we saw in Chapter 1), so for Honig an order can only be maintained by doing violence to its remainders. As she puts it, “the efforts of political and moral orders to stabilize themselves as the systematic expressions of virtue, justice, or the telos of community drive them to conceal, deny, or subdue resistances to the regime.” Hence, “Moral and political orders must work to maintain the fittedness they presuppose, daily. To that end, they rely on such practices as respect, responsibility, punishment, and friendship to discipline dissonances and resistances ranging from the criminal to the idiosyncratic” (p.3).

Moreover, what makes this interesting is that, for Honig (as for Foucault, as discussed in Chapter 2), these remainders do not exist as discrete, pre-existing differences from the form of organisation but, rather, are created by that very organisation. “When we say that the number 100 divided by 11 equals 9, remainder 1, the remainder of the 1 is understood by Williams to have existed prior to the division process and apart from it. To further the analogy, the problem with formulaic ethics would be that they round off to the nearest number without attending to the division’s remainder at all. In my view, however, the problem with both Williams’s account and that of the theorists of formulaic ethics is that neither sees that the remaindered 1 is produced by the process of division itself, in the absence of which it would not exist as such” (p.213). If one thinks about the division of the world into territorial states, the political import of this becomes clear. A world divided into discrete territorial states has remainders – subjects and groups that do not fit in any particular states. These remainders, however, exist only because of the division of the world. If it were not for this division, those subjects and groups would still exist, but they would not exist as remainders. Thus, stateless persons, refugees and separatist groups are remainders, “produced by the process of division itself,” this time the division of the world.
But for Honig these daily practices of control often fail; remainders always persist, they are rarely concealed or subdued. This, indeed, is why Honig advocates *virtù* politics and agonistic contest, as we will see. “To affirm the perpetuity of contest,” she asserts,

is to see that the always imperfect closure of political space tends to engender remainders and that, if those remainders are not engaged, they may return to haunt and destabilize the very closures that deny their existence . . . It is to see that attempts to shut down the agon perpetually fail, that the best (or worst) they do is to displace politics onto other sites and topics where the struggle of identity and difference, resistance and closure, is then repeated (pp.15-6).

*Rawls, Justice and Deliberative Rationality*

Virtue theories of politics always have radical differences, remainders, which they treat violently. Honig demonstrates this through analyses of Kant, Rawls and Sandel. Each analysis is a significant contribution to scholarship on these thinkers. The focus here is on Honig’s exposure of the ongoing violence toward remainders in the work of Rawls. Whilst Honig touches on Rawls’s later work in *Political Theory* (pp.195-99), her principal focus is on *A Theory of Justice*. In this, Rawls argues that the principles of justice that govern society ought to be decided upon from within a hypothetical ‘original position.’

Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of
natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.\textsuperscript{7}

Because those behind the veil of ignorance are rational, Rawls argues, they would necessarily choose two rather different principles: the first require equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example, inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.\textsuperscript{8}

Such principles, he contends, would be 'fair,' as any rational person unaware of their social position would want as much freedom as possible so as to live as they wish, but would nevertheless want support if they were unlucky in terms of their skills, attributes or status. Moreover, these principles would provide a framework, a “well-order society,” within which “persons are left free to determine their good.”\textsuperscript{9}

According to Rawls, then, all subjects will rationally endorse the principles of justice and, once society is ordered according to these principles, subjects will be free to live as they wish. Honig’s critique, however, is that Rawls’s vision is not as harmonious as he claims.

\textsuperscript{7} Rawls, \textit{A Theory of Justice}, 12.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, 15.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}, 447. For a more detailed account of these arguments see, \textit{Ibid.}, 60-192.
Rawls imagines a political culture whose fundamental conflicts (between liberty and equality) are "settled," a civic culture that engenders no resistances to itself, a practice of punishment that sparks no remorse, a potentially radical redistributive taxation scheme that provokes no resentments; he offers us a virtue theory of politics untouched by the disruptions of virtù" (p. 127).

But much tumult belies this harmonious image. "Rawls's strategy of depoliticization does not dissolve the remainders of politics. Instead, they return; they seem to be forever popping up in his text, in his thoughts" (p. 128). In particular, Honig demonstrates three ways in which Rawls's well-ordered society is violent: it relies on subjects suppressing desires that deviate from the principles of justice, it criminalises subjects who do not accept the principles, and subtly normalises those subjects who deviate from his model of deliberative rationality.

Fundamental to Honig's first point is that although Rawls begins by suggesting that the original position is a place in which agents negotiate and arrive at the principles of justice, "In the course of its development in A Theory of Justice, Rawls becomes more and more beholden to his ideal, more and more invested in securing the conditions of its approximation, maintenance, and automaticity" (p. 126), until it becomes inevitable that the two principles will be decided upon. Ultimately, for Rawls, "Since the parties meet in the original position simply as beings possessed of the capacity to reason, the original position is guaranteed to produce, not a mere agreement, but unanimity" (p. 133). The two principles of justice are foregone conclusions: the final agreement could not have been otherwise. As Rawls himself puts it: "the acknowledgement [of the two principles]
is the only choice consistent with the full description of the original position. The argument aims eventually to be strictly deductive.\textsuperscript{10}

"At this point," Honig notes, "the dimension of agreement fades from the position and in its place we find a perspectivism, a positioning from which the truths of justice can be more clearly discerned, acknowledged, but not chosen" (p.134). The significance of this becomes clear after she notes two further points. First, for Rawls, what is decided in the original position is decided once-and-for-all for the Rawlsian society. Second, though, "this does not mean that the citizens may never again enter the original position. On the contrary, they may do so at any time." However,

its function [ie., allowing re-entry] is not to open up alternative possibilities or to investigate any unexpected effects of their initial agreement but to consolidate existing practices. . . If the original position is rightly conceived, each repetition of its operation will produce the selfsame outcome (p.135).

Honig asks, therefore, If the original position always yields the same principles, and if these are unalterable, why allow subjects to re-enter, "why repeat the experiment?"

The perfect and unchanging repeatability of the position indicates that its operation is prized for something other than its outcome. If the operation is repeated perpetually, perhaps that is because the Rawlsian subject is never a fait accompli. Perhaps it signals the regime’s perpetual need to reinscribe unruly subjects into the order. Perhaps Rawls counts on the original position to issue not only in an intersubjective agreement among selves but also

\textsuperscript{10} Rawls, cited in Honig, Political Theory, 133. See Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 121.
(repeatedly) in an intrasubjective ordering of the self according to the dictates of Rawlsian rationality and justice (p.136).

Indeed, “When Rawlsian citizens experience dissonance (in themselves or in others), the default is to return to the original position and confirm that, from its perspective, the outlaw impulse, desire or activity in question is indeed irrational or unjust” (p.137).

Honig’s first critique of Rawls, then, is that the original position, and re-entry into it, is not so much a device for arriving at principles acceptable to all, and more a device for ensuring that subjects suppress divergent desires and impulses that contradict the principles of justice that Rawls has established. The original position thus functions to ensure that subjects are self-policing.

Secondly, Honig draws to attention the violence within Rawls’s treatment of those subjects who reject the principles of justice and support an alternative conception of justice. For Rawls, of course, the rational subject will endorse the principles of justice. However,

Rawls admits that some people will just fail to identify with the regime. For people such as these, there is nothing internal – no sense of loyalty, no identification, not even rational self-interest – to prevent or discourage them from devoting themselves to conceptions of the good that are not congruent with the principles of justice.

They simply do not feel themselves to be a part of ‘the people.’ This is what “forces Rawls to confront the problem of punishment.” Honig therefore asks whether Rawls thinks it is just for society to punish those who endorse principles of justice other than
those Rawls advocates. “Rawls,” she claims, “answers yes, without remainder; it is just to enforce compliance in justice as fairness” (pp.140-1).

The reason for this is that the Rawlsian society, governed according to principles of justice, has

...done all that can reasonably be expected of it. It has set up a just basic structure according to principles that those not disposed to act justly would themselves affirm from the standpoint of the original position. It has eliminated thereby all the environmental factors, all the injustices both arbitrary and systemic, that in other regimes motivate persons to criminal behaviour.

Rawls can therefore insist that “There is no perpetual underclass here; homelessness is not a systemic problem. There is genuine equality of opportunity” (pp.141-2).

In the absence of systemic injustice, there is nothing that can account for criminal behaviour; criminality must be a symptom of sheer perversity, orneriness, a tic of some kind, a defective character. Criminality, in short, must be seen as an assault on the system from the outside, from some mysterious and terrifying state of nature: it must be sociopathic (p.142).

This is problematic, however, because there are always remainders, radically different subjects, within the Rawlsian order who have different ideas about justice to the principles Rawls advocates: there are always “unlucky louts whose nature is his misfortune, [a] bad character who is committed to a conception of the good that is
incongruent with the principles of right and unable to affirm his sense of justice” (p.147). Rawls is so certain that his principles of justice will create a just society and so certain, therefore, that punishing those who act differently is justified, that he depoliticises the punishment of these characters. Rather than allowing them to have contrary views about justice, the Rawlsian order criminalises them. But in so doing, Rawls “dismantles those (bad characters as well as others) who might seek to politicise the practice of punishment” (p.146). Instead of being treated as legitimate political opponents or interlocutors, therefore, they are categorised as radically different, punished and excluded from political debate; they are allowed no channels through which they can legitimately contest or challenge their punishment or the principles governing society. Honig notes, moreover, that punishing and criminalising these subjects for their divergent views will not necessarily secure or protect the order from their challenges, since if they seek to challenge justice as fairness they will have to use other, illegitimate channels to be heard, and this might be altogether more threatening to the liberal order than allowing them to engage in political contest (pp.147-8).

Finally, and most importantly, Honig argues that the Rawlsian order is also reliant on subjects adopting a certain form of subjectivity. As seen, for Honig, the unspoken function of the original position is to ensure that subjects police their desires. She goes on to note that if subjects are obedient then not only will they remain attached to the principles of justice but, in addition, certain kinds of subjects will emerge: rational deliberators, not greatly different from those theorised by Mill, who will regulate themselves according to the original position and the principles of justice, who will
rationally consider their future, will deliberate with themselves and with others. As Rawls describes it, a plan that is arrived at by a person practicing deliberative rationality is the plan that would be decided upon as the outcome of careful reflection in which the agent reviewed, in the light of all the relevant facts, what it would be like to carry out these plans and thereby ascertained the course of action that would best realize his more fundamental desires.\(^{11}\)

These "Rawlsian subjects," Honig confirms, "live responsible and well-planned lives" (p.149). Of course, this is not compulsory in Rawlsian society.

Deliberative rationality is a voluntary activity but one held in high – and public – esteem. Although rational deliberation is an option, not a requirement, there is nonetheless some moral pressure to conform with its requirements, pressure from Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* and pressure from one’s fellow citizens’ (p.151).

This moral pressure becomes obvious, for Honig, toward the end of Rawls’s work:

In Part III of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls invites us to spend some time in justice as fairness and we meet several interesting characters there: the criminal and the law-abiding public faced with its need to punish him, the indolent laborer and the citizens who willingly soften his economic hardship, the fanciful fellow who counts blades of grass in a park and the rational community that is puzzled by him, the irresponsible rogue who does not reason deliberatively about his good and the responsible life planners who disapprove of him (127).

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Honig’s principal concern is to show the subtle normalising, assimilatory violence experienced by these kinds of subjects who deviate from the model of deliberative rationality in the Rawlsian order: the violence experience by “irresponsible rogues,” “idiosyncratic misfits,” “bad characters,” amongst others, all of whom are “not evil, not intolerant, not criminal – just odd, the least well off, not economically, but socially” (pp.147-9). One example she considers is the ‘fanciful fellow’ who Rawls introduces so as to provide a “portrait of the nondeliberating subject” (p.152):

someone whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns. He is otherwise intelligent and actually possesses unusual skills, since he manages to survive by solving difficult mathematical problems for a fee.

Rawls introduces this character to demonstrate that his political order is neutral between competing conceptions of the good, that the grass counter is free to live as he wishes. However, after noting that Rawls “would be surprised that such a person should exist’ in justice as fairness,” Honig argues that through this character Rawls demonstrates the dubious fate of the non-deliberating subject in the Rawlsian order. 12 The grass counter, in short, is doomed to continual interference and policing from other ‘concerned’ citizens. The moral pressure to live a rational, well-planned life that pervades the Rawlsian order forces citizens to “consider whether counting blades of grass is really part of this person’s conception of the good,” and thus to ask “the grass counter to give an account of himself” (p.152). For Rawls justice as fairness is neutral since, if the grass counter can show that counting grass is a rational, considered part of his life he will be

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left alone, but if it is a neurosis then society will help him. But either way, the moral pressure pushes the Rawlsian citizen to question the grass counter. Of course, "Rawls envisions a benign, even nurturant exchange." But Honig notes,

> the effects of justification exceed his intentions. As soon as the citizens stop to ask the grass counter to justify his activity, they begin to sound a bit more like the police than like mere passers-by. They have stopped in order to decide what to do about this person, as if he were at their disposal. They have stopped in order to interrogate him (p.152).

The significance of this, for Honig, is that "interrogation is itself a political intervention, an exercise of power for the purposes of identity formation, maintenance, and closure" (p.154). Its aim is to ensure that those divergencies, those differences that threaten the order, are normalised so that the Rawlsian order is not fundamentally challenged. The possible "instability [of the Rawlsian order] drives Rawlsian citizens to seek out and normalize difference wherever feasible" (p.155). Thus, because misfits such as the grass counter – as well as others oddballs in the Rawlsian order such as the ‘indolent labourer’ and the ‘irresponsible rogue’ – differ from deliberative rationality they threaten the stability of the order, and as such they are treated as radically different and subject to subtle normalisation and control in ways unacknowledged by Rawls.

Honig is critical of the ‘early’ Rawls, then, claiming that although he presents a vision in which all subjects have consented to the order’s major principles and in which subjects are free to pursue their own conceptions of the good, it is actually more violent. It requires that subjects police their own desires so as to remain committed to the
principles of justice, it punishes and criminalises those who have opposing political views about justice, and it subtly categorises oddballs, eccentrics, underachievers and others as radically different because they diverge from Rawls's rational deliberative subject, submitting them to interrogation and normalising. Honig thus identifies a great deal of violence toward difference hidden within Rawls’s harmonious, well-ordered society.

2 Connolly, Difference, Liberal Individualism

Honig offers a detailed reading of the early Rawls. Connolly’s analysis ties in closely with Honig’s. However, rather than offering a detailed analysis of Rawls’s liberal theory, he provides a broader critique of the model of the normal individual – the model of the deliberative, rational subject – that he recognises is not just fundamental to Rawls’s thought but to a great deal of liberal political theory and practice.

Identities, Orders and Radical Differences

We must start, however, by noting that Connolly, who has been a pioneer in bringing Nietzschean and poststructural insights to political theory, begins from the premise that radical difference is ineradicable and thus recognises that liberal orders will always be confronted by an excess with which they must deal. From works such as Politics and Ambiguity and Political Theory and Modernity, through texts such as Identity/Difference, The Augustinian Imperative, The Ethos of Pluralization and Why I am not a Secularist to his most recent work Pluralism, as well as countless articles and chapters, Connolly has drawn on Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze to make original comments and raise new, often controversial, questions about traditional issues
in political theory. Whilst a number of themes run through Connolly's work, the most foundational is the idea that any identity or order is pervaded by radical differences of the kind seen through Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault in Chapter 2.

This can be seen in a number of his texts. In *Identity/Difference* Connolly responds to the dangers associated with the way in which every system of identity-difference tends to be hierarchical and underpinned by *différance*. Connolly begins this text by noting that "This study . . . concurs with the . . . early Derrida that *différance* enables, disturbs, and compromises every system of identity and difference." For Connolly, whilst an identity is critical to a person's self-understanding and the very possibility of agency, their identity is not pre-existing, independent or fixed. "An identity is established in relation to a series of differences . . . These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity."

My personal identity is defined through the collective constituencies with which I identify or am identified by others (as white, male, American, a sports fan, and so on); it is further specified by comparison to a variety of things I am not. Identity, then, is always connected to a series of differences that help it be what it is.

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The establishment of an identity and a set of differences is not, however, exhaustive. "There is more in my life than any official definition of identity can express. I am not exhausted by my identity. I am not entirely captured by it, even though it is stamped upon me – even though it enables me." 17 The identity of 'Muslim' stamped on many who practice or are associated with that religion ignores other identities and attachments: as a Shiite Muslim, woman, mother, employee, computer analyst, British citizen, cinema-goer, member of the Pakistani Diaspora, and so on. For Connolly, in short, an identity-difference dynamic imposes a certain set of identities upon a multiplicity of diverse and singular identities and attachments.

Connolly expresses this idea through the work of Deleuze in *The Ethos of Pluralization*. From this perspective, the flows, movements and desires that constitute us as subjects

gives a certain priority to life over identity, treating identity not as the deepest truth of the self or the community, but as a specific formation drawn from energies of life (difference) never exhausted by any particular organisation. . . For every identity becomes fixed by engendering and organizing a set of differences. Difference points to the noise, energies, and remainders that circulate through every cultural configuration and are not captured by their self-identifications. . . Difference is never exhausted by the claims of identity or difference." 18

17 *Ibid.*, 120.
Or again, "every social identity is a constructed, relational formation that engenders human differences, resistances, remainders, and surpluses through the very politics of its consolidation."\textsuperscript{19}

Whilst Connolly is interested in the paradoxes and partiality of identity, he makes a similar point in relation to social and political orders. In \textit{Politics and Ambiguity} Connolly writes that

> The human is the incomplete animal, completed only within the social frame. But since humans were not designed to fit neatly into any social form, and since no ideal form has been predesigned to mesh with every drive and stirring within the self, every particular form of completion subjugates even while it realizes something in us, does violence to selves even while enabling them to be.\textsuperscript{20}

For Connolly, then, like identity, although order is crucial, it is nevertheless imposed on a mass of singularities which exceed, overspill and unsettle it. Order is always pervaded by unruly singularities that occasionally differ radically from it. It is hardly surprising that in his latest work, \textit{Pluralism}, Connolly describes himself as "a Deleuzian with a liberal streak."\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Individualism, Normalisation and Tolerance}

This basic idea – that any identity or order is permeated by radical differences – has led Connolly to criticise numerous political theorists for too readily conceptualising a

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{20} Connolly, \textit{Politics and Ambiguity}, 13.
\textsuperscript{21} Connolly, \textit{Pluralism}, 155.
political order in which subjects who differ from that order are suppressed, coerced, silenced or excluded in the name of harmony. This, for example, was his analysis of the individualism-communitarianism debate, in which he suggested that despite their differences each [approach] assumes that when properly constituted and situated the individual or collective subject achieves harmony with itself and with other elements of social life. Thus any otherness discerned in the actual world becomes a sign that the selves in which it is located are incapacitated or that there is unintegrated material in need of assimilation or that the community need to be broadened to internalize that which is now external to it. Otherness, the opponents agree, is something to be corrected, eliminated, punished, or integrated. The issue between them is how normalization is to proceed. Otherness – that which does not fit neatly into the form assumed by self or society – is not treated as that which might not fit because even a good order (or self) must itself produce elements that do not synchronise with its structure.  

However, although Connolly has attacked a variety of theorists, theories and ideals, his main focus of critique has been contemporary liberalism because, as we will see, Connolly is sympathetic towards liberalism but sees contemporary variants as too quick to gloss over the violence inherent within it. Hence he frequently critiques Rawls, Dworkin, Mill, Habermas, Kant, Kateb and others, as well as liberal society and discourse generally. In particular, Connolly has often challenged what he calls liberal individualism, the model of the liberal individual found in much liberal discourse.  

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22 Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, 10.
23 See for example: Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, 75-104; Connolly, Identity/Difference, 64-94.
very clearly in the ‘early’ Rawls’s emphasis on the ideal of deliberative rationality. But Connolly notes that liberal individualism is also the model endorsed by “a range of rights theorists, rational choice theorists, and economic individualists,” and is central to contemporary political discourses in existing liberal societies.\textsuperscript{24} Liberal “individualism,” Connolly suggests, “presupposes a model of the normal or rational individual against which the conduct and interior of each actual self are to be appraised” which “provides the ground for a theory of rights, justice, responsibility, freedom, obligation, and legitimate interests”\textsuperscript{25}

But for Connolly this is just one model of subjectivity, a liberal model which is exceeded by various desires and beliefs.

No individualist philosopher has ever proven that the human animal is predesigned to correspond to the shape assumed by the modern normal individual, and thus none has proven that this formation can be forged and maintained each generation without imposing cruelty upon those who adjust to its dictates as those who are unable or unwilling . . . to do so. Seen from the perspective of those who endorse subjectivity as an ambiguous achievement while refusing to endorse the fiction that it corresponds to what we naturally are, the subterranean presumption that humans are predesigned to be responsible agents veils elements of cruelty and revenge in the formation of this identity and its differences.\textsuperscript{26}

Because the model of the normal individual is exceeded by divergent desires Connolly claims that “late-modern societies,” those liberal societies with which Rawls is most

\textsuperscript{24} Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference}, 73.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 73-4.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 80.
concerned, are “normalizing societies.” Normalising societies, Connolly suggests following Foucault, “bestow institutional privileges on a restrictive set of identities and apply intensive institutional pressures to secure those identities as norms against which a variety of modes of otherness are defined and excluded.” And “those who endorse these norms tout them as natural or intrinsically true.” The consequence is that those who differ from the norm, those who have desires, characteristics or beliefs that diverge from the model of the normal individual, are treated violently: those who differ are seen as “fundamental threats, deviations, or failures in need of correction, reform, punishment, silencing or liquidation.” In this sense, liberal societies do not require a homogenous population of normal liberal individuals. They allow for differences, but translate these differences “into perversified diversities.” “There is thus plenty of variety in a normalizing society. The numerous groups and individuals who deviate are shuffled into multifarious categories of abnormality, perversity, incapacity, irrationality, sickness, irresponsibility, personal defect, and so on.” This we have seen clearly in the early Rawls’s vision, where the model of the normal individual is promoted through the institutional device of the original position and by liberal individuals, and those oddballs and misfits who diverge from this are viewed as ‘perverse’ and subject to normalising pressures.

For Connolly, the normalisation of liberal societies is exemplified by the liberal ideal of tolerance. For liberals such as Rawls, tolerance is a means of ensuring that differences can flourish insofar as they do not impact detrimentally upon others. In this sense, the

28 Ibid., 90.
Rawlsian society creates a framework within which all subjects can live as they wish. Ideally they will be rational deliberative subjects, but this is not essential. They can live in other ways – spontaneously, eccentrically, and irrationally – insofar as this does not harm others. However, for Connolly, this idea of tolerance creates a society in which “one perspective exercising hegemony over the culture allows others to exist as enclaves within it”\(^{29}\) – a society, in other words, in which all ways of living are seen as deviations from the ideal of the liberal individual. As Wendy Brown explains:

\begin{quote}
the experience of being tolerated is inevitably one of being condescended to, of being forborne . . . tolerance appears to express the extent to which the existence, behaviour, ancestry, or attachment of one group are permitted or forbidden at the behest of another . . . The object of tolerance, through the very activity of toleration, is construed as marginal, inferior, other, outside the community, and at least in some measure of enmity with the community.\(^{30}\)
\end{quote}

The model of the liberal individual is thus a norm in liberal societies; those who differ – oddballs, misfits, underachievers and innumerable others – are tolerated, they are put up with, but they are treated as perverse deviations and subject to normalising pressures.

Finally, Connolly suggests that this has an unexpected effect. Liberal individualism normalises subjects into viewing their identity as stable and coherent when their identities are in fact inherently unstable, when identity “is a contingent artifice that

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 92.
encounters resistances and recalcitrance to the pressures that form it." As such, subjects often adopt dogmatic and aggressive approaches toward those who differ in order to strengthen and stabilise their own sense of self. Liberal individualism thus contributes significantly toward what Connolly calls 'fundamentalism.' For Connolly, fundamentalism refers to a strategy "in which the identity of the self, the association, and the nation are secured by converting differences that jeopardize their self-certainties into abnormalities and dangers that must be chastised, punished, or corrected." Because the Rawlsian model of the liberal individual is never stable, because it is always exceeded by radically different desires that render it unstable, it consequently (and rather ironically) leads subjects to adopt illiberal fundamentalist strategies so as to try and secure their identity.

3 Mouffe, Antagonism, Rawls

Connolly thus contributes to the critique of early Rawls, not by offering a detailed reading of Rawls but by providing a broader analysis that ties in closely with that of Honig, thus further demonstrating the way in which oddballs, misfits and others are treated violently by normalising liberal societies such as Rawls's because they diverge from the model of the deliberative, rational individual. As mentioned, in his later work Rawls takes difference more seriously. He does not, perhaps, take the kinds of criticisms advanced by Honig and Connolly into consideration, but in Political Liberalism he recognises that the principles of justice theorised in his early work are not universal principles but specific to modern liberal democratic societies and therefore might be

31 Connolly, Identity/Difference, 92.
32 Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, 121. For a more detailed account of fundamentalism see Ibid., 105-34.
more violent than he initially recognised. As we will see in more detail shortly, the question he seeks to address in *Political Liberalism*, therefore, is how citizens with diverse and irreconcilable conceptions of the good life can live together. He argues that political liberalism is a means of enabling diverse individuals to arrive at principles of justice which they can all accept as legitimate. However, Chantal Mouffe has developed a distinctive critique of Rawls's political liberalism, arguing that, Rawls continues to conceal the violence toward radical difference within his liberal order, with dangerous consequences.

**Hegemony and Socialist Strategy**

Before exploring Mouffe's critique we must understand why Mouffe sees radical difference as ineradicable. We can do this by primarily focusing on her 1985 work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-authored with Ernesto Laclau, since her later single-authored work builds on this. 33 *Hegemony* is a poststructural rethinking of politics undertaken through a deconstruction of classical Marxism – of Gramsci, Luxemburg, Kautsky and Althusser. There is, therefore, a great deal in this text. Here the focus is on the central ontological claims they forward about the discursive construction of society and the ineradicability of excess and antagonism.

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Contingency, Discourse and Hegemony

Rudimentary in this work is Laclau and Mouffe’s claim that the world is constituted by objects, relations, identities and events that have no intrinsic or a priori meaning – these undetermined entities they call ‘elements’ (p.105) and the whole range of them they call ‘the field of discursivity’ (p.111). For Laclau and Mouffe, as for Saussure’s structuralism, elements gain meaning only when they are symbolised and given meaning through a chain of signifiers which differentiate elements from one another. This signifying chain they term ‘discourse’: a discourse is thus defined as that which orders elements and gives them meaning by transforming them into what they call ‘moments’ (p.111). Crucially, though, like Foucault and unlike Saussure, Laclau and Mouffe concur with the poststructural claim that the subject is enmeshed within a variety of different, often competing and contradictory, discourses. All discourses, though, have a similar aim: they are “an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre.” The “privileged discursive points of this partial fixation” they call “nodal points” (p.112). If these particular elements are fixed then this will determine other elements too, thus meshing them together, or ‘quilting’ them as Žižek puts it.34 On this basis, therefore, Laclau and Mouffe contend that there is no a priori set of relations and identities that constitute society; the form that the relations and identities that make up society take and the meaning they have depends entirely upon their discursive articulation, their quilting together through discourse.35 Society is a discursive construction.

35 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony, 111. It is important to note that although for Laclau and Mouffe objects, identities and events have no meaning until they are discursively articulated into moments, Laclau and Mouffe are not nominalists, they do not deny the existence of entities outside of thought: “The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world
If society is a discursive construction, why does a society take one form rather than another? How are the different elements of the social order quilted together? The answer for Laclau and Mouffe lies in the concept of hegemony – the central concept of their work – and in particular the concepts of hegemonic practice and hegemonic articulation. Hegemonic practices occur when a bloc within society attempts to fix the meaning of a set of nodal points, and thus define the way in which various issues, identities and relations in society are viewed. Feminists, for example, engage in a hegemonic practice when they attempt to fix the meaning of nodal points such as sexuality, gender and equality and thereby alter the way in which subjects think about and treat women. A hegemonic articulation occurs when there has been a successful articulation of elements into moments, when the bloc has successfully managed to alter the way in which subjects think, feel and act in relation to a range of issues and objects by rendering their discourse hegemonic. This is precisely what feminists have to some degree achieved: the nodal points of sexuality, gender and equality have been successfully articulated such that most citizens in liberal democracies view women as equal, with respect, and so forth.

For Laclau and Mouffe, hegemonic practices and articulations are the stuff of politics. If social relations, identities and objects are meaningless until articulated by a discursive

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external to thought... An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of "natural phenomena" or "expressions of the wrath of God," depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence" (p.108).
practice, then a hegemonic articulation means that those social relations, identities and objects will take one form rather than another. Thus, if, as Laclau and Mouffe contend, the Left is to be reinvigorated and successful it needs to engage in more than simply attempting to gain power through parliament or lobbying government: to be successful the Left (or any other bloc in society) must engage in hegemonic practices and attempt to discursively alter the way in which subjects think, feel and act. Only then will subjects of the liberal capitalist order accept the fundamental changes called for by the Left.

Excess

Fundamentally, though, for Laclau and Mouffe, no hegemonic articulation can articulate the whole of society. Society - like any identity or object - can never be 'sutured' because it is always contains forces, radical differences, within it that have not been fully subsumed. There are two explanations for why there will always be these radical differences in Laclau and Mouffe's work: an excess of elements/meanings, and ineradicable antagonisms. These will be considered respectively.

The first explanation - one discussed in detail by Laclau and Mouffe, influenced by Derrida and that ties in closely with poststructural notions of radical difference - is that the field of discursivity always 'exceeds' the hegemonic articulations that give meaning to the social order. There are always more elements than can be articulated by the hegemonic discourses operating within society. One reason for this is the "growing complexity and fragmentation of advanced industrial societies" which means that there is an "asymmetry existing between a growing proliferation of differences - a surplus meaning of 'the social' - and the difficulties encountered by any discourse attempting to
fix those differences as moments of a stable articulatory structure.36 But more fundamentally, there is always an excess because the discourses that give meaning to society are relational. Hegemonic articulations give meaning to a variety of elements that constitute the social order by placing them in a chain of signifiers which systematically differentiates elements from one another; the meaning of any moment, therefore, will be dependent upon the meaning of others. Whilst this is not problematic within a particular hegemonic articulation, certain moments within a hegemonic articulation will be dependent upon their relation to moments outside of it, thus meaning that the discourse can never be sutured; it is always reliant on the existence of an outside to give it meaning. As “the identities [created through hegemonic articulations] are purely relational, this is but another way of saying that there is no identity which can be fully constituted” (p.111).

This point is made clearer by Mouffe in her later work, in which she uses the notion of the ‘constitutive outside’ to describe this phenomenon.37 The constitutive outside refers to the idea that any identity or community requires an outside to exist since it is only by defining itself in relation to – indeed, against – this other that the identity or community can exist – an idea that “reveals that there is no identity that is self-present to itself and

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36 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony, 96. A further, less interesting, reason why there is always an excess which is a logical consequence of the idea that discourses articulate elements, transforming them into moments: “in an articulated discursive totality . . .where every element has been reduced to a moment of that totality . . .the practice of articulation would be impossible: the latter involves working on elements, while here we would be confronted only with moments of a closed and fully constituted totality where every moment is subsumed from the beginning. As we shall see, if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality and the transformation of the elements into moments is never complete” (pp.106-7). Their concept of discourse, in other words, must articulate elements, transforming them into moments, and as such some elements must always remain unarticulated, otherwise there would be a closed linguistic system and no articulation would be required.

Hegemonic articulations thus give meaning to the social order by establishing an outside on which that meaning is dependent; as such, "there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents it becoming fully sutured" (p.111). Any hegemonic articulation structuring social order is thus always exceeded by alternative discourses.

In this sense, then, Laclau and Mouffe insist that there is always a radical difference, an excess, within the social order. Indeed, they note that their "analysis meets up with a number of contemporary currents of thought which . . . have insisted on the impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings" (p.111). They refer to Derrida, who they claim "generalizes the concept of discourse in a sense coincident with that of our text," thus indicating that their notion of excess is similar to the Derridean idea of différence. And as they make clear, like poststructural ideas of radical difference, this excess often challenges and resists the social order being instituted: all discursive articulations of social orders are "precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences" (p.96).

Indeed, any system of discourse

only exists as a partial limitation of a 'surplus of meaning' which subverts it . . . [Thus] the field of discursivity . . . determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture (p.111).

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38 Mouffe, _The Return of the Political_, 141.
**Antagonism**

However, Laclau and Mouffe suggest a second, more tangible, reason why a hegemonic articulation never sutures society: because societies are constituted by numerous blocs engaged in hegemonic practices, and thus any hegemonic articulation is always under challenge by others struggling for hegemony. Because, that is, an excess of meaning is inescapable, there will always be diverse constellations and blocs attempting to articulate nodal points and thus alter the social order: “every social identity becomes the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices” (p.138). There is often, therefore, extensive conflict over the meaning of different moments and nodal points in the social order. This kind of conflict they call *antagonism*, and they contend that society is constituted through such antagonistic struggles. Antagonism is central to the establishment of society: it is the struggle that occurs when competing hegemonic blocs, each aimed at articulating particular moments and nodal points, engage in competition with one another so as to define the social order. Hegemony, therefore, consists in one bloc winning this antagonistic struggle, in marginalising the alternative discourses, silencing them, such that subjects in the social order accept their discourse.

Mouffe refers to antagonisms as ‘the political.’ Laclau and Mouffe discuss this term briefly, pointing out that

> politics as a practice of creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations cannot be located at a determinate level of the social, as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonisms (p.153).
However, Mouffe’s discussion of this term in her later work is more extensive, making clear the distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘the political.’ By the former she means “the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created”: parliaments, parties, elections, and so forth. The ‘political,’ on the other hand, “has to do with the ‘ontological’ level, it ‘concerns the very way in which society is instituted.’ “More precisely,” she says, “by ‘the political’ I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies.” \(^{40}\) “To take account of ‘the political’ as the ever present possibility of antagonism,” therefore, “requires . . . recognizing the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and the fact that every society is the product of a series of practices attempting to establish order in a context of contingency.” \(^{41}\)

Mouffe clarifies this by drawing on Carl Schmitt. As discussed in the introduction, Schmitt was critical of liberalism for its individualism and thus ignoring the fundamental significance of collective political identities — identities based on nationality and territory — for political life. His contention was that the “specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between enemy and friend.” \(^{42}\) The political thus consists “in a certain type of we/they relation” in which collectivities oppose one another, sometimes in ways that mutate into a friend/enemy relation and involve violence and aggression. \(^{43}\) Mouffe is careful to note, however, that

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 17.
This does not mean of course that such a relation [a we/they relation] is necessarily one of friend/enemy, i.e. an antagonistic one. But we should acknowledge that, in certain conditions, there is always the possibility that this we/they relation can become antagonistic, i.e. that it can turn into a relation of friend/enemy. 44

Thus Mouffe uses Schmitt to clarify that the political refers to the realm of antagonism between competing collective political identities attempting to establish their identity and discourse as hegemonic rather than allow other collectives to do so – antagonisms that might become violent. And Mouffe uses the notion of the ‘constitutive outside’ mentioned earlier to help explain why this relation is ineradicable, why there is an “ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping,” as Schmitt puts it. 45 Because an identity always requires a difference, even if it becomes hegemonic it cannot suture the social order. There will always be groups against whom they define themselves, and these will differ and may contest the order established. What this means, consequently, is that antagonistic struggle between collective identities is a permanent feature. “It is therefore an illusion to believe in the advent of a society from which antagonism would have been eradicated. Antagonism, as Schmitt says, is an ever present possibility; the political belongs to our ontological condition.” 46

44 Ibid., 15.
45 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 35. Using the constitutive outside also enables Mouffe to explain why seeing politics in terms of the friend-enemy distinction does not essentialise the different collectivities involved in this relation. In short, because the idea of the constitutive outside highlights “the fact that the creation of an identity implies the establishment of a difference,” this means that a collective identity is never ‘essential,’ it is never grounded in anything other than a range of differences against which it defines itself: “every identity is relational . . . the affirmation of a difference is the precondition for the existence of any identity.” Mouffe, On the Political, 15.
46 Mouffe, On the Political, 16.
Mouffe's conceptions of antagonism and the political are the bases for her critique of Rawls, as we will see. But they are also the ideas that have led Žižek and Stavrakakis to discern a Lacanian rather than poststructural account of radical difference in Mouffe's work. Žižek argues that, whilst Laclau and Mouffe may have been explicitly influenced by Derrida, their work nevertheless enriches and is enriched by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. For Žižek, what Laclau and Mouffe call antagonism is an example of the Real. He contends that their claim that society is never sutured is similar to the Lacanian analysis of the imaginary-symbolic order: although each order attempts to demonstrate their completeness, neither is ever complete — there is always a gap, something that is not articulated. Where Lacan calls this the Real, Laclau and Mouffe call it antagonism, referring to an ongoing antagonism in which one hegemonic articulation suppresses alternative discursive practices so as to maintain hegemony. The notion of antagonism is thus like the notion of the Real: it exists at a level below experience and perception, that is not and cannot be articulated. Hence, for Žižek, "antagonism is precisely such an impossible kernel, a certain limit which is in itself nothing; it is only to be constructed retroactively, from a series of its effects, as the

47 In fact, there is little doubt that Laclau and Mouffe are now firmly associated with a Lacanian approach to political theory. Arguably, this is partly because of the clear similarities between their approaches and Lacanian theory as Žižek and Stavrakakis illustrate, partly because Laclau in particular adopted a more psychoanalytic approach in his post-Hegemony work, and partly because they are associated with the 'Essex School' of political theory and discourse analysis which is rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis. For a critical account that situates Laclau and Mouffe clearly in the Lacanian camp see Andrew Robinson, 'The Political Theory of constitutive Lack: A Critique,' Theory and Event 8, no.1 (2005): 1-31; and Andrew Robinson, 'The Politics of Lack,' British Journal of Politics and International Relations 6, no.2 (2004): 259-69. For an edited collection which also sees Laclau and Mouffe as based in psychoanalytic theory see Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen eds., Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. For an introduction to the Essex School see David Howarth, Aletta J Norval and Yanis Stavrakakis eds., Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

48 Indeed, according to Žižek, "Laclau and Mouffe were the first to develop this logic of the Real in its relevance for the social-ideological field." Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 163.
traumatic point which escapes them; it prevents a closure of the social field." Indeed, like the Real, antagonisms may be constitutive of social order but they can rarely be recognised. If they are experienced it is only as a rupture: "antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity. . . If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the failure of difference: in that sense it situates itself within the limits of language and can only exist as the disruption of it." 

The Political and Political Liberalism

The ineradicability of radical differences – antagonisms and excess – leads Mouffe to claim that a stable, sutured social order is 'impossible.' Although Mouffe draws to attention the impossibility of any social order, however, her principal target is liberalism. It is to her insightful critique of the 'later' Rawls that we turn – a critique demonstrating that Rawls's political liberalism conceals the violence toward difference on which it is reliant. Mouffe has presented various versions of this critique, but this outline concentrates on Mouffe's criticisms of Rawls advanced in her essay 'Politics and the Limits of Liberalism,' in The Return of the Political, in which Mouffe argues that "political liberalism" . . . offers us a picture of the well-ordered society as one in which

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49 Ibid., 163-4.
50 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony, 125. Stavrakakis's contention is, similarly, that "The political is not the real per se but one of the modalities in which we experience an encounter with the real." Yannis Stavrakakis, Laca and the Political. London: Routledge, 1999: 75.
51 'The Impossibility of Society,' is in fact the phrase Laclau used in a later essay explaining the parameters of the argument in Hegemony; however the point is made explicit by Laclau and Mouffe (p.111). See Ernesto Laclau, New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time. London: Verso, 1990: 90.
52 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox, for example, contains various essays offering critical analyses of the later Rawls, especially Chapter 1 (17-35) and her 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism' provides a similar critique of Rawls and Habermas.
53 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 135-54. Further references to this text will be inserted into the text parenthetically.
antagonism, violence, power and repression have disappeared. But, in fact, this is only because they have been made invisible through a clever stratagem” (p.141).

Mouffe begins by noting that

Political liberals like John Rawls . . . start from what they characterize as the ‘fact’ of pluralism, that is, the multiplicity of conceptions of the good that exist in modern democratic society. This leads to the ‘liberal problem’ of how to organize coexistence among people with different conceptions of the good (p.136).

The solution, Rawls argues, is political liberalism. As Mouffe notes, the defining feature of Rawls’s political liberalism is the recognition that if “they are to be accepted by people who disagree about the nature of the good life, liberal institutions cannot be justified on grounds which are bound to be controversial, like ideals of Kantian autonomy or Millian individuality.” Consequently, “Rawls and Larmore defend a liberalism that is strictly ‘political’ in the sense that it does not rely on any comprehensive moral ideal.”

Specifically, Rawls sees his society as governed by what he calls a ‘political conception of justice,’ which, Mouffe notes, amounts to “a definitive list of rights, principles and institutional arrangements that are unassailable” (pp.138-9). This list is ‘political,’ free-standing rather than metaphysically grounded. But Rawls explicitly sees this conception

54 Ibid., 138. The other political liberal to whom Mouffe refers here is Charles Larmore, ‘Political Liberalism,’ Political Theory 18, no.3 (1990): 339-60.
of justice as more than just a *modus vivendi*, a self-interested agreement between competing groups and individuals in society. As Mouffe notes, whilst

some liberals consider that a Hobbesian modus vivendi should be enough to provide the type of consensus required by a pluralistic society 'political liberalism' finds those solutions wanting and proclaims the need for a moral type of consensus in which values and ideals play an authoritative role (p.138).

For Rawls, a moral consensus on principles of justice can be found in a pluralist society not by appealing to common moral values but by appealing to reason. If 'reasonable' citizens engage in deliberation with one another over the principles of justice then an 'overlapping consensus' can be established that is acceptable to all. In short, for Rawls, being reasonable means reciprocal reason-giving – giving reasons that others can accept, or at least "could not reasonably reject," if they are also engaged in public deliberations aimed at arriving at a consensus on the principles of justice.\(^{55}\) Through a to-and-fro process of reason-giving, reasonable citizens will eventually arrive at an overlapping consensus on the principles of justice that will govern society. This consensus, he contends, will be 'political' since it will be derived from deliberation and reasoning rather than comprehensive doctrines and conceptions of the good; it will be 'moral,' though, since it will have been elaborated through the principal of reciprocity; and it will be acceptable to all, since all reasonable citizens have been involved in its formulation.\(^{56}\) Thus, through the procedures of political liberalism, a consensus can be achieved in plural societies.

\(^{55}\) Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 49.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 48-66, 212-47.
However, for Mouffe, Rawls’s claim that an overlapping consensus can be arrived at through the procedures of political liberalism conceals a mass of differences – of different discourses, ideas and desires – that the consensus suppresses. One reason for this is that, as Rawls himself notes, there will always be controversial questions on which consensus is impossible – abortion, for example, or various issues associated with comprehensive religious, philosophical or ethical doctrines.\(^{57}\) These issues, he contends, ought to be taken out of the public sphere and left up to individuals to decide so that a consensus is possible. For Mouffe, however, this is problematic because consigning issues to the private sphere is controversial. The question of abortion, for example, cannot be excluded from public discussion without suppressing the concerns of those who want to make it a public issue: the very argument of pro-life campaigners is that the state ought to legislate so as to ensure that individuals cannot make the decision about whether or not to abort a foetus themselves. Thus, for Mouffe, Rawls is “relegating pluralism and dissent to the private sphere in order to secure consensus in the public realm. All controversial issues are taken off the agenda in order to create the conditions for a ‘rational’ consensus” – a consensus that conceals the fact there will be subjects with radically different discourses and ideas who are silenced (p.140).

Moreover, Mouffe recognises that the procedures Rawls theorises so as to enable subjects to negotiate and arrive at the overlapping consensus also silence a range of radical differences by excluding them from engaging in deliberation. Firstly, Rawls distinguishes between two kinds of pluralism which political liberalism must face,
'simple pluralism' and 'reasonable pluralism.' The former refers to the whole range of different conceptions of the good present in society, whereas 'reasonable pluralism' refers to just those conceptions of the good that Rawls deems reasonable, namely, those that will engage in a process of public reason over the content of the political conception of justice. This distinction enables Rawls to ensure that those people with unreasonable views – those who are excessively dogmatic or unwilling to engage in a process of reasoning – cannot have any control over the shape of public institutions and principles.58 As he puts it, "That there are doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedoms is itself a permanent fact of life, or seems so. This gives us the practical task of containing them – like war and disease – so that they do not overturn political justice."59

As we will see in Chapter 5, Mouffe does not oppose exclusions. However, she does criticise the way in which Rawls frames it. She notes that

political liberals are, of course, perfectly aware that the pluralism they defend cannot be total and that some views will have to be excluded. Nevertheless, they justify those exclusions by declaring that they are the product of the 'free exercise of practical reason' that establishes the limits of possible consensus.

As such, "When a point of view is excluded it is because this is required by the exercise of reason." The point that Mouffe raises is that "Once exclusions are presented as arising from a free agreement resulting from rational procedures ('veil of ignorance' or rational dialogue), they appear as immune from relations of power" (p.142). Rawls can thus

58 Ibid., 36-8, 58-66.
59 Ibid., 64, n.19.
exclude people who diverge from and challenge the liberal order, but he can do so by
claiming that it is required by the dictates of reason. “In that way, rationality is the key
to solving the ‘paradox of liberalism’: how to eliminate its adversaries while remaining neutral” (p.142). But this recourse to reason is simply a way of disguising the need for
divergent subjects to be excluded. For Mouffe recognises that there may be innumerable
people with divergent beliefs and discourses, who would, if given a voice in
deliberations over the shape of the public institutions, seek to challenge the liberal vision
and institutionalise an alternative. That is the nature of the political. Rawls cannot allow
them to engage in deliberation; to do so would make evident the dissent within the
society and might even lead to the establishment of illiberal institutions. As such, he
uses the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable people to subtly demarcate the
legitimate interlocutors from the illegitimate ones, and so ensure that the liberal order
can exist unchallenged by those he perceives as radically different.

Secondly, Mouffe notes two subtler ways in which Rawls conceals the fact that
divergent subjects are excluded from negotiating the overlapping consensus of political
liberalism. This stems from the way in which, for Rawls, public reason is aimed not at
discerning universal principles of justice, as was the case in his early work, but with
discovering the principles of justice which citizens of contemporary liberal democracies
can all endorse. “For him, this requirement simply indicates that we start from the
fundamental intuitive ideas present in our societies” and arrive at principles of justice
based on these. However, Mouffe sees this approach as highly questionable: “He sees it
as self-evident and uncontroversial, but it is not” (p.143). Fundamental intuitive ideas
are themselves based on a violent exclusion, on a violent decision. Mouffe gives two
examples of this. One is Rawls’ suggestion that, because liberty and equality are values widely accepted in modern societies, public deliberations over the principles of justice ought to be structured around defining how they can be best realised and guaranteed. However, for Mouffe, Rawls’s statement that liberty and equality are widely accepted is problematic. “Far from being a benign statement of fact, it is the result of a decision which already excludes from the dialogue those who believe that different values should be the organizing ones of the political order” (p.143). The assumption that modern societies are guided by liberal ideals, therefore, enables Rawls to silence and conceal awkward subjects with divergent beliefs.

The other example Mouffe gives is Rawls’s distinction between reasonable and unreasonable persons, a critical distinction since those who are considered unreasonable by Rawls are excluded from public deliberation.

But who decides what is and what is not reasonable”? In politics the very distinction between ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ is already drawing the frontier; it has a political character and is always the expression of a given hegemony. What is at a given moment deemed ‘rational’ or ‘reasonable’ in a community is what corresponds to the dominant language games and the ‘common sense’ that they construe. It is the result of a process of ‘sedimentation’ of an ensemble of discourses and practices whose political character has been elided (p.143).

Just as a broad acceptance of ideals such as liberty and equality in society is the result of a decision, of the hegemony of a discursive bloc articulating a variety of elements so as to create a certain social reality, so is the broad acceptance about what is and what is not
reasonable. There are always other interpretations that are silenced. But this silencing is concealed by Rawls who takes the existence of a certain ideas about liberty and equality in society as a fact and builds a consensus on them.

For Mouffe, then, the overlapping consensus arrived at by the subjects of political liberalism is not as consensual as Rawls claims. A whole range of divergent subjects have been excluded in order to arrive at it: those who want to politicise controversial questions, those deemed unreasonable, those who do not endorse the ideals of liberty and equality, and those with different understandings of reason. By claiming that this is a consensus, therefore, Rawls is denying the masses of differences that are suppressed, marginalised and excluded to make that 'consensus' possible. What makes this particular problematic for Mouffe, however, is not simply that Rawls's political liberalism suppresses difference, but that it actually poses a danger to liberal democratic politics. For the various differences that are suppressed and ignored by the apparent consensus will not go away; for Mouffe, as we have seen, difference and excess are ineradicable features of all societies – indeed, antagonistic clashes are constitutive of them. In denying that these differences exist, therefore, Rawls is endangering the project of political liberalism, since unless these differences are recognised and engaged with – unless, in fact, they have legitimate channels through which they can be expressed – they may well emerge in ways with which political liberalism cannot deal. This point will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5. For now it suffices to note that, on Mouffe’s reading, Rawls’s concealment of a variety of differences beneath the façade of consensus endangers liberal democracy. “To negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to a bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to
impotence in dealing with them . . . this can have disastrous consequences for the
defence of democratic institutions" (p.140).

Conclusion

This chapter, in sum, has demonstrated that agonistic liberals begin with the idea that all
orders might be troubled by radical differences, and it has shown that this leads them to
forward a critique of contemporary liberal democratic theory similar to the one
forwarded in the previous chapter. Though they use different ideas, they all adopt a
poststructural or psychoanalytic perspective so as to claim that radical difference will
pervade all forms of social and political order. This leads them to recognise that, despite
claiming to provide a consensual society in which subjects can pursue their own
conceptions of the good, Rawls's political thought actually treats violently those subjects
who diverge from the order or from the liberal subject. Honig explains how the early
Rawls criminalises and punishes those with divergent conceptions of justice and requires
Rawlsian subjects police both their own desires and those oddballs and misfits who
diverge from deliberative rationality. Connolly notes, more broadly, that those who
diverge from the model of liberal individualism are subtly treated violently, being
categorised as 'perversified diversities.' Finally, we saw through Mouffe that the later
Rawls's emphasis on a consensual framework can only be established by excluding from
public engagement a mass of radical differences. Thus, the agonists make clear that the
Rawlsian order presents little more than an illusion of difference; it is, in a variety of
ways, reliant upon violently assimilating or excluding the radically different.
Chapter 5 ‘The Hegemony of Democratic Values’: Mouffe’s Agonistic Pluralism

Introduction

Violence toward radical difference is inherent to liberalism. Whilst liberal democrats since Hobbes have admitted this to some degree they conceal the full extent of this violence by failing to acknowledge the subtle ways in which their visions will continue to treat violently those who diverge from their ideals of liberal subjectivity. We saw in the previous chapter, however, that three more radical agonistic liberals, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig and Chantal Mouffe are more candid about liberalism’s violence, and this has led them to be highly critical of liberal democrats such as Rawls. However, this critique of liberalism is just the first-step in their argument. When they criticise liberals for concealing violence Connolly, Honig and Mouffe do so not because they want to highlight its flaws or seek to replace liberalism. They criticise liberal theories so as to reform liberalism, to rework the relationship between liberalism and violence.

It is to this agonistic project that we turn. In the following three chapters the specific agonistic reforms proposed by each theorist will be examined and critically evaluated. Whilst there are significant differences between these thinkers as we will see, they all admit that because radical differences are inescapable, violence toward divergent subjects will always be present in liberal societies. They suggest, therefore, that institutions for agonistic contest are needed so as to provide means for confronting and
dealing with this politically. Although they largely recognise that some divergent subjects *might* have to be excluded from engaging in such contest, they claim that agonistic institutions will provide an outlet for divergent passions that might otherwise threaten the liberal order, whilst also enabling divergent subjects to contest the violence they experience and create spaces for difference.

The focus in this chapter is on the agonistic pluralism of Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe is critical of the other two agonists, Connolly and Honig, for the same reasons as she is critical of liberal democrats. Although, she does not provide a detailed argument, on her reading Connolly and Honig fail to appreciate the ineradicability of antagonism: they mistakenly attempt to resolve the violence inherent within political orders through their agonistic ideals. Hence she writes that

> this antagonistic dimension, which can never be completely eliminated but only 'tamed' or 'sublimated' by being, so to speak, 'played out' in an agonistic way is what, in my view, distinguishes my understanding of agonism from the one put forward by other 'agonistic theorists,' those who are influenced by Nietzsche or Hannah Arendt like William Connolly and Bonnie Honig. It seems to me that their conception leaves open the possibility that the political could under certain conditions be made absolutely congruent with the ethical, optimism, which I do not share.¹

As we will see in subsequent chapters, Mouffe’s observation is relatively accurate with respect to Honig, but mistaken about Connolly, who is as clear as Mouffe that the agon requires the exclusion of those radically different subjects who threaten it. But the fact

that Mouffe considers herself the only agonistic thinker to appreciate the ineradicability of violence not only makes it pertinent to begin our analysis with her but also indicates that if anyone ought to have a vision that is candid about and deals with violence toward radical difference it ought to be Mouffe's. However, as will be contended in this chapter, although she is certainly more attuned to this issue than many other liberals, and recognises in certain ways that violence toward radical difference is a precondition of liberalism, she fails to acknowledge the extent of this violence. Section 1 presents an outline of Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism. Section 2 locates the hidden violence toward difference on which this vision relies.

1 Mouffe’s Agonistic Pluralism

Mouffe begins by recognising that liberalism is the form of political order that best enables differences to flourish.

If there is a lesson to be drawn from the failure of communism it is that... liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed. If we take 'liberty and equality for all' as the 'ethico-political' principles of liberal democracy (what Montesquieu defined as the 'passions that move a regime'), it is clear that the problem with our societies is not their proclaimed ideals but the fact that those ideals are not put into practice.2

She accepts these basic liberal principles because she views them as a necessary response to the ineradicability of antagonism.

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Once the very possibility of achieving homogeneity is discarded, the necessity of liberal institutions becomes evident. Far from being a mere cover-up for the class divisions of capitalist society, as many participatory democrats seem to believe, such institutions provide the guarantee that individual freedom will be protected against the tyranny of the majority or the domination of the totalitarian party/state.3

But she contends that if liberalism is to enable diversity to flourish, if liberal ideals are to be put into practice, then some fairly radical changes to liberal orders are needed. She specifies these changes by developing what she calls ‘agonistic pluralism,’ the main features of which are outlined in what follows.

Bringing Antagonisms to the Fore

As we saw in the previous chapter, Mouffe’s concern is that liberals such as Rawls offer a vision of a consensual society committed to an overlapping consensus on principles of justice which conceals a mass of different discourses and subjects that must be suppressed in order to guarantee this consensus; this suppression is the condition for the existence of liberal society; it is the nature of the political. As we also saw, however, for Mouffe, these suppressed differences will not remain marginalised but will often manifest themselves, challenge and perhaps undermine the liberal order. By denying the existence of antagonisms and differences beneath consensus liberals therefore endanger liberal democratic politics.

Many liberal theorists [like Rawls] refuse to acknowledge the antagonistic dimension of politics . . . because they believe that it would endanger the realization of consensus, which

they see as the aim of democracy. What they do not realize is that, far from jeopardizing
democracy, agonistic confrontation is the very condition of its existence. Modern
democracy’s specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to
suppress it.⁴

Mouffe argues, therefore, that the liberal order needs to be invigorated by a variety of
legitimate democratic channels through which subjects can engage in contest and
argument, through which differences can come to the fore. This is important, she argues,
because, as we have seen, for Mouffe there are always subjects and discourses that differ
from the liberal consensus, that will challenge it in some way – that might even
undermine it. These differences cannot be eradicated since excess, antagonism and
difference are inescapable features of all societies. However, she suggests that these
differences can be ‘sublimated.’⁵ Like Hobbes’s claim that human passions cannot be
eliminated but instead must be harnessed and counteracted by channelling them into the
market where they can flourish in a more manageable, less dangerous way, so for
Mouffe differences cannot be eliminated but they can be diverted or displaced into
democratic channels through which they can be “played out” and “tamed.”⁶ In this
sense, the importance of democratic institutions lies “in domesticating hostility and in
trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations.”⁷

The democratic institutions and practices Mouffe advocates, however, are of a particular
kind, namely, contestatory institutions. They are emphatically not deliberative

⁴ Mouffe, On the Political, 29-30.
⁵ Ibid., 21.
⁶ Ibid., 20-1.
⁷ Mouffe, Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism, 15.
institutions such as those advocated by Jürgen Habermas, Joshua Cohen and others. As Cohen explains, deliberative institutions are democratic institutions intended to enable citizens “to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus” in which “outcomes are democratically legitimate if and only if they could be the object of free and reasoned agreement among equals.” They are not dissimilar from Rawls’s vision of reasoned deliberation over principles of justice leading to an overlapping consensus; Cohen’s account of deliberative democracy is, in fact, explicitly based on Rawls’s later work on reasonableness as the basis for the justification for public principles and policies. According to Mouffe,

While not denying ‘the fact of pluralism’ (Rawls) and the necessity to make room for many different conceptions of the good, deliberative democrats affirm that it is nevertheless possible to reach a consensus that would appear deeper than a ‘mere agreement on procedure,’ a consensus that could qualify as moral.9

But because it stresses moral consensus and rational agreement, “the deliberative democracy model is denying . . . the dimension of undecidability and the ineradicability of antagonism, which are constitutive of the political,” and as such overlooking the ineradicability of difference from the deliberative procedure in the same way that Rawls’s liberal consensus denies the ineradicability of difference.10

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9 Mouffe, Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism, 2.
10 Ibid., 17.
What Mouffe calls for instead are agonistic institutions, channels not aimed at consensus but ones through which different subjects can contest with one another, challenge particular laws and policies, and make themselves heard. "A well functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions." For "antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist. Otherwise dissent tends to take violent forms." We will see what kinds of agonistic channels Mouffe considers necessary shortly, but the key point is that, for her, the turn to deliberation and consensual decision-making is mistaken. "Rather than helping to construct a vibrant agonistic public sphere, thanks to which democracy can be kept alive and deepened," deliberative and consensual institutions, like political liberalism, "might in fact be jeopardizing democracy by creating the conditions for the emergence of antagonism that cannot be contained by democratic institutions." Instead, institutions for contest and argument are needed.

**From Antagonism to Agonism: The Ethico-Political Bond**

Agonistic pluralism is not simply intended to make differences "visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation." Its purpose is also to 'tame' the antagonisms that emerge between these differences when they come to the fore. This is what makes Mouffe's vision one of 'agonistic' rather than 'antagonistic' democracy. This distinction, between antagonism and agonism, is based on Schmitt's account of the political discussed in Chapter 4. For Mouffe, an antagonistic relationship is a

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11 Ibid., 16.
12 Mouffe, On the Political, 20-1.
14 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 149.
friend/enemy relationship, a zero-sum relationship between ‘enemies’ who define themselves against one another and who, therefore, having no common ground, seek to destroy or annihilate the other so as to attain hegemony and secure their identity. An agonistic relationship, conversely, is a relationship between ‘adversaries,’ a we/they relation between subjects who disagree but who nevertheless see one another as legitimate opponents:

If we want to acknowledge on one side the permanence of the antagonistic dimension of the conflict, while on the other side allowing for the possibility of its ‘taming,’ we need to envisage a third type of relation. This is the type of relation which I have proposed to call ‘agonism.’ While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are ‘adversaries’ not enemies.15

But if, as Mouffe contends, agonistic pluralism “allows democratic politics to transform antagonism into agonism,” if “In other words, [agonistic pluralism] helps us to envisage how the dimension of antagonism can be ‘tamed,’ thanks to the establishment of institutions and practices through which potential antagonisms can be played out in an agonistic way,” the question is: how does agonistic pluralism do this? What aspect of

15 Mouffe, On the Political, 20. Notably, this distinction between hostile conflict and agonistic contest is also drawn by Nietzsche in ‘Homer’s Contest,’ one of the major essays on the idea of agonistic contest, although not an essay on which Mouffe draws. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7 as Honig draws from it extensively. But the point is that Nietzsche recognizes a dangerous form of Eris or envy that “leads men against one another to a hostile war of extermination,” and a “good one, who as jealousy, spite, envy, incites men to activity but not to the action of war to the knife but to the action of contest.” Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest,’ in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Volume 2. Early Greek Philosophy, edited and translated by Oscar Levy. New York: Gordon Press, 1974: 55.
agonistic pluralism transforms those antagonistic conflicts brought to the fore into agonistic contests? For Mouffe, the second aspect of agonistic pluralism entails establishing common bonds, what she calls 'ethico-political' bonds, between subjects within the liberal order. “This means that, while in conflict, [subjects] see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place”; it means that antagonistic conflicts between different subjects are transformed into agonistic contests.16

For Mouffe, the common bonds needed are already present in liberal democratic societies. Drawing on Claude Lefort, as we will see in more detail shortly, she claims that liberal democracy is characterised by two ‘ethico-political principles,’ by two broad principles – the principles of liberty and equality.17 Mouffe’s contention is that so long as there is a “consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality,” liberal democratic subjects can disagree whilst simultaneously seeing themselves as belonging to the same political association.18 In other words, contest and argument between diverse subjects can flourish so long as those subjects are committed to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy.

When Mouffe suggests that these ethico-political values ought to provide a common bond she does not simply contend that subjects should endorse or accept these values but that they build them into their identity such that they passionately, actively identify with them. In this sense she differs significantly from Rawls who, as seen, considers it

16 Mouffe, On the Political, 20-1.
18 Mouffe, On the Political, 121.
enough that subjects use their reason to see that the endorsement of liberal principles is rational. One way she thinks about this is through the work of the conservative political philosopher Michael Oakeshott.¹⁹ Oakeshott contrasts two different forms of political association: the universitas, an association based around a substantive set of values or beliefs such as the kind of association defended by communitarians and nationalists, and what he calls the "societas or 'civil association' [which] designates a formal relationship in terms of rules, not a substantive relation in terms of common action."²⁰

Oakeshott insists that the participants in a societas or cives are not associated for a common enterprise nor with a view to facilitating the attainment of each person's individual prosperity; what links them is the recognition of the authority of the conditions specifying their common or 'public' concern, a 'practice of civility.' This public concern or consideration of cives Oakeshott calls respublica.

What attracts Mouffe to Oakeshott’s conception is the idea that

To belong to the political community what is required is that we accept a specific language of civil intercourse, the respublica. Those rules prescribe norms of conduct to be subscribed to in seeking self-chosen satisfactions and in performing self-chosen actions. The identification with these rules of civil intercourse creates a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises.²¹

¹⁹ The other way in which she theorises identification with the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy is through the work of Wittgenstein. See especially: Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox. London: Verso, 2000.
²¹ Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 67.
The *respublica* allows citizens to pursue their own interests and have their own identities—it allows differences to flourish—but simultaneously creates a common bond between these various citizens, because, despite their diverse interests and identities, they pursue and perform these within the rules specified by the *respublica*. Thus, if the liberal democratic principles of liberty and equality were to take the form of a *respublica* then citizens within liberal democratic orders would be able to have their own identities and interests but simultaneously have a bond because when they pursued those interests or performed their identities they would do so within the framework of certain rules based around the principles of liberty and equality. The exact content of these rules could take varied forms, as we will see shortly. But nevertheless, when subjects relate to family and friends, when they interact with colleagues at work—indeed, whenever they act—their actions will be guided by rules based on the principles of equality and liberty because they are a fundamental, active aspect of their identity.\(^{22}\) And, crucially, this means that when subjects engage in contest with one another or when some seek to change particular policies, the subjects nevertheless agree on common ethico-political principles which form the basis and the unity of the liberal democratic order. Thus although the “antagonistic dimension is always present” within agonistic pluralism because there are always differences between subjects, “it . . . is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{22}\) This idea, that there can be diversity within the rules of the *respublica*, it must be noted, diverges from one of Mouffe's major influences, Carl Schmitt. Arguing against pluralist accounts of political community, Schmitt contends that “Only as long as the essence of the political is not comprehended or not taken into consideration is it possible to place a political association pluralistically on the same level with religious, cultural, economic, or other associations.” For Schmitt, the friend-enemy distinction is decisive; a pluralist state would divide the political community, thus meaning that it would be in no position to fend against their enemy. He concludes, therefore, that pluralism cannot exist "without destroying the entity and the political itself.” Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by George Schwab. London: University of Chicago Press, 1996: 45.

However, whilst a common ethico-political bond is necessary for agonistic contest, Mouffe does not think that there will be a consensus on the meaning of the ethico-political principles that constitute the regime. "Consensus is needed on the institutions constitutive of democracy and on the 'ethico-political' values informing the political association – liberty and equality for all – but there will always be disagreement concerning their meaning and the way they should be implemented." She draws to attention various different interpretations of the ethico-political principles – "liberal-conservative, social-democratic, neo-liberal, radical-democratic, etc" – and argues that for any of these to become established requires a hegemonic project whereby some interpretations are marginalised and others accepted by subjects, as will be discussed in more detail shortly. But, crucially, this is a 'conflictual consensus': there is disagreement over specific interpretations of the principles of liberty and equality, but there is a consensus that liberty and equality are the values which should govern political and social life. As she puts it:

What I am proposing is that adherence to the political principles of the liberal democratic regime should be considered as the basis of homogeneity required for democratic equality. The principles in question are those of liberty and equality and it is clear that they can give rise to multiple interpretations and that no-one can pretend to possess the 'correct' interpretation.  

24 Ibid., 31.  
25 Mouffe, Deliberative Democracy and Agonistic Pluralism, 16.  
26 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 130.
The complexity and simplicity of this idea of contest within and over the ethico-political bond can be seen through the example of party political contest in the UK during the early- to mid-1980s. During this period the British Conservative Party had adopted a new right ideology, the Labour party had shifted substantially to the left, adopting a social democratic position, and both competed against one another through the British parliamentary system. Although these two parties differed considerably and contested with each other passionately, each subscribed to the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy: they accepted that elections were decisive, that the majority always won, that governments once elected should govern, and that the defeated party should provide vociferous opposition. But we can also see that in opposing one another on various issues about how Britain ought to be governed within the rules of parliamentary democracy, the parties not only sought to alter public policies but also to shift the way in which parliamentary democracy was understood: the Conservatives did not simply want to privatise the economy but to alter the hegemonic interpretation of parliamentary democracy by defining it in less participatory, less accountable terms, and more in line with a laissez-faire approach to the economy; the Labour party, conversely, sought to alter the way in which parliamentary democracy was understood, making it more participatory and bringing more areas, especially the economy, under democratic control. There is simplicity, then, insofar as both parties accept the rules of the game of parliamentary democracy, but complexity insofar as their aim is not simply to work within but also to alter those very rules. The same applies with the ethico-political bond: competing subjects act within the ethico-political principles when contesting with one
another, but often they not only seek to alter phenomena within the ethico-political principles but also how the ethico-political principles are understood.  

**Hegemony and Frontiers**

For Mouffe, then, agonistic pluralism needs citizens to build the ethico-political values of liberty and equality into their identity; by so doing, it will be possible for different subjects to engage in agonistic rather than antagonistic contest with one another, even if there is always contest over the precise interpretation. This means that if contemporary liberal democracies are to develop agonistic pluralism there is a critical task ahead: they must "foster allegiance to our democratic institutions" by developing identification with the rules of the *respublica* amongst the bulk of the subjects. In short, for Mouffe, this entails two things. Firstly, Mouffe follows Oakeshott in recognising that identification with the ethico-political rules stems from living with those rules, seeing others practicing them, and so forth. "We acquire habits of conduct, not by constructing a way of living upon rules or precepts learned by heart and subsequently practiced, but by living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner" – indeed, "the education by means of which we acquire habits of affection and behavior in not only coeval with conscious life, but is carried on, in practice and observation, without pause in every moment of our waking life, and perhaps even in our dreams." Mouffe argues, therefore, that if liberal subjects are to develop commitment to the *respublica* then the ethico-principles of liberal democracy need to become *hegemonic*. And

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27 Interestingly, James Tully, an agonist not discussed in this thesis, defines politics not simply in terms of contest and argument *within* the rules of the game but contestation of and argument *over* the rules of the game. Mouffe makes clear that, in practice, the two cannot be separated: engaging in contest within the rules of the game often impacts upon the rules of the game themselves. See James Tully, 'The Agonic Freedom of Citizens,' *Economy and Society* 28, no.2 (1999): 161-82.

the best way to do this is . . . by creating strong forms of identification with them. This should be done by developing and multiplying in as many social relations as possible the discourses, the practices, the 'language games,' that produce democratic 'subject positions.'

The objective is to establish the hegemony of democratic values and practices. 29

This will not be a harmonious, peaceful process. Mouffe acknowledges the 'political' nature of agonistic pluralism, the fact that it is and can only be established at the cost of other alternatives. As she puts it, "the agonistic approach . . . acknowledges that society is always politically instituted and never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices and that it is never a neutral terrain." 30 This will be returned to shortly, but the point is that agonistic pluralism must be established by becoming hegemonic, by suppressing alternative discourses and ideas.

However, whilst establishing a democratic community united around the ethico-political principles of the respublica might entail rendering these principles hegemonic, maintaining this united community requires the more negative task of defining an outside, since it is only by having an other against which the community can define itself that it will have any coherence. Drawing on Derrida's constitutive outside, and Schmitt's conception of the political, Mouffe contends that "Political discourse attempts to create specific forms of unity among different interests by relating them to a common project and by establishing a frontier to define the forces to be opposed, the 'enemy.'" 31

29 Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 151.
30 Mouffe, On the Political, 34.
31 Ibid., 50. Emphasis added.
Agonistic pluralism, therefore, must attempt to create unity on its principles by establishing a frontier between those who are members of the community and those who are outside it – between friends and enemies. Mouffe, therefore, like Schmitt and Hobbes, recognises both that those outside the given liberal democratic community within which agonistic pluralism is being established must be seen as enemies (Schmitt), and that those within the borders of the community who reject the values of the respublica must be seen as enemies too (Hobbes). “The category of the ‘enemy’ does not disappear but it is displaced [in her agonistic vision]; it remains pertinent with respect to those who do not accept the democratic ‘rules of the game’ and thereby exclude themselves from the political community.”

This will also be returned to in more detail shortly, but the point is that those who reject the respublica exclude themselves from engaging through the legitimate political channels of the agon. For if they do not accept the basic liberal democratic principles of liberty and equality – the legitimacy of elections, the freedom of other individuals, the need to engage with others without using physical violence or intimidation, and so forth – they must not be given channels through which they can undermine the institutions and practices of democracy:

A democratic society requires the allegiance of its citizens to a set of shared ethico-political principles, usually spelled out in a constitution and embodied in a legal framework and it cannot allow the coexistence of conflicting principles of legitimacy in its midst.

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32 Ibid., 4.
33 Ibid., 122.
Where the frontier lies – what counts as allegiance or rejection of these principles, and who therefore counts as liberal democratic and non-liberal democratic – is, of course, a difficult question. Some might argue that the Front National, political campaigners for the Southern Baptist Church, the Socialist Worker Party, or the Islamic Brotherhood are all non-liberal democratic because they seek to dramatically alter the structure of liberal democracy. Others might claim that despite seeking radical change they nevertheless subscribe to the basic principles of liberal democracy. These questions are ultimately irresolvable. What is in line with and what is radically different from principles of liberty and equality depends on how these principles are interpreted, and is thus largely contextual. Hence who is to be excluded is not decided a priori by Mouffe as it is by Rawls. Rather, for Mouffe, “the frontier between legitimate and illegitimate [ways of engaging] is always a political decision, and . . . should therefore always remain open to contestation.”

Despite this, Mouffe is certain that the distinction must be made: unless non-liberal democrats are excluded from agonistic contest and a constitutive outside is established, the allegiance to the respublica necessary for agonistic contest would crumble.

**Difference, Radical Difference and Violence in Agonistic Pluralism**

Agonistic pluralism, then, provides contestatory institutions through which differences within the liberal order can be brought to the fore; but, because the subjects engaged in such contest accept the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy, these differences are played out democratically, in an agonistic rather than antagonistic manner. Agonistic

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pluralism thus enables "democratic politics to transform antagonism into agonism."\(^{35}\) Shortly we will see in what sense that this can be described as a radicalisation of liberal democracy. First, though, we must distinguish between two levels of difference in Mouffe's vision that have become clear in the preceding analysis. Firstly, there are differences between subjects: different desires, passions, interests, concerns, identities, ways of living, and so forth. These differences pervade society but are often suppressed by liberalism. To ensure that they do not explode and become antagonistic these differences must be sublimated, channeled into agonistic contests through which they can be played out and their dangerous potential dissipated. These, however, are differences that exist within the bounds of the respublica – within a set of shared rules that allow "for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty."\(^{36}\) The subjects have accepted the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy and, therefore, although they might conflict and differ in certain ways they are nevertheless committed to a shared symbolic space and are willing to engage respectfully, agonistically, with one another. They are, in Hobbes’s terms, a ‘people’: they are "characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the population a single identity: ‘the people’ is one."\(^{37}\) These kinds of differences can flourish.

However, Mouffe is also clear that there are other kinds of differences that cannot flourish – radically different, divergent desires, discourses and subjects that contradict and challenge the ethico-political values of the respublica which need to be treated

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{36}\) Mouffe, The Return of the Political, 69-70.

violently if the ethico-political bond is to be established and maintained. Specifically, she is explicit about the ineradicability of, and need for violence toward, radical differences in two ways. Firstly, as we have seen, she suggests that in order to establish the respublica, in order to ensure that subjects identify with its rules and principles, it must become hegemonic. This is an unavoidably violent process in which the contrary desires and discourses circulating through subjects within society are silenced, suppressed, assimilated. "Things," Mouffe recognises, "could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities." She is thus clear that hegemonic articulations function in much the same way as symbolic violence: by becoming established as 'true' amongst the population and silencing alternative ideas. A project aimed at establishing the hegemony of the ethico-political values of liberal democracy needed for agonistic pluralism is thus an inherently violent project that needs to assimilate everybody within the liberal order, to turn the population into 'democratic subjects.'

Secondly, Mouffe also recognises that even once the ethico-political values have been established there will still be subjects – both inside and outside the liberal order – with other desires and discourses that contradict or challenge the respublica. These subjects are not just different from other subjects but are different from the liberal democratic order – they are radically different. Mouffe is clear that if, once the hegemony of the ethico-political bond has been established, it is to be maintained then these subjects cannot be engaged with, that they have to be excluded from agonistic contest – these kinds of differences simply cannot be allowed to flourish.

38 Mouffe, On the Political, 18.
To avoid any confusion, I should specify that, contrary to some postmodern thinkers who envisage a pluralism without any frontiers, I do not believe that a democratic pluralist politics should consider as legitimate all the demands formulated in a given society. The pluralism that I advocate requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded. A democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries. The agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all exclusions. 39

Indeed, as seen, she goes further, claiming that these radically different subjects who reject liberal democratic values are the constitutive outside, the 'enemy' – they 'do not accept the democratic 'rules of the game' and . . . thereby exclude themselves from the political community.'

Although agonistic pluralism does not differ greatly from mainstream liberalism in this respect, since both exclude those who have radically different values and practices that contradict the core principles of liberal democracy, for Mouffe "it is very important to recognise those forms of exclusion for what they are and the violence that they signify, instead of concealing them." 40 Hence she comments that what differentiates her exclusion of non-liberal democrats from that proposed by other liberals is the degree of honesty about the reason for those exclusions:

39 Mouffe, *Ibid.*, 120. By 'some postmodern thinkers' it is fair to assume that Mouffe is referring to other agonists such as Honig and Connolly of whose politics Mouffe is (to some extent mistakenly) critical for being too inclusive and thus denying the ineradicability of antagonism and conflict.

My position here can appear similar to that of a liberal theorist like John Rawls, whose distinction between 'simple' and 'reasonable' pluralism is also an attempt to draw a line between legitimate and illegitimate demands. However, it differs significantly from Rawls's: he pretends that such a discrimination is grounded in rationality and morality, while I claim that the drawing of the frontier between the legitimate and the illegitimate is always a political decision.41

The precise distinction between those subjects who are different but can be tolerated and those who are radically different and therefore cannot be tolerated cannot be defined in advance, as we have seen. But nevertheless, Mouffe is clear: amongst those who are perceived as accepting the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy differences can flourish, and the agonistic institutions thus provide mechanisms that ensure they are played out agonistically; but those who are seen not just as different, but as radically different, who are thought to reject the liberal democratic principles, have to be excluded from contest and categorised as enemies. This exclusion is the condition for maintaining the agonistic liberal order.

The Radicalisation of Liberal Democracy

Shortly we will see that maintaining the agon is actually likely to require far more violence than Mouffe admits, violence which impacts upon everybody, not just a minority of anti-liberal democratic subjects. First, though, it is important to consider the sense in which her vision radicalises liberal democracy since this gives us a better understanding of the relation between agonistic pluralism and liberal democracy. There appear to be two different ways in which Mouffe envisions agonistic pluralism as a

41 Ibid., 121.
radicalisation: as a *democratic radicalisation* of liberal democracy, which can be seen especially in Mouffe’s earlier work, and as an *ontological radicalisation*, evident in her later work.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and *The Return of the Political* Mouffe views agonistic pluralism as a ‘radical and plural democracy’ in which a ‘democratic revolution’ is extended into numerous areas of social life, thus providing multiple channels through which divergent subjects can contest the violence of liberalism. In advocating a democratic ‘revolution’ Laclau and Mouffe are not using that term in the sense typically employed by the left.

> [L]iberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed in order to create, through revolution, a completely new society. . . This is why our project of ‘radical and plural democracy’ was conceived as a new stage in the deepening of the ‘democratic revolution,’ as the extension of the democratic struggles for equality and liberty to a wider range of social relations.⁴²

Indeed, they stress that that “The task of the left . . . cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy.”⁴³

Laclau and Mouffe explore this idea of a democratic revolution that transforms liberal democracy into a radical and plural democracy in the final chapter of *Hegemony*. Following Claude Lefort they contend that since the French Revolution a democratic

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⁴³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 176.
revolution has been underway. The French revolution was an important political rupture because prior to this point "power was embodied in the person of the prince." The French revolution, however, inaugurates the emergence of democratic politics in which the "locus of power becomes an empty place . . . it cannot be occupied – it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it." Moreover, the French revolution also ushered in a new imaginary, a new democratic way of seeing the world, based around the values of liberty and equality. "Here lay the profound subversive power of the democratic discourse," for although the values of liberty and equality were applied rather restrictively at the end of the 18th Century, it is their introduction at this time which ultimately "would allow the spread of equality and liberty into increasingly wider domains and therefore act as a fermenting agent upon the different forms of struggle against subordination."  

Laclau and Mouffe note that this democratic revolution has erupted at a number of periods since the French revolution. However, most importantly they contend that since the 1960s the democratic revolution has deepened considerably, with the emergence of 'new social movements,' an "unsatisfactory term [which] groups together a series of highly diverse struggles: urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of sexual minorities." What these diverse struggles have in common, for Laclau and Mouffe, is that they deepen the democratic revolution, spreading equality and liberty to increasingly wider domains by contesting domination, oppression and inequality as they emerge in relation to the family, to the environment, to

44 Lefort, Democracy and Political Theory, 17.
45 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony, 155.
race, and so forth — domains until recently untouched by the principles of liberty and equality. They are bringing about "the displacement into new areas of social life of the egalitarian imaginary constituted around the liberal-democratic discourse."\(^{46}\)

Laclau and Mouffe's contention is that "the alternative of the left should consist of locating itself fully in the democratic revolution" so as to extend it further.\(^{47}\) On the one hand, the Left ought to undertake a hegemonic project through which they unite the various struggles of new social movements, thus "constructing a 'we,' a chain of equivalence among their demands." This "should lead to a common recognition among different groups struggling for an extension and radicalization of democracy that they have a common concern."\(^{48}\) Broad-based Left coalitions such as *Respect* in the UK have arguably begun to do this: constructing a chain of equivalence between the demands of socialist, communist, anti-war and Islamic struggles. They thus establish more than a coalition of interests; they alter the struggles themselves, and bring them together.

On the other hand, though, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the Left ought to attempt to establish this hegemony because doing so will make it possible to extend the democratic revolution even further into social life. For as the hegemonic project progresses, more and more subjects will come to accept the importance of previously apolitical areas of life being guided by the rules of liberty and equality. This will not only mean that the principles will become more widespread but, in addition, there will gradually emerge new democratic institutions and practices within those areas. As such, divergent subjects

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 159, 165.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 176.
\(^{48}\) Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 70.
who experience violence in areas that liberal democracy does not politicise will have channels through which they can resist. They will not have to attempt to contest this violence outside democratic channels or through macropolitical institutions of the state but, rather, will have local institutions and channels that they can use, thus contesting violence at the level of family, the neighbourhood, the workplace, or wherever else it emerges. Of course,

The spaces constitutive of the different social relations may vary enormously, according to whether the relations involved are those of production, of citizenship, of neighbourhood, of couples, and so on. The forms of democracy should therefore also be plural, inasmuch as they have to be adapted to the social spaces in question.49

But the “multiplication of political spaces and the prevention of the concentration of power in one point” will provide radically different subjects with a variety of channels, usually denied in liberal democratic societies, through which they can contest the violence they experience.50 In this sense, then, agonistic pluralism provides a multiplicity of democratic channels through which differences and antagonisms can be played out, effectively turning liberal societies into much more radical, participatory orders than they are typically envisioned.

Whilst in her early work Mouffe conceptualised agonistic pluralism as a democratic radicalisation of liberal democracy – extending participatory, contestatory democracy to new spheres of liberal society – in her later work, to some extent in *The Democratic*

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49 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 185.
Paradox, but most significantly in *Deliberative Democracy and Agonistic Pluralism* and *On the Political*, Mouffe sees agonistic pluralism more as a 'redescription' than an extension of liberal democracy.\(^{51}\) This vision of agonistic pluralism stems from her contention, which we saw in Chapter 4, that the problem with the liberal democratic order as it is forwarded by those such as Rawls, is that it fails to acknowledge the antagonisms on which the order is reliant – that it fails to acknowledge that divergent subjects must be excluded for liberalism to function. Agonistic pluralism, she argues, must be seen as a reflexive version of liberal democracy which admits that this antagonism is an ineradicable feature of liberal democracy. ""Agonistic pluralism' as defined here is an attempt to operate what Richard Rorty would call a 'redescription' of the basic self-understanding of the liberal democratic regime, one which stresses the importance of acknowledging its conflictual dimension."\(^{52}\)

This means that agonistic pluralism redescribes the ontological foundations of liberal democracy. Mouffe contends that liberal democracy should no longer be conceptualised, by either theorists or citizens, as an order grounded in rationality, morality or human nature. Rather, under agonistic pluralism, liberal democracy is recognised by theorists and citizens as a 'political' project that has been established only because it has been successfully articulated, achieved hegemony and thus silenced counter-hegemonic projects and subjects that differ. Firstly, then, Mouffe’s ontological redescription of

\(^{51}\) Things are actually more complex than this: we cannot neatly distinguish between radical and plural democracy in her early work and a redescription in her later work since even in her latest monograph Mouffe continues occasionally to equate radical and plural democracy with her vision of agonistic pluralism (see, for example, Mouffe, *On the Political*, 52-3). However, despite this, we can nevertheless say that the stress in her early work is exclusively on radical and plural democracy not on redescription, whereas in her later work Mouffe puts emphasis on agonistic pluralism as a redescription of liberal democracy, not as a democratic radicalisation of it.

\(^{52}\) Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, 14, n.32.
liberal democracy entails greater reflexivity on the part of liberal democratic citizens about the violent 'origins' of the liberal order. They must recognise that

Democracy is not based on or guided by a certain positive, foundational, normative principle. On the contrary, democracy is based on the recognition of the fact that no such principle can claim to be truly universal, on the fact that no symbolic social construct can ever claim to master the impossible real. Democracy entails the acceptance of antagonism, in other words, the recognition of the fact that the social will always be structured around a real impossibility which cannot be sutured. Instead of attempting this impossible suture of the social entailed in every utopian or quasi-utopian discourse, democracy envisages a social field which is unified by the recognition of its own constitutive impossibility.  

Secondly, Mouffe contends that accompanying this awareness of the political nature of the liberal democratic order, there ought to be a more adversarial form of democratic politics. Because the liberal order is founded on exclusion it is critical not only that democratic citizens acknowledge this, but also that those who are radically different have democratic channels through which they can engage in contest; otherwise they may well resist the order in undemocratic or physically violent ways. However, unlike her earlier work, where Mouffe emphasises a multiplicity of channels for participation and contest, in her later work she emphasises the need for adversarial party politics. One interesting way in which she makes this point is in relation to the way in which existing liberal democratic regimes have fostered the success of extreme right parties. Her contention is that because the traditional left/right division has disappeared from party politics in European liberal democracies, because political parties have converged

ideologically, there is no outlet to express discontent, resistance or injustice other than voting for the extreme right: "the belief in the end of an adversarial form of politics and the overcoming of the left/right divide, instead of facilitating the establishment of a pacified society, has created the terrain for the right wing populist movements."\textsuperscript{54} Mouffe therefore suggests "that the solution lies in fostering the agonistic character of politics through the revitalization of the left/right distinction." This does not mean a "return to their traditional content, as if the meaning of those terms had been fixed once and for all." Rather, the left/right division matters because it ensures that outlets are always available for antagonisms. "The very content of left and right will vary, but the dividing line should remain because its disappearance would indicate that social division is denied and that an ensemble of voices has been silenced." She thus follows Niklas Luhmann in suggesting that "modern democracy calls for a 'splitting of the summit,' a clear divide between the government and opposition, and this supposes that clearly differentiated policies are on offer, giving the possibility for citizens to decide between different ways of organizing society."\textsuperscript{55}

Thus, agonistic pluralism not only requires a shift in the way in which citizens understand the ontological foundations of the liberal democratic order, but it also requires a more adversarial form of party politics, in which left and right, government and opposition, oppose one another with clear and distinct policies, thus providing outlets for antagonisms and differences. It allows "for political forms of identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions and the possibility of choosing


between real alternatives." It is obvious why Mouffe’s earlier understanding of agonistic pluralism as a radical and plural democracy is a radicalisation of liberalism: it entails injecting a multiplicity of channels into the liberal order and thus extending the principles of liberty and equality further and further into the lives of liberal subjects so as to enable them to contest violence and make spaces for difference. However, it is harder to see why Mouffe’s later work is a radicalisation, for it accepts most of the features of liberal democracy rather uncritically. Indeed, Mouffe herself notes that the conception of agonistic pluralism forwarded in On the Political ‘can here appear similar to that of a liberal theorist like John Rawls.’ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Andrew Robinson has argued that Mouffe’s recent work, precisely because it simply reformulates liberal democratic politics, ‘is a rather meek effort from someone claiming to be offering something radically different from mainstream liberal theory.’

However, whilst Robinson certainly has a point – Mouffe’s later vision is an ontological redescriptions of liberal democracy with an adversarial twist far removed from the radical and plural democracy of her earlier work – Žižek indicates a less obvious way in which Mouffe’s later theory can be considered radical: as ontologically radical. For Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe’s democratic vision is radical because it recognises its own impossibility: because it recognises that the liberal democratic order can never be complete, but will always be founded on some kind of violence. Thus, according to Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe.

56 Mouffe, ‘For an Agonistic Public Sphere,’ 126.
emphasize that we must not be ‘radical’ in the sense of aiming at a radical solution: we always live in an interspace and in borrowed time; every solution is provisional and temporary, a kind of postponing of a fundamental impossibility. The term ‘radical democracy’ is thus to be taken somehow paradoxically: it is precisely not ‘radical’ in the sense of pure, true democracy; its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by taking into account its own radical impossibility. 58

Žižek’s analysis is of Mouffe’s work with Laclau, and in this respect he ignores the fact that their vision of a radical and plural democracy is also democratically radical since they argue that if antagonisms are to be played out a democratic revolution is needed. But Žižek’s analysis is of significance when we turn to Mouffe’s later work, where agonistic pluralism is a ‘redescription’ of liberal democracy. For Žižek indicates that agonistic pluralism is a radicalisation of liberal democracy because it seeks to acknowledge and expose the ontological lack upon which it is based, the impossibility of it ever being fully established. Indeed, it is a radicalisation because it demands that subjects acknowledge the impossibility of a final, fully inclusive order, of an order not founded on the violent exclusion of those who have radically different ideas. This might not require a major overhaul of liberal democratic institutions, as is the case with Mouffe’s previous understanding of agonistic pluralism, but it does require a radical overhaul of the way in which subjects perceive liberal democratic politics.

2 Evaluating Agonistic Pluralism

Mouffe offers a vision of liberal democracy radicalised by agonistic contest between subjects sharing ethico-political principles, a vision in which ineradicable differences and conflicts are acknowledged and in which many are tamed and able to flourish through agonistic contest. However, whilst Mouffe might provide a convincing account of how differences between subjects can be played out agonistically rather than antagonistically, she ignores the full extent of violence toward the radically different on which her vision relies. As we have seen, she acknowledges the violence necessary for agonistic pluralism at two points: in order to establish the hegemony of agonistic pluralism the population will need to be assimilated into the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy and their divergent desires and discourses suppressed; and, subsequent to this, in order to maintain the ethico-political bond a minority of radically different subjects who challenge it will have to be excluded. Arguably, though, Mouffe’s apparent recognition of the violence toward radical difference needed to establish and maintain the liberal democratic respublica actually obscures the even more extensive violence toward radical difference on which the maintenance of the respublica relies. For, when we analyse Mouffe’s suggestion that maintaining the ethico-political bond requires excluding from contest those radically different subjects who challenge it, it becomes clear that she underestimates the number of subjects who will at times differ radically from the ethico-political bond and, therefore, the number of subjects who will have to be treated violently to maintain it.
Whither the Resistance?

We have seen in some detail that Mouffle envisions the radically different, non-liberal democrats within the liberal order being excluded from agonistic contest. At no point, however, does she acknowledge that these radically different subjects who are excluded from legitimate political contest might fail to comply with their exclusion. Her assumption appears to be that non-liberal democrats, because they cannot engage in debate via the legitimate agonistic channels, will remain silent. But the Lacanian dictum, that 'what is foreclosed from the symbolic returns in the Real' surely applies here: what is excluded from legitimate agonistic contest must return antagonistically. For the radically different subject who rejects the ethico-political values of liberal democracy is unlikely to use democratic, agonistic channels, even if she is not excluded from the agon. The very reason why they are excluded from the political contest is precisely because they refuse to abide by the liberal democratic rules of the respublica. As such, when this radically different subject is formally excluded from the agon for failing to accept the rules of the game, there is no reason why they would remain silent simply because the legitimate democratic channels are unavailable to them. Instead, they are likely to seek to be heard outside of the legitimate political arena, using non-democratic methods to be heard of various kinds. Consider the exclusion from the legitimate political arena of neo-Nazi groups such as Combat 18 in the UK. They are excluded from legitimate political contest because they do not endorse the democratic rules of the game, because they are radically different, and instead use physical violence and intimidation to be heard. And because of this, their exclusion from the legitimate political arena does not silence them; they continue to engage in non-democratic forms of action undeterred.
It is strange that Mouffe fails to address this issue. Mouffe is attuned to the idea, also found in Hobbes and Nietzsche, that instincts and passions cannot be ignored because they will always emerge somewhere else if they suppressed; indeed, she is attuned to the way in which subjects who are excluded from the legitimate political arena will adopt alternative channels to be heard. The whole rationale for her agonistic pluralism is exactly this: that ‘antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist. Otherwise dissent tends to take violent forms.’

One possible reason why Mouffe fails to address this issue is, quite simply, that it complicates her vision significantly. Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism is intended to ensure that differences have democratic outlets. However, whilst this is an effective strategy with respect to subjects who identify with the ethico-political bond since they can then engage in contest within the parameters of the respublica, it is less effective with those who are not just different but radically different, who reject the bond, since they will also reject the agonistic channels through which Mouffe hopes those that they will engage in contest. As such, if she admits the presence of resistant non-liberal democrats, she must admit that within agonistic pluralism will be subjects engaged in political communication and action of a non-democratic nature, perhaps entailing physical violence, intimidation, and such like. Moreover, if this is the case then Mouffe must also consider how to respond to this, how to control or silence these resistant minorities. This will be discussed in more detail shortly, but such a response might require stringent acts of control, violence and policing. There are thus complicated issues that arise when one
acknowledges the presence of radical differences, of non-democratic resistance within the democratic community – issues that significantly detract from Mouffe’s vision of an agonistically charged liberalism in which differences are channeled into democratic institutions and practices. It is not surprising that she does not discuss the problem.

The Multiple Self

However, Mouffe might not avoid the discussion of non-democratic resistance for simply pragmatic reasons. She might also avoid it because she does not see such resistance as a particularly wide-spread phenomenon. This is certainly the impression that Mouffe gives in her work, since she rarely discusses any of the kinds of groups, subjects or demands that might be excluded from agonistic contest in order to maintain the agon. From the perspectives of poststructural and psychoanalytic radical difference, though, Mouffe underestimates the level of resistance likely to exist. From these perspectives, non-liberal democratic resistance is likely to be a complex, messy and wide-spread phenomenon that cannot be overlooked because radical differences are everywhere. For Deleuze, for example, there is no unitary, centred subject. Rather, the subject is pervaded by unruly singularities, by a swarm of often only partially actualised differences, that mean the subject is composed of a multiplicity of diverse and often contradictory desires, characteristics and beliefs which cannot all be contained within one identity. Similarly, from the perspective of Lacanian radical difference the subject’s

59 The only specific example of an exclusion that Mouffe gives is in terms of multiculturalism, about which she contends briefly that: “A democratic society requires the allegiance of its citizens to a set of shared ethico-political principles, usually spelled out in a constitution and embodied in a legal framework and it cannot allow the coexistence of conflicting principles of legitimacy in its midst. To believe that, in the name of pluralism, some category of immigrants should be granted an exception is, I submit, a mistake.” Mouffe, On the Political, 122-3.
identification with the order always fails to capture the multiplicity of singular, radically
different drives and desires that emerge as a consequence of the Real.

On these readings, therefore, it is not necessarily subjects *qua* individual agents that are
radically different from, that act contrary to, the ethico-political principles of the
*respublica* but, rather, certain unruly characteristics or desires of subjects that do so: one
individual’s desire to silence their adversary, another subject’s belief that their ideas are
the only way for people to live, a person’s sense that they can only be heard if violent
methods are adopted, another’s inability to look beyond their direct material interest,
somebody’s desire for a strong form of authority, and so on. The point is that if the non-
liberal democrat is not the occasional subject or group within the liberal order but the
fugitive desire or belief within the subject, this means that the extent of the non-liberal
democratic elements within the democratic community will be much larger than Mouffe
appreciates. Indeed, if the radical difference, the non-liberal democratic element within
the *respublica*, is the fugitive desire or belief that contradicts the ethico-political bond
then, to differing degrees, there may be non-liberal democratic elements within every
subject.

Interestingly, Mouffe does comment on this view of the subject and its implications for
the ethico-political principles, but in a quite different way. She contends that

> the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an
> adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and
> equality should apply. It is only when we discard the view of the subject as an agent both
rational and transparent to itself, and discard as well the supposed unity and homogeneity of the ensemble of its positions, that we are in a position to theorize the multiplicity of relations of subordination. A single individual can be the bearer of this multiplicity and be dominant in one relation while subordinated in another.  

What she overlooks, however, is that, by this same logic, the subject might have certain desires and characteristics that conform to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy, but have other desires that diverge from it, that subvert it, that rebel against it, that are radically different. This matters, however, because if non-liberal democratic desires are within each subject then this not only means that non-liberal democrats are much more widespread than Mouffe suggests, but it also has implications for the violence needed to maintain the ethico-political bond.

**Micropolitical Resistance**

Firstly, it means that even once the ethico-political bond has become hegemonic it still might be resisted, but not simply by groups and individuals intentionally opposing liberal democratic practices, but unintentionally, on a more day-to-day basis, by the innumerable acts, desires, feelings and beliefs of diverse subjects that are radically different from the ethico-political bond. This is a subtler, ‘micropolitical’ kind of resistance that takes place at the level of “postures attitudes, perceptions, expectations” and that, consequently, is much more difficult to perceive.  

This is the kind of resistance caused by ‘lines of flight,’ by spontaneous and uncontrollable interconnections, energies and singularities within the subject that cannot be contained,

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60 Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 76-7.
that flee all over the place. An example, already referred to in Chapter 1, is discussed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They suggest that following the Second World War and the success of fascism the West was so focused upon securing liberal democracy at the level of the state, with parties, elections, and so on, that they missed the undemocratic, intolerant, illiberal desires within citizens that undermine the macro-level functioning of democratic institutions. But, for Deleuze and Guattari, “What makes fascism so dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power.” Hence they note that “It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even to see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective.”62 Their point is that focusing on the macropolitical structures overlooks the resistant, radically different, micropolitical attitudes, urges, desires, emotions and affections that make fascism possible and constantly undermines liberal democracy. Fascism, as Foucault says, is “in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour.”63

The same applies with the ethico-political bond. For although Mouffe is aware that individuals must identify with the principles, that they must build them into their identity, what she ignores is the way in which the individual is a messy bundle of diverse desires, and as such that they may regularly have desires, urges and feelings that ‘flee all over the place,’ thus contradicting and resisting the *respublica*. And as such, radical differences are likely to constantly emerge in otherwise obedient subjects. Certainly, this is not the same kind of resistance as non-liberal democrats explicitly challenging the

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liberal democrat order; it is unintentional micropolitical resistance, in the form of recalcitrant desires that subvert, challenge or clash with the rules of the *respublica*. But, nevertheless, these are radical differences – and they can have catastrophic effects. As Scott has demonstrated, everyday, micropolitical forms of resistance which are ‘hidden’ from the authorities can have a tremendous impact upon the stability of an order. As he puts it in relation to ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’ such as “foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth,” peasant resistance

is a social movement with no formal organization, no formal leaders, no manifestos, no dues, no name, and no banner. [But] multiplied many thousand fold, such petty acts of resistance by peasants may in the end make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would be superiors. Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own.\textsuperscript{64}

Although subjects’ non-liberal democratic, dogmatic and intolerant desires at the micropolitical level may not cause the ethico-political bond to collapse immediately – although they certainly do not constitute anything like a “shattering ethico-political

\textsuperscript{64} James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. London: Yale University Press, 1985: 29, 35-6. Another way of conceptualizing this kind of resistance is through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome,’ a non-hierarchical, unorganised structure in which various singularities join together in diverse ways with often surprising effects. We will consider this in detail in Chapter 6 as Connolly uses the rhizome in his political theory. However, it is interesting to note that Ricardo Blaug uses the rhizome, arguing in a manner similar to Scott, that rhizomatic forms of (dis)organisation can be much more effective than hierarchical forms of organisation, using the Barbarians’ victories against the Romans as an example. See: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-28; Ricardo Blaug, ‘The Tyranny of the Visible: problems in the Evaluation of Anti-Institutional Radicalism,’ *Organization* 6, no.1: 33-56.
It is possible that, multiplied many thousand fold, these fugitive desires and practices might cause the hegemony of the ethico-political bond on which agonistic contest is reliant to slowly unravel.

**Exclusion, Surveillance and Normalisation**

It is because subversive, radically different, micropolitical desires may constantly, slowly, undermine the ethico-political bond that more extensive assimilatory and exclusionary violence will be needed to maintain the *respublica* than Mouffe recognises. For when we see that radically different desires will emerge within liberal democratic subjects it becomes clear that once the *respublica* has become hegemonic there is not a majority of subjects who conform to the *respublica* and a minority of non-liberal democrats who have excluded themselves by rejecting it, as Mouffe claims. Now there are non-democratic, radically different, elements within everybody: the fugitive non-democratic desires, characteristics and practices of subjects who, at other times and in other situations, do identify with the *respublica* – fleeting undemocratic, intolerant or fascistic desires, rumblings of the Real, that emerge in us all.

In the first place, therefore, this makes the exclusion of non-liberal democrats from agonistic contest a more widespread and complex process than Mouffe acknowledges. Schmitt suggests that the "high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy," and Mouffe is clearly attempting to attain such clarity, explicitly recognising as 'enemies' those minorities

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who oppose the principles of the *respublica* and excluding them from contest. But if fugitive, non-liberal democratic desires are in us all then who exactly the enemy is will be far less clear: potentially the entire population could, at different times, be an enemy of the *respublica*. Excluding from agonistic contest those who challenge and threaten the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy, therefore, will be messy and complicated, frontiers will be fuzzy, and undoubtedly a far greater number of subjects will have to be excluded than Mouffe acknowledges. This will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 6 in the analysis of Connolly, as his approach to exclusions raises the same problem. But the point is that if radically different, illiberal, intolerant desires are within all subjects then the number of subjects that may needed to be excluded from agonistic contest might be far higher than Mouffe appreciates.

There is, however, a second form of violence specific to Mouffe’s vision which she fails to recognise. For if radically different, non-liberal democratic desires are within all subjects, even liberal democratic subjects who appear to identify with the *respublica*, then in order to ensure that the *respublica* is perpetuated, to ensure that subjects regularly conform to the rules that create the common bond and the framework of the democratic community, a great deal of surveillance and normalisation might be required. It will not simply be a question of monitoring and identifying individual subjects or groups that reject the *respublica* so as to ensure that they are isolated and excluded from agonistic contest, even if such anti-liberal democrats could be so easily and clearly distinguished. Because radically different desires that threaten the *respublica* might

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emerge in diverse subjects, often in otherwise committed liberal democratic subjects, it will be necessary to monitor and assess far more subjects than Mouffe suggests. Indeed, because radical differences might emerge in subjects throughout the liberal democratic community, and because they might emerge at different time and in different ways, such monitoring will entail constant surveillance and policing of the population so as to ensure that fugitive desires which threaten the order, which must be excluded from agonistic contest, can be immediately identified.

Indeed, perhaps agonistic pluralism will have to adopt a more preemptive approach so as to ensure that, even after the hegemony of the respublica is established, the multiplicity of divergent and troubling desires within the population remain silent. A comparison with Foucault’s description of normalising institutions:

The aim of all these institutions—factories, schools, psychiatric hospitals, hospitals, prisons—is not to exclude but, rather, to attach individuals. The factory doesn’t exclude individuals: it attaches them to a production apparatus. The school doesn’t exclude individuals, even in confining them: it fastens them to an apparatus of knowledge transmission... The same is true of the reformatory or the prison: even if the effects of these institutions are the individual’s exclusion, their primary aim is to insert individuals into an apparatus of normalization of people. The factory, the school, the prison, or the hospitals have the object of binding the individual to a process of production, training, or correction.67

Foucault thus recognises that normalising institutions ensure that subjects do not need to be excluded, they shape and mould subjects so as to attach them to the hegemonic order.

And this is precisely what Mouffe requires. For, even if the respublica of agonistic pluralism has become hegemonic it is not self-sustaining. If it is to be maintained, therefore, the divergent desires and passions of a multitude of subjects need to be domesticated and suppressed so that these subjects continue to be attached to and follow the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy. Hence Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism will not only need to constantly monitor the population to identify the multiplicity of deviations that might threaten the order but will also need to use the kinds of institutions and techniques that Foucault discusses ‘not to exclude but, rather, to attach individuals.’

The point is, then, that whilst Mouffe wants to establish the hegemony of the respublica ‘by developing and multiplying in as many social relations as possible the discourses, the practices,’ the ‘language games,’ that produce democratic ‘subject positions,’ and she wants to maintain it by excluding from contest those radically different, anti-liberal democratic subjects, she may have to admit that, because divergent desires flow through all subjects, maintaining the hegemony of the respublica will require that many more subjects are excluded from agonistic contest than she admits and that techniques for monitoring and normalising the population are developed and multiplied so as to ensure that there are not too many radical deviations from the rules. In this sense, then, although Mouffe stresses vibrant agonistic contest within a shared framework, when one takes into account radical differences within the self the importance of exclusion, surveillance and normalisation to the reproduction of the respublica becomes equally prominent.
Conclusion

For Mouffe, in sum, liberalism too frequently ignores the differences within it, meaning that they may ultimately emerge as antagonisms that destroy the liberal order. As such, she advocates the introduction of agonistic pluralism – of flourishing contest between differences within the bounds of the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy – so as to enable these differences to make themselves heard and be played out agonistically. For Mouffe, this is the only way of safeguarding liberal democracy. A detailed analysis of Mouffe’s theory, however, demonstrates that although she recognises that the hegemony of the ethico-political bond will be necessary and that some exclusions will be required to maintain it, she overlooks the even greater amount of violence toward divergent desires and subjects that will be needed to maintain subjects who are committed to and identify with the ethico-political bond because radical differences pervade not just the liberal order but also liberal subjects. Thus, although Mouffe claims that agonistic pluralism will provide a radicalised liberalism in which differences can be played out, she presents an illusion behind which far more differences are treated as radically different and in need of exclusion, surveillance and normalisation than first appears.
Chapter 6 A ‘Radically Pluralised Liberalism’: Connolly’s Ethical Agonism

Introduction

We saw in the previous chapter that hidden within Mouffe’s attempt to provide political channels through which differences can be articulated is a level of violence toward radical difference that she underestimates. In this chapter, therefore, we turn to the work of William Connolly to evaluate the effectiveness of his vision of agonistic liberalism. Like Mouffe, Connolly acknowledges that radical differences are inescapable features of liberal orders. However, whereas Mouffe’s emphasis is on providing democratic outlets for these differences so as to ensure that they do not threaten the liberal order, Connolly’s focus is on ensuring that those who are normalised by liberalism’s implicit privileging of the rational individual are able to contest and avoid this violence. As we will see in detail, he contends that if differences between subjects in liberal societies are conceptualised ‘rhizomatically’ rather than hierarchically, if these differences are negotiated politically not privatised, and if subjects cultivate a ‘pluralist ethos’ — a radicalised, pluralised version of liberal tolerance — when they engage publicly with others, then differences will flourish. Those who reject the pluralist ethos, he contends, might have to be excluded from contest, but most subjects will voluntarily cultivate the ethos, thus avoiding the extensive assimilatory violence that pervades Mouffe’s vision. It is, indeed, because of his reliance on the voluntary cultivation of an ethos that Connolly’s vision is termed here ‘ethical agonism,’ as will become clear.
The chapter proceeds in two stages. First it outlines Connolly’s ethical agonism, explaining how it reworks liberalism so as to enable differences to flourish. Second, it demonstrates that Connolly’s ethical agon is more violent toward difference than he acknowledges. It treats a large number of subjects as radically different and in need of exclusion from political contest and puts a normalising pressure on subjects to cultivate the pluralist ethos whilst claiming that they can cultivate it voluntarily.

1 Connolly’s Ethical Agonism

We must note, to begin, that Connolly is particularly critical of liberalism. Certainly, as has been discussed already, Connolly sees all political orders as ambiguous – as both a necessary condition for human being and a restriction on the possible forms of subjectivity:

The human is the incomplete animal, completed only within the social frame. But since humans were not designed to fit neatly into any social form, and since no ideal form has been predesigned to mesh with every drive and stirring within the self, every particular form of completion subjugates even while it realizes something in us, does violence to selves even while enabling them to be.¹

Toward an ‘Alternative, Militant Liberalism’

However, the bulk of Connolly’s critique, as seen in Chapter 4, is aimed at liberal political orders for failing to recognise that liberal societies treat divergent subjects violently by normalising, controlling, policing or excluding them. The reason for this focus is that despite seeing liberalism as the hegemonic form of political order in

contemporary societies, Connolly - like Mouffe - does not contend that it ought to be
demolished or eradicated. Connolly is no revolutionary. Rather, he argues that it ought
to be reformed or 'reworked.' For Connolly, liberalism is an approach to political and
social order that, as currently configured, is violent toward divergent subjects as we have
seen, but that, if reformed appropriately, can limit much of the violence currently
experienced by divergent subjects in liberal orders. Thus, whilst Connolly's vision might
fundamentally differ from the liberalism of Rawls, it is nevertheless a liberal vision -
albeit a reworked liberalism in which there are "more space for discordance to be."^{3}

However, as we will see, Connolly's liberalism is far removed from that of classical
liberals or liberal democrats. He describes himself as "a Deleuzian with a liberal streak,"
and the Deleuzian influence is evident throughout his vision of a radically pluralised
liberalism.^{4} This will become clear shortly when his vision is outlined, but it is useful to
briefly consider the way in which Connolly defines his liberalism. He does this on a
number of occasions.^{5} One such occasion is in the essay 'Liberalism and Difference,' in
which Connolly provides the critique of liberal individualism outlined in Chapter 4. He

^{2} Indeed, Connolly, whose work is heavily influenced by Foucault, concurs with the latter's contention
that revolutionary change per se is dangerous because the newly established order can be just as dangerous
as the previous one, albeit in new ways. Hence Connolly suggests that "A political theory attuned to
discordance lodged within concordance will be possible only to the degree that the imperatives of
modem political economies are relaxed to establish more space for discordance to be, without disrupting
^{3} Ibid.
^{5} See, for example, "Fundamentalism in America," chapter 4 of *The Ethos of Pluralization* (105-33), where
Connolly argues that liberals are often 'fundamentalist,' adopting "a set of political strategies to protect"
the fundamentals of their identity "by defining every carrier of critique or destabilization as an enemy
marked by exactly those defects, weaknesses, corruptions, and naivetés you are under an absolute
imperative to eliminate" (105-6). However, despite this criticism Connolly also contends that a reformed
liberalism, what he calls a 'postfundamentalist' liberalism, could actively militate against such
fundamentalist strategies. As he puts it earlier in the book: "Liberalism, at its best, contends not only
against these tendencies in others, but also against them in itself" (xxvii). See William Connolly, *The
contends that because normalising institutions are so pervasive a more engaged, democratic, contestatory form of politics is needed. This does not require shifting to republicanism, Marxism, participatory democracy, or some other form of political order; it requires a more contestatory, democratic, liberalism.

This perspective is, of course, a liberalism, an alternative, militant liberalism both indebted to and competitive with other liberalisms and nonliberalisms contending for presence in late-modern life. It is a liberalism in its refusal to choose between revolutionary overthrow and the idealization of traditional culture, in its appreciation of the claims of individuality, in its attentiveness to rights and constitutional protections, in its extension of these concerns to forces that would expand the dialectic of discipline and reactive disaffection to new corners of life, in its skepticism about any definitive solution of the paradoxical relationship between identity and difference, in its radicalization of liberal battles against the hegemony of teleological and transcendental theories, in the ironic distance it insinuates into the identities it lives and modifies, in the ironic dimension in its politicization of difference in a world in which identity is essential to life, in its insistence on questioning fixed unities even while admiring some more than others. It is not the best liberalism that can be dreamt, only the highest regulative ideal to pursue if we are incomplete without social form in a world not predesigned to mesh smoothly with any particular formation of personal and collective identity.  

Connolly also makes it clear that he seeks reform not revolution in *Why I am not a Secularist*, where he explains what is needed in order to move toward this alternative liberalism: "We need new improvisations today, those that rework rather than eliminate".

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secular liberal practices of majority rule, minorities, progress, dissent, rights, sympathy, tolerance, and creative dissidence."

The specific kind of reworking of liberalism that Connolly suggests is the introduction of 'ethical agonism,' as it is termed here, into liberal orders. As will be seen, this is intended to rework liberalism so as to render it more democratic, both by making subjects more open to difference whilst simultaneously providing divergent subjects with channels through which they can resist the violence they experience. As was the case for Mouffe, such a democratisation is not intended to eliminate liberal violence; its aim is more modest, to provide democratic channels through which those who differ can negotiate 'more space for discordance to be.' This idea is evident even in early works such as Politics and Ambiguity, where Connolly claims that liberal orders have "uncertainties, repressed voices, exclusions, and injuries lodged within them" which must be "expressed and given some redress." However, it is in his later work, especially Identity/Difference, The Ethos of Pluralization, Why I am not a Secularist and Pluralism that Connolly really develops this agonistic, democratic reworking of liberalism. As such, in elaborating his vision of liberalism reworked by ethical agonism the focus is on these works.

The Rhizome

As we saw in Chapter 4, Connolly is critical of mainstream liberals such as Rawls for presenting a veneer of tolerance but actually treating violently those who differ from the

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model of the normal individual. It is not just that liberal tolerance implicitly allows certain forms of subjectivity and identities to be hegemonic and others to be marginal. It is also that liberal societies such as Rawls’s are normalising societies which promote the ideal of the normal liberal individual who is autonomous, rational, and so forth and as such treats all differences as “perversified diversities.”

Connolly’s response to the normalisation that pervades liberal orders is to theorise an order in which differences are not normalised, in which differences can burst forth and flourish. He does this initially by turning away from liberalism and using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’ as a way of reconceptualising society. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between ‘aborescent’ and ‘rhizomatic’ structures. The former are singular, static, final, hierarchical and discrete structures. Rhizomes, conversely, are network-like structures composed of a multiplicity of singularities, movements and lines:

the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton.

Liberalism, he suggests, has an arboreal view of society, in which some cultural ideal, such as the model liberal individual, is placed at the centre of the society and “diversity

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9 Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, 90.
10 See: Ibid., 94-7; Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 73-96.
and difference are imagined in relation to a constitutive cultural centre that is definitive.¹² A rhizomatic view of society is very different. "The image reworks the idea of a cultural center surrounded by diverse, satellite minorities." Instead,

the cultural center is pluralized along multiple dimensions. Public culture inside and outside the state is now constituted by multiple minorities, divided along more numerous lines of religion, linguistic habit, economic interest, irreligion, ethnicity, sensuality, gender performances, and moral sources of inspiration.¹³

Connolly replaces the liberal myth of a society centred on the ideal of the liberal individual with a view of society as rhizomatic, as a multitude, constituted by innumerable differences, innumerable singular identities, desires, drives, beliefs and assemblages of minorities. He does this, however, not because he is idealistic but because "the image of the nation reflects a chimera" (84). For Connolly, the idea of a centre of society is "fictive"; there is no centre but "a black hole," a "constitutive lack" (83). Connolly is not adopting a Lacanian perspective here, although the parallels are evident.¹⁴ Rather, he claims that there is a constitutive lack because beneath the arboreal structure of the liberal society is a rhizome of subjects with diverse but interconnected interests, traits, characteristics, values and desires. There is therefore no single centre but multiplicity and diversity: there is a lack of a centre. The liberal society thus suppresses a multiplicity of differences whereas the rhizome enables them to flourish.

¹² Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 89.
¹³ Ibid., 92.
¹⁴ Indeed, Connolly opposes the Lacanian approach: "Deep, comprehensive explanations" of political phenomena, "risk congealing experimental intervention in precisely those domains where historical experiments of thought and action are most needed. In this domain, I prefer the practice of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to, say, that of Friedrich Hegel and Slavoj Žižek. They [Foucault and Deleuze] offer explanations but don't try to render them complete, deep, or uncontestable." Connolly, Ibid., 89.
Connolly recognises that once society is conceptualised rhizomatically other aspects of liberalism will have to be altered too. For now that the multiplicity of differences constituting society is no longer seen as deviations from or aberrations of the normal individual, differences will burgeon. As such, although subjects will sometimes be able to live independently within the rhizome, often their interests or desires will clash with those of others on issues and concerns such as abortion, euthanasia, immigration, taxation, schooling and innumerable other questions that require public answers or responses. Indeed, Connolly recognises that contemporary life is already characterised by global communications and travel, a powerful and pervasive media, extensive interference by state and corporate institutions which, amongst other things, mean that "partisans find themselves in intensive relations of political interdependence." Once the multiplicity of differences within the rhizome has been revealed too, therefore, the liberal emphasis on the flourishing of difference within the private sphere will be impossible to maintain. There will be constant clashes, interconnections, disputes and conflicts between differences. There will be a need for ongoing contest and negotiation between subjects in the rhizome over public issues on which they differ.

In contrast to the conventional [liberal] view that the sanctity of the individual in a constitutional regime is best protected by restricting politics to its bare essentials,

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democratic agonism contends that spaces in which differences may constitute themselves as contending identities are today most effectively established by political means. In order to ensure that the different subjects engaged in these public negotiations are able to express themselves faithfully and make their concerns and arguments clear, these engagements between different subjects and minorities must, he suggests, be agonistic. In referring to these negotiations as agonistic Connolly is referring to the idea that the subjects engaged must be respectful and responsive toward those who differ as we will see in more detail shortly. However, he also means that in these negotiations the multiplicity of subjects and minorities who constitute the rhizome must argue over issues from the perspective of their own faith, ideology or ethical position. Unlike liberal visions, such as the later Rawls’s, debate is not restricted to those who have views that mesh with the key principles of liberalism or to those that can be articulated impartially or reasonably. This, as we saw through Mouffé’s critique of Rawls, severely restricts who can engage in political debate and what can be discussed. In Connolly’s agon, therefore,

participants are called upon neither to leave their metaphysical baggage at home when they participate in various publics nor to adopt an overarching faith acknowledged by all parties who strive to promote the common good. Rather, a deep plurality of religious/metaphysical perspectives is incorporated into public discourses.

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16 Connolly, Identity/Difference, xi.
17 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 185.
As we will see, Connolly does set limits as to who can engage. But nevertheless his point is that political negotiations within the rhizome must be agonistic negotiations in which “partisans bring selective dimensions of their religious, ethical, sensual, gender, and moral sensibilities into public engagements whenever the issue makes it pertinent to do so.”

Largely, Connolly suggests, this negotiation will be between established, existing minorities in society: between minorities such as the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, evangelical Christians, environmentalists, for example. The identities of these minorities will never be fixed: “subterranean forces may accumulate within them,” meaning that a constituency might have new ones within it; after all, “in a world where things are mobile at bottom, the final essence of things never arrives.” But, nevertheless, this is what he calls the ‘politics of being.’ Often, though, struggle and negotiation will be undertaken by emerging groups and movements who unsettle, disturb and alter existing political orders so as to thrust themselves into it – what Connolly (following Deleuze) calls the ‘politics of becoming.’ Connolly’s point is that, because the rhizome is fluid, there are always emerging new claims, identities, demands, injustices and political movements in a process of becoming, seeking to carve out a place in the existing political order. “The politics of becoming . . . emerges out of historically specific suffering, previously untapped energies, and emerging lines of possibility eluding the attention of dominant constituencies.”

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18 Ibid, 92.
19 Ibid, 121, 59.
20 For Deleuze, because within all identities and objects is a swarm of differences that constantly interconnect with one another in surprising ways, nothing is ever complete or final; nothing is ever ‘being,’ it is always in the process of ‘becoming.’ For a good account of this see Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 256-341.
Today, for example, it is arguable that the suicide bomber changes the established contours of international politics, as the bomber fights for a vision of civilization by means exceeding traditional revolutionary organization, national insurgency, and state military machines. On another, more promising front there is the drive to place the right of doctor-assisted suicide on the register of recognized rights. Forty years ago that claim was not even simmering as a minority report among moralists who defined themselves as defenders of the definitive list of human rights.21

"Indians, slaves, feminists, Jews, labourers, homosexuals, secularists, among others have participated in the politics of becoming in the past few centuries."22 They have been ignored, excluded, misrecognised or marginalised within the liberal order and have engaged in agonistic struggle and contest so as to force themselves into the sights of others.

Agonistic negotiations between a multiplicity of subjects with different interests, identities, desires and beliefs is important because it enables subjects to make themselves and their concerns heard, rather than forcing them to present their arguments in 'neutral' terms or remain silent as we find in Rawls. Moreover, Connolly also makes clear that public negotiations of differences of this kind ensure that the rhizomatic society is not necessarily a fragmented society.23 The rhizome creates a society composed of "complex networks of interdependence and intercommunication unfiltered

21 Connolly, Pluralism, 121-2.
22 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 99.
23 I say necessarily because Connolly recognises that although the rhizome guards against fragmentation, it is always a danger. As will be discussed shortly, it is for precisely this reason that Connolly introduces the ethical dimension of his vision.
through a definitive racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, sensual, or transcendental center.

These constituencies share overlapping commitments to each other and to a set of procedures, but this sharing now takes the form of a general ethos negotiated between constituencies honoring a variety of moral sources. This is the overlapping consensus of John Rawls reworked. Cultural density now becomes rhizomatic. Its density is made up of intersecting and interdependent minorities of numerous types and sorts.24

Thus, when negotiating certain issues subjects will find themselves at odds with some subjects and in line with others; but when negotiating alternative issues their allegiances will alter, and they will form an assemblage with those they previously opposed, and compete against those with whom they have previously coalesced. In this respect, constituencies and assemblages will have different connections and relations with one another, they will be fluid, and there will be a density to the community despite diversity. "You do not need a wide universal 'we' (a nation, a community, a singular practice of rationality, a particular monotheism). . . Numerous possibilities of intersection and collaboration between multiple, interdependent constituencies . . . suffices very nicely."25 Public negotiations do not create a 'people' in the sense of subjects united by a single identity. But neither is this a multitude. This is a multitude pervaded by interconnections.

24 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 93, 92.
25 Connolly, Ethos of Pluralization, xx.
The Need for Ethics

For Connolly, then, once we let go of the liberal image of society centred on the normal liberal individual – an image which treats differences violently – a multiplicity of differences become clear. These, however, will often come into conflict with one another; hence agonistic public negotiations are crucial. However, Connolly only sees this agonistic negotiation as a first step toward the flourishing of differences. For many minorities – both those who are established and those who are emerging – may approach agonistic negotiations in a dogmatic, aggressive manner. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 4, for Connolly one of the major dangers stemming from the ineradicability of excess and radical difference is that subjects often have a fragile sense of their identity, and this sense of instability leads them to become ‘fundamentalist.’ It leads them, that is, to protect the fundamentals of their beliefs “by defining every carrier of critique or destabilization as an enemy marked by exactly those defects, weaknesses, corruptions, and naïvetés you are under an absolute imperative to eliminate.”26 This, in turn, is likely to produce fragmentation and ultimately lead to antagonism and conflict. For, the multiple interconnections between minorities create cultural density. But when constituencies become aggressive and dogmatic, when they demonise and attack those who challenge them, then this density collapses: the rhizome is “likely to decline into warring fragments when some of its constituencies insist upon sinking deep, exclusionary roots.”27 Indeed, far from enabling differences to flourish, these agonistic negotiations are likely to “break down into violent discord.”28

26 Ibid, 105-6.
27 Ibid, 94.
28 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 93.
Agonistic negotiations within the rhizome are not enough, then; dogmatic, aggressive, fundamentalist constituencies may well destroy the order. It is at this point that Connolly returns to liberalism, albeit to a more radicalised liberalism than we have seen so far in the work of Locke, Mill, Rawls and Mouffe. He does not argue that rights, elections, limited government or any other key liberal institutions ought to be guaranteed so as to ensure that the impact of fundamentalists is neutralised; indeed, Connolly has little interest in theorising these traditional institutions of liberal politics. But he does propose two things. Firstly, he occasionally suggests that if negotiations between diverse subjects in the rhizome are to avoid degenerating into fragmentation and conflict then a key condition must be met: there must be greater equality of wealth than currently found in liberal societies. He claims that it is crucial that nobody “has, say, more than five or six times as much income as any other,” since this ensure that “everyone has effective standing as a citizen” and “each has the effective opportunity, should it prove attractive or necessary, to participate in the common life of the society.” Connolly thus argues that a “significant reduction in economic inequality is surely crucial to a robust democracy,” suggesting that “managed markets” are needed as “the standard of equality demanded by democracy [is] significantly more demanding than that acknowledged by most contemporary liberal, realist, and communitarian theories of democracy.”

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29 Connolly rarely discusses elections at all. As we have seen, Connolly rejects a limited state on the grounds that in a rhizomatic society politics is all-pervasive and as such limited government is entirely inappropriate. And whilst Connolly recognises the value of rights he also centers on the way in which they fix certain injustices in place rather than protect individuals. For Connolly’s analysis of rights see Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 137-61. See also the discussion of ‘critical responsiveness’ shortly, in which it becomes clear why Connolly is more concerned with virtues than rights.


31 Connolly, Identity/Difference, 192-3.

32 Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, 80.
However, despite discussing this condition on occasions and explaining in detail how the reduction of inequality might be achieved, Connolly’s focus has not been on this kind of reform. Rather his central argument has been that if negotiations in the rhizome are to avoid degenerating into fundamentalist and dogmatic conflict then the subjects engaged in these negotiations need to adopt a different kind of subjectivity, by cultivating what he terms a ‘pluralist ethical sensibility’ or ‘pluralist ethos.’ The major elements of this will be explored shortly, but, in short, it pushes subjects not simply to be tolerant, to allow others to live as they wish in private, but to engage and negotiate publicly with those who differ, to be open toward their arguments, to adapt understandings and identities in response to the claims of others, and to recognise that other subjects have very different ideas and understandings. In some respects, therefore, this is not a return to liberalism; no classical or liberal democratic theorists endorse this kind of ethos. It is, as Stephen White puts it, “a sensibility that cannot simply be submerged under the liberal values of equal respect and tolerance.”

However, despite its differences, Connolly’s pluralist ethos must nevertheless be understood as liberal. One reason for this is that, as Spragens insists and as we will see shortly, the virtues and principles that make up the ethos that Connolly recommends “are deeply embedded in our [liberal democratic] culture – and, no doubt, the patterns of socialisation that produced the humane and ethically attuned sensibility of a William

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Connolly.”35 But even more fundamentally, Connolly’s ethos must be understood as embedded in liberalism because it is a “radically pluralized” version of liberal tolerance, as Kenny puts it.36 This will become clearer when the main components of the ethos are outlined, but it is useful to explain here.

For Connolly, as we have seen, liberal tolerance enables liberal societies to normalise difference. On the one hand, therefore, liberal tolerance is an inappropriate virtue or principle for a rhizomatic society since the aim of a rhizomatic conception of society is to ensure that all differences are able to flourish; as Deleuze and Guattari say, the rhizome is ‘nonhierarchical’. Liberal toleration, in which hegemonic groups tolerate, endure, or put up with those who differ, therefore, is wholly unsuitable. A more pluralised virtue than liberal toleration is needed, one in which differences are seen in a non-hierarchical manner. Secondly, when all differences flourish in the rhizome then, as we have seen, political negotiations become necessary. Again, therefore, the liberal toleration of private differences is not enough. Instead, there needs to be an ethos of greater openness and tolerance in public debate, since such public negotiations are likely to emerge frequently in the rhizomatic society. This is a radicalised or politicised version of liberal tolerance. Thus, the pluralist ethos “bears a family resemblance to liberal tolerance,” as Connolly puts it, but it pluralises liberal toleration by stripping it of hierarchy, and radicalises it by emphasising the need for openness toward differences in public negotiations not just in private.37 Connolly discusses this ethos in different ways

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at different points in his work. Here the focus is on three aspects of the pluralist ethos discussed in various texts: the bicameral orientation, agonistic respect and critical responsiveness.

A Bicameral Orientation

Connolly explicates the general basis of the pluralist ethos most simply through the idea of a 'bicameral orientation' in *Pluralism*.

A bicameral orientation requires a tolerance of ambiguity in politics. There is, first, the faith, doctrine, creed, ideology, or philosophy (I do not distinguish sharply between these) that you adopt as an engaged partisan in the world. Marxism, say. Or a branch of Christianity. Or a particular vision of science. Or Hinduism, Islam, orthodox Judaism, Katnianism, Rawlsianism, neoconservatism, or pragmatism. There is, second, the engrained sense that you should exercise presumptive receptivity towards others when drawing that faith, creed, or philosophy into the public realm. You love your creed; you seldom leave it entirely in the closet when you enter politics. But you appreciate how it appears opaque and profoundly contestable to many who do not participate in it; and you struggle against the tendency to resent this very state of affairs. Pluralists adopt a bicameral orientation to political life. They mix affirmative energies into both sides of that bicameralism. It is not necessary to be either an effete intellectual or a hero to adopt a bicameral orientation to politics. A decent respect for persistent diversity of the human condition suffices.

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38 At certain points he refers to it as a 'Foucaultian ethical sensibility,' at others, a 'post-Nietzschean ethic,' or a 'non-theistic reverence for the abundance of being.' On the Foucaultian ethical sensibility see William Connolly, 'Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault.' *Political Theory* 21, no.3 (1993): 365-89. On the post-Nietzschean ethic see *The Ethos of Pluralization*; On non-theistic reverence see *Identity/Difference*.

Connolly supports the cultivation of a bicameral orientation because it helps ensure that negotiations between contending and divergent constituencies within the rhizome are open and un-dogmatic. It allows subjects to affirm their own perspective, to argue for and support their own beliefs, but simultaneously it ensures that they recognise that others see their position as 'opaque and profoundly contestable,' thus reducing the likelihood of them pushing that position as final, unquestionable, natural. The bicameral orientation is thus more demanding than liberal tolerance. It does not just entail supporting one's own position whilst allowing others to live as they wish. It also entails adopting this ambivalent stance even whilst engaging in public contest with others.

Critical Responsiveness

The bicameral orientation is the least demanding aspect of the pluralist ethos. Connolly also contends that the negotiations in the rhizome must be accompanied by 'civic virtues.' "These civic virtues – each of which offers support and sustenance to the others – provides enabling conditions for a cultural pluralism of democratic governance appropriate to contemporary life." The two most significant, and those that he discusses most frequently, he terms 'critical responsiveness' and 'agonistic respect.'

Critical responsiveness is a virtue that citizens ought to develop as a response to the politics of becoming – as a response to emergent identities and movements propelling themselves into the liberal order and demanding that they are recognised.

40 William Connolly, 'Civic Republicanism and Civic Pluralism: The Silent Struggle of Michael Sandel,' in Debating Democracy's Discontent: Essays in American Politics, Law, and Public Philosophy, edited by Anita L Allen and Milton C Regan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998: 210. The other civic virtue Connolly mentions here is 'forbearance'; however, he discusses this significantly less often and, as will become clear, it appears to be attached to the other virtues.
Critical responsiveness bears a family resemblance to liberal tolerance. Tolerance is typically aimed at minorities whose identity is already stabilised, and it typically flows from those at the centre to those on the margins. . . Critical responsiveness often involves comparative shifts in the self-identifications of the constituencies who offer it. Thus where tolerance implies benevolence toward the other amid stability of ourselves, critical responsiveness involves active work on our current identities in order to modify the terms of relation between us and them. 41

"Critical responsiveness thus moves on two registers," Connolly notes: "to redefine its relation to others a constituency" offering critical responsiveness "must also modify the shape of its own identity." 42 Consider the example of demands for the right of homosexuals to teach in and have homosexuality taught in schools, to join the army, to have equal, or different, legal rights as heterosexual couples, and so forth. Demands for these rights, which have occurred gradually over the last few decades in Western countries, have taken the form of a politics of becoming, with gay rights campaigners, organisations and individuals agonistically disrupting the existing order and carving out spaces for homosexuals to live more freely. However, in order for these kinds of demands to have effect rather than simply generate resentment and anger the majority of heterosexuals have had, to some degree, to cultivate the virtue of critical responsiveness toward homosexuality. This has entailed heterosexuals adjusting their view of homosexuality, seeing it not as an aberration or unnatural, but as a different kind of relationship. And it has entailed heterosexuals altering their view of their own sexuality; not perceiving it as natural, but just as one way of living. Critical responsiveness is thus

41 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 62.
42 Connolly, Ethos of Pluralization, xvi.
not a distant ideal, but a virtue practised to some degree already. Connolly’s claim is that it ought to be practiced more frequently, by more citizens, in a wider range of situations.

Connolly, clearly, is not simply advocating responsiveness toward all movements: toward fundamentalists and suicide bombers. “Critical responsiveness is critical in that it does not always accede to everything that a new constituency or movement demands.” Those offering critical responsiveness critically evaluate the claims, grievances, and practices of emergent movements, determining which aspects ought to be rethought, where their own identities require reconfiguring, and so forth.

Cultivation of creativity, close attunement to new circumstances, preliminary receptivity to negotiation, and a readiness to explore how some element in received standards might be in need of selective recomposition – these are subvirtues shimmering within the practice of critical responsiveness.\footnote{Connolly, \textit{Pluralism}, 127.}

\textbf{Agonistic Respect}

Many identities and movements, whilst they are not final, have emerged, and their place in the liberal order has been determined, at least temporarily. When these constituencies engage in agonistic contest they are engaged in the politics of being. For Connolly, when constituencies engage in this kind of politics, ‘agonistic respect’ between these different and contending constituencies, identities and movements is needed. Agonistic respect entails respecting the different moral sources and beliefs that others in the rhizome endorse. What makes this respect \textit{agonistic} is not that one accepts or accedes to their every demand, but that one is respectful toward those with different sources \textit{by}...
engaging, contesting and arguing with them, by pressing them to explain, justify and determine their sources, to show how their faith gives rise to the particular vision of the political order that they endorse. In a relation of agonistic respect “carriers of another creed may press you to sharpen or modify yours, in response to distinctive questions, examples and sensitivities. In a relation of agonistic respect, something in the faith, identity, or philosophy of the engaged parties is placed at risk.” Thus, “you absorb the agony of having elements of your own faith called into question by others, and you fold agonistic contestation of others into respect that you convey toward them.”

For Connolly, agonistic respect reduces dogmatism in rhizomatic negotiations. Constituencies advance their claims and arguments respectfully, aware that others have faiths, moral sources or perspectives that diverge from their own.

When the issue in question makes it necessary to bring aspects of their basic faith-philosophy into the public realm, the partisans adopt a certain forbearance and hesitancy with respect to its practical universalizability, out of respect for the relative opacity of their faith to others and in acknowledgment of their own inability, to date, to demonstrate its truth. In a relation of agonistic respect . . . each [partisan] . appreciates the comparative contestability of its own fundamentals to others.

Moreover, their claims and arguments receive a respectful hearing from those of other faiths. They do not go unchallenged. “In a relation of agonistic respect, partisans may

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44 Ibid., 125, 123-4.
test, challenge, and contest pertinent elements in the fundamentals of others. But their concerns and demands are listened to.

2 Evaluating Ethical Agonism

In sum, then, Connolly fears that simply allowing agonistic negotiations between minorities will result in fundamentalist subjects engaging in aggressive conflict that will undermine the flourishing of difference, hence he proposes that subjects cultivate an ethos composed of a bicameral orientation, critical responsiveness and agonistic respect. If subjects who engage in negotiations cultivate this ethos, he argues, they will affirm their own faith but simultaneously recognise that others do not, and attempt to adapt their identities and arguments so as to be respectful toward those others. As such, compromise and negotiation rather than intractability, dogmatism and aggression will most likely emerge and the flourishing of differences within the rhizome will not degenerate into antagonism and violence. Connolly, of course, is aware that this strategy is idealistic, that there “are big ‘ifs’ and ‘maybes’” about it, and that it ushers in new dangers. But, nevertheless, Connolly sees this ethos as a way of ensuring that difference can flourish.

In what follows, however, Connolly’s pluralist ethos is explored in more detail, and it is demonstrated that Connolly’s vision of flourishing difference conceals far more subjects being treated as radically different and subject to violence than he acknowledges. As will be seen, he admits that those who have not cultivated the pluralist ethos must be

45 Ibid., 123.
46 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 5. Many of these dangers will be discussed in the following section.
excluded from agonistic negotiations. But he underestimates the extent and significance of this exclusion as well as altogether ignoring the assimilatory violence the ethical agon uses. This can be seen after addressing three questions: What does the pluralist ethos presuppose? How will subjects cultivate this ethos? And what happens if subjects contradict it?

What does the ethos presuppose?

First, what does the ethos Connolly suggests presuppose? This is an issue drawn to attention by Dana Villa. Villa contends that “Connolly thinks he can evade the charges that agonism is . . . dangerously irresponsible in its glorification of conflict . . . by imagining a political culture that fosters such an ethos, a democratized version of the eristic virtues celebrated by Nietzsche.” However, Villa suggests, “The problem is that this version of agonistic politics presupposes a culture in which no individual’s or group’s ‘fundamental metaphysical position’ is fundamental in the sense that it is a truth that stands in irreconcilable conflict with other ultimate values.” It requires, on the part of the subject, “an agnostic willingness to suspend the truth claim implicit in his own ultimate values.” This is problematic, because it is unlikely that a significant number of subjects will cultivate the required ethos if it requires agnosticism. “Simply put,” Villa says, “this is presuming a lot.”

49 Ibid., 238.
Although Villa provides little detail on this, we can begin to see why the ethos presupposes agnosticism by looking at Connolly’s bicameral orientation. This orientation entails recognising that one’s faith ‘appears opaque and profoundly contestable to many who do not participate in it’; to adopt the bicameral orientation is thus to admit that one’s position might be contested by others with divergent ideas. However, to admit that one’s beliefs might be contestable does not necessarily mean that one views them as contestable oneself, it does not entail being agnostic. Rather, one might admit that others find your faith contestable, even allow them to contest it, but nevertheless continue to view it as fundamentally true. We have seen Connolly suggest as much in his outline of the bicameral orientation already, where he claims that ‘It is not necessary to be either an effete intellectual or a hero to adopt a bicameral orientation to politics. A decent respect for the persistent diversity of the human condition suffices.’

For Connolly, though, the bicameral orientation is just the beginning of the pluralist ethos; subjects must also cultivate critical responsiveness and agonistic respect. And when one examines these virtues it becomes clear that the pluralist ethos entails agnosticism, that is, viewing one’s own fundaments as contestable and open to question. Consider agonistic respect. This entails being open to agonising debate over the fundaments of one’s faith with other members of the rhizome, and this surely presupposes a more agnostic approach to one’s own beliefs. Connolly notes, for example, that “a public ethos of agonistic respect . . . is inspired by mutual appreciation of the human inability to dissolve operational differences about final ethical sources into a public matrix of consensus.” Indeed, he suggests that “An ethos of agonistic respect grows out of mutual appreciation for the ubiquity of faith to life and the inability of
contending parties, to date, to demonstrate the truth of one faith over other live candidates.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, the open, agonising and respectful negotiations that this virtue produces first requires subjects to cultivate a more \textit{agnostic} approach to their beliefs – an approach that appreciates that humans cannot solve the question of which faith is true or natural once-and-for-all and as such must accept mutual contestation by those with different beliefs.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{How will subjects cultivate this ethos?}

Villa is right then: Connolly’s radical pluralist ethos requires agnostic subjects. What makes this so problematic is, again, not explored in any detail by Villa. But his assertion that Connolly is ‘presuming a lot’ implies that, for Villa, agnosticism is an approach to one’s faith that only a limited number of subjects will develop – that the rhizome will be populated, perhaps by some subjects who will cultivate the ethos, but by many others that will not. The critical question for Connolly, therefore, is how can diverse constituencies and subjects cultivate the ethos? The answer that Mouffe offers in her discussion of establishing the ethico-political bond is that the ethic must be imposed, not ‘from above’ necessarily but, rather, by rendering it hegemonic. Through political institutions, through discourses and the media, and through the drawing of frontiers, the various subjects and constituencies would be assimilated into the ethical order such that they adopt the ethos; divergent drives and impulses would be domesticated, suppressed or excluded, even if they are not eradicated. However, for Connolly, the ethos ought to

\textsuperscript{50} Connolly, \textit{Pluralism}, 125, 123.

\textsuperscript{51} Critical responsiveness is similar to agonistic respect, but whereas agonistic respect requires an acceptance that one’s beliefs are not fundamental prior to agonistic engagement over those beliefs, critical responsiveness requires a readiness to adapt one’s own beliefs, feelings and identities in response to new and emergent movements.
be cultivated by the subject herself, not imposed. The assimilation of the subject is, therefore, not theorised as a violent process whereby her singularities are suppressed or sheared off through symbolic violence and normalisation by the liberal order. It is seen as a process in which the subject herself gradually builds the ethos into her identity and way of being. For Connolly, therefore, assimilating subjects into the agonistic order does not require extensive violence as Mouffe contends; it is a voluntary process of assimilation.

There are a number of reasons why he sees the cultivation of the ethos as voluntary rather than violent, all of which centre on the flexibility of subjectivity and the pluralist ethos. Firstly, assimilation of the pluralist ethos is voluntary, Connolly suggests, because subjects cultivate this ethos through (Foucaultian and Nietzschean) 'arts of the self' in which, through difficult and careful cultivation, a subject moulds herself into a particular kind of subject. Arts of the self, Foucault notes, "is not a discovering of a truth hidden inside the self." It is a difficult, often agonising, process of training oneself to act, think and live in particular ways. Arts of the self thus permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain numbers of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immorality.  

Whilst the "self is always engaged in work on itself," Connolly wants to claim arts of the self as method for cultivating the pluralist ethos.\textsuperscript{54} "The goal," he says, "is to work demurely on a relational self that has already been formed, recrafting vengeful, anxious, or stingy contingencies that have become entrenched and forging them into a distinctive form you can admire."\textsuperscript{55} The "highest aim of self-artistry," he continues, "is cultivation of political virtues such as critical responsiveness and agonistic respect."\textsuperscript{56}

The pluralist ethos can be voluntarily assimilated, secondly, because when subjects work on themselves so as to cultivate this ethos they will cultivate a form of ethos particular to themselves, adopting the ethos in different ways and for slightly different reasons depending on their beliefs, interests and allegiances. There is thus no single model of the ethos; it varies, depending on context. As Connolly puts it in a discussion of why diverse subjects might cultivate the ethos:

Each set of participants draws upon a different mix of principles, practices, desires, and incentives to foster the general ethos. Support is grounded partly in care for the later modern condition that multiplies minorities on the same territory, partly in a desire to ensure that you do not become a minority persecuted by others, partly in an interest to protect the survival of democracy under the distinctive conditions of late modern life, partly in recognition of the embedded character of your own faith as well as that of others, partly in specific injunctions to love, generosity, charity, or hospitality that help to compose specific faith practices, partly in a desire to avoid participation in otherwise unnecessary modes of

\textsuperscript{54} Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization}, 234, n.37.
\textsuperscript{55} Connolly, \textit{Why I am not a Secularist}, 146.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, 151.
violence fomented by calls to national unity, and most of all in a distinctive compound of these motives and habituations that varies in texture from case to case. 57

Thirdly, Connolly contends that voluntary assimilation is possible because there is a distinction between an ethos or ethical sensibility on the one hand and that of 'moral codes' and faiths on the other. This distinction is derived from volume 2 of Foucault's History of Sexuality in which Foucault identifies morality as those codes, such as Christianity, to which citizens must adhere, and ethics as the practice, most apparent for the Greeks, of determining how one behaves and acts within that code oneself. 58 Connolly develops this distinction. 59 His pluralist ethos, he suggests, infuses the beliefs, traditions or moral codes of subjects, emphasising the contestability of those traditions and pushing the bearer to rethink their difficult relationship with subjects drawn to other moral codes. It does not present itself as the single universal to which other ethical traditions must bow. Rather, it provides a prod and a counterpoint to them, pressing them to rethink the ethics of engagement and, crucially, to rework their relations to the diversity of ethical sources that mark a pluralistic culture. 60

Thus, the subject's moral code or faith is not undermined, but the ethos pushes it to take a form more conducive to rhizomatic agonism than it otherwise might: the responsive,

57 Connolly, Pluralism, 66-7.
60 Connolly, Ethos of Pluralization, xxiv. See also White, Sustaining Affirmation, 116: "Connolly uses the term ethos frequently. . . My sense is that he wants to emphasise continually the orientation he seeks is vivified more by a spirit or sensibility than by any set of rules of conduct."
open, respectful and generous end of the code – be it liberal, Marxist, pluralist, Christian or, Hindu, for example – will be emphasised; the dogmatic, aggressive and fundamentalist end down-played.

Finally, assimilation of the ethos is voluntary in Connolly’s vision because its adoption by subjects need only be partial. Firstly, the rhizomatic agon does not require every subject or constituency to cultivate the ethic. It simply requires “at least a significant minority of those implicated in it to understand that the porous understandings they share rest upon contestable foundations.”\textsuperscript{61} Secondly, the cultivation of the ethos will be partial even by those who have begun to do so. There will always be some subjects and constituencies who can cultivate, at most, only aspects of the ethos, or the ethos in relation to only certain aspects of their beliefs or particular issues.\textsuperscript{62} Thirdly, Connolly – as a faithful Deleuzian – is aware that even if a subject has developed the ethos it will often be exceeded by divergent desires and urges:

\begin{quote}

even within a privileged subject position you experience recurrently a burning desire to stare at passing figures who reflect your current ideal of sensuality, or to exhibit yourself to strangers, or to conform meekly to arbitrary authority, or to rage against authority figures of the opposite sex, or to insist upon the last word in each argument, or to steal trinkets for the sheer thrill of it, or to translate your most intense interests into transcendental principles you purport to obey. Or, perhaps, all of the above.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{61} Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization}, 154.
\textsuperscript{62} For an example of how fundamentalists might be open to certain differences, but refuse to countenance others see \textit{The Augustinian Imperative}, 156-7.
\textsuperscript{63} Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization}, 70.
The cultivation of the ethos will thus be partial: some will cultivate a bicameral orientation, some will develop agonistic respect, others critical responsiveness, and some will cultivate combinations of these; some will display these attitudes in relation to certain issues but not in relation to others; some will find it hard to develop any aspects of the ethos at all; and those that have developed the ethos will experience periodic desires to act otherwise. And this partiality reflects the way in which the ethos is cultivated in relation to and through other traditions and moralities. But for Connolly the ethos "need not be shared by each and every constituency to the same degree to play a positive role in politics." 64 This partial voluntary cultivation of the ethos is enough.

What happens to those who contradict the ethos?

It is evident from this account, however, that there will always be some constituencies or subjects who diverge in some ways at some times from the ethos. Indeed, given that Connolly suggests that only a 'significant minority' need cultivate the ethos, the rhizome might contain a large number of dogmatic, aggressive, fundamentalist constituencies and subjects who engage by demonising and attacking others. What happens to these subjects who, at different times and in different ways, contradict the ethos in their public engagements? What happens to aggressive evangelical Christians who denounce abortion clinics, to anti-vivisection campaigners who verbally and sometimes physically attack staff at laboratories, to constituencies of Muslims angrily protesting against adverse portrayals of the Prophet by the press? What happens to these forms of engagement that seem to contradict the pluralist ethos?

64 Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, 158.
Although he discusses this only infrequently and at little length, Connolly is explicit that there must be some exclusion of those who do not cultivate the ethos. Contrary to Mouffe's claim, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, that he advocates unlimited pluralism, Connolly is actually close to Mouffe in stating very clearly that there are limits; that those who are radically different, who reject the pluralist ethos, must be excluded from political contest. "Pluralists," he explains, "set limits to tolerance to ensure that an exclusionary, unitarian movement does not take over an entire regime." Thus, his pluralist "perspective does not deny the necessity of limitations and exclusions." The ethical agon "must explore what can be done to restrict dogmatic constituencies who strive to repress the very differences upon which they depend for their organization." Connolly is clear, then, that there are certain limits to the rhizomatic agon: it must restrict the extent to which fundamentalist, dogmatic or unitarian movements can engage in contest, since these constituencies contradict the ethos, adopting an essentialist approach to their own beliefs, and seeking to override others. This, of course, is not to say that they ought to be excluded from the rhizome – even if that were feasible. Members of the rhizome should "tolerate spaces for fundamentalism to be, at least when the latter do not compel the universalisation of what they are." Evangelical Christians and Muslims and animal rights supporters would, therefore, be able to live as they wish. But this is quite different from allowing them a voice in public negotiations. The ethical agon "does not stop such constituencies from

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66 Connolly, Pluralism, 42.
67 Connolly, Ethos of Pluralization, 89.
68 Ibid., 209, n.34.
living within the orbit of such assumptions; it does stop them from placing such assumptions at the authoritative center of political culture.\textsuperscript{69}

However, whilst Connolly is clear that subjects or constituencies who are radically different from the ethos must be excluded from agonic contest, again like Mouffe he does not want to define in advance what counts as sufficiently different to warrant excluding. He notes that the question of inclusion and exclusion "poses difficult and dicey issues."\textsuperscript{70} Thus, "the ethos of pluralism supported here does acknowledge the necessity of setting limits. It simply insists that we often do not know with assurance exactly what those limits must be."\textsuperscript{71} The reason why Connolly does not want to provide a 'formula' for who ought to be included and excluded, then, is that doing so is dangerous.\textsuperscript{72} As he puts is: "we are cautious in setting final limits in advance to the scope of diversity. For we are attuned to the dicey history of how absolute limits posed at one time in Europe or America were revealed later to have fostered grave suffering." He gives numerous examples:

that the citizens of a regime must be Christian, that only men can be citizens, that only heterosexuals can participate openly in public life, that racial mixing is impermissible miscegenation, that only landed gentleman are qualified to govern a state, that marriage must be restricted to the relation between men and women, and that avowed atheists are too unreliable to serve as elected public officials.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{69} Connolly, \textit{Why I am not a Secularist}, 154.
\textsuperscript{70} Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization}, 89.
\textsuperscript{71} Connolly, \textit{Identity/Difference}, xxix.
\textsuperscript{72} Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization}, 209, n.34.
\textsuperscript{73} Connolly, \textit{Pluralism}, 42-3.
Each of these rules led to some subjects being excluded from political debate or discriminated against on the basis that they were divergent, too different to allow into democratic contest, but were later revealed to be a means of justifying the exclusion of certain subjects who were not, perhaps, radically different but just different. As such, although Connolly concludes that those who have not cultivated the ethos might have to be excluded from agonistic contest, he suggests that exactly who is to be excluded must not be decided in advance but in the context of the agon itself, and only ever provisionally.

**Violence and Radical Difference in the Ethical Agon**

For Connolly, then, liberalism needs to be radically reworked. Normalising societies centred on liberal individualism must be reconceptualised as rhizomes composed of a multiplicity of differences. This in turn will mean that political negotiations between differences will become widespread and unavoidable. And as such liberal tolerance will have to be radicalised and pluralised – subjects will have to cultivate a pluralist ethos such that engagements between differences do not collapse. There will be no compulsion or force used to ensure that subjects cultivate this ethos, but those who do not will have to be excluded from contest. If all these elements are in place then, for Connolly, most of those differences currently normalised, assimilated and suppressed by liberal societies will be able to flourish, there will be 'spaces for discordance to be.'

Like Mouffe's, Connolly's vision appears to offer a level of candour unmatched by liberals such as Locke, Mill or Rawls. He appears to acknowledge the violence that his order will need. The ethical agon, he makes clear, must exclude from agonistic contest
subjects or constituencies with desires that diverge too far from the ethos. Such exclusions are fundamental: the extensive negotiations between different minorities that will characterise the rhizome can only be kept from spiraling into culture war and antagonism if those engaging in the contest do so in a bicameral, respectful and responsive way. In this sense, Connolly recognises that the exclusion of radical difference is constitutive of the ethical agon in much the same way as the exclusion of the self-interested is constitutive of Rousseau’s ideal, the exclusion of the irrational is constitutive of Locke’s liberal order, and the exclusion of the ‘unreasonable’ is constitutive of Rawls’s liberal order. Thus, far from denying the need for violent exclusions as Mouffe suggests Connolly does, Connolly appears to agree with Mouffe that “it is very important to recognize those forms of exclusion for what they are and the violence that they signify, instead of concealing them.”

**Radical Difference, Fundamentalists and Scapegoats**

However, perhaps there is more violence in Connolly’s vision than he admits. We saw in our analysis of Mouffe that she overlooks the fact that, from the perspective of poststructural radical difference, excess desires that are radically different from and challenge the ethico-political principles will not just emerge amongst a minority of non-liberal democrats, but will emerge in everybody. It was explained in some detail that this would lead to a society in which extensive exclusion, surveillance and normalisation are needed if subjects’ commitment to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy is to be maintained. Whilst Connolly would presumably not allow for surveillance and normalising institutions because he emphasises the voluntary cultivation of the ethos,

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there is little doubt that Connolly’s ethical agonism would, like Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism, be forced to exclude from political negotiations far more subjects than he admits. For the idea of radical difference insists that there will always be a multiplicity of desires within each subject, many of which will have to suppressed or domesticated so that the ethos can take form. There is always, as Deleuze, puts it, “tumult, restlessness and passion underneath the apparent calm.” But these differences do not disappear. Like lines of flight and unruly singularities, dogmatic, universalising or spiteful urges will sporadically reappear in subjects, undermining the ethos in different ways at different points. Connolly himself, as a Deleuzian, recognises this to be the case, as we have seen, suggesting that even the most privileged identities are always exceeded by irresponsible, fugitive desires that cannot be fully contained. Indeed, he claims that “All of us have strains of fundamentalism flowing through us.” Thus, radical differences will pervade the rhizome, constantly resisting the pluralist ethos.

If all subjects have fugitive desires that contradict the pluralist ethos, as Connolly himself acknowledges, this raises an interesting question: why does he want to focus exclusions on distinct fundamentalist minorities who refuse the pluralist ethos, on ‘dogmatic constituencies who strive to repress . . . differences?’ After all, innumerable subjects throughout the ethical agon will have radically different desires that contradict the pluralist ethos. Whilst fundamentalists certainly contribute toward the fact that negotiations are not entirely open, respectful and responsive, they are not the only reason why this obtains; the innumerable fugitive desires of a multiplicity of subjects also

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76 Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization*, 106.
ensure that there is never full adherence to the ethos. Excluding these fundamentalist minorities, therefore, will not provide the conditions for agonistic contest and flourishing differences. Connolly, clearly, is aware of this. He stresses repeatedly, as we have seen, that the rhizome and the pluralist ethos are precarious because subjects will not have cultivated the ethos fully, because there is fundamentalism in us all, and thus that, potentially, we all contribute to the fragility and partiality of the ethos. However, whilst Connolly might not exclude fundamentalists because he blames them and thinks that if they are forced out of agonistic negotiation then differences will engage in respectful negotiation and flourish, the political effect of him excluding them might well be that this blame is forced upon them.

A brief comparison with Žižek is useful here. Žižek contends that there is always a radical difference, a sense of lack, a “structural imbalance,” within the capitalist order, because it “produces more than any other socio-economic formation to satisfy needs, but the result is the creation of even more needs to be satisfied.” This sense of lack, he argues, drives subjects toward fascism, first toward “the figure of the Master – Leader – who guarantees the stability and balance of the social fabric,” and, because the leader never sutures the order, subsequently to find a scapegoat on whom the ills of the fascist-capitalist order can be blamed:

this imbalance is projected into the figure of the Jew whose ‘excessive’ accumulation and greed are the cause of social antagonism. The dream is thus that, since the excess was introduced from outside – the work of an alien intruder – its elimination would enable us to
obtain once again a stable social organism . . . 'It is they who steal our enjoyment, who, by means of their excessive attitude, introduce imbalance and antagonism.'

This comparison is certainly not intended to suggest that Connolly’s pluralist vision is fascist. It is instructive, however, because although Connolly himself might not blame fundamentalists for the lack that will pervade the ethical agon, by excluding them from agonistic contest he gives the appearance that they are to blame and thus turns them into scapegoats for this lack in a similar way. Other subjects in the ethical agon, therefore, who sense the gap that militates against a rhizomatic society in which agonistic negotiations are respectful and responsive, might therefore see the exclusion of the fundamentalists as evidence of their culpability, suggesting that ‘It is they who steal our enjoyment,’ that their ‘elimination would enable us to obtain once again a stable social organism.’ This is speculative, but the point is that if the radical differences that undermine the ethos are within all subjects but fundamentalist minorities are the focus of exclusion, then other subjects in the ethical agon might see them as to blame for the failings of the ethical agon.

If Connolly’s ethical agon is to avoid this – to avoid erroneously targeting and blaming a minority of fundamentalists – and instead exclude all those radical differences that challenge the pluralist ethos, then the ethical agon will have to use exclusionary violence against far more subjects than Connolly acknowledges. For if radically different, spiteful or intolerant desires are in everybody then this means that the exclusion of subjects might have to be much more extensive than Connolly acknowledges, not just focusing

on a small minority of fundamentalists but on all those subjects who might have desires or urges that challenge the pluralist ethos. Not everybody who has urges or desires that contradict the ethos will have to be excluded from contest, of course. As we have seen, Connolly is clear that only a ‘significant minority’ of subjects need to cultivate the ethos, and exactly who is to be excluded cannot be decided in advance anyway. But it is nevertheless likely that there will be a significantly larger number of exclusions from agonistic contest than he initially suggested, since all subjects might be fundamentalist at some point. Subjects who will not engage in a certain negotiation respectfully, who refuse to be tolerant toward a particular group in society, or who are racist, may not be fundamentalists opposed to pluralism and democracy per se, but because of these certain divergent desires they might have to be excluded from specific negotiations.

This increase in exclusion in the ethical agon is a troubling ramification of the inescapability of radical difference, since it means that exclusionary violence might have to be used against a far wider range of subjects than Connolly allows. But it is no more troubling than the alternative: not excluding subjects when they have divergent desires that contradict the ethos. For if they are permitted to engage in political contest then agonistic negotiations between the multiplicity of differences within the rhizome are likely to degenerate into intolerant, dogmatic and aggressive clashes, with the consequence that violence and antagonism rather than difference will flourish. Thus, if resistance to the pluralist ethos stems from innumerable subjects rather than a small minority of fundamentalists, not only do the latter become the scapegoats for fissures in the agon if they are blamed, but the ethical agon must violently exclude from agonistic contest more subjects than Connolly admits if it is to enable differences to flourish.
Normalisation in the Rhizome

Connolly acknowledges the need for radical differences to be excluded, then, but does not recognise that if these exclusions are to be effective and not fix the blame on dogmatic minorities then even more subjects will have to be the target of violent exclusion. In this respect Connolly underestimates the number of subjects who will be treated as radically different and the full extent of violence involved. However, there is a further way in which Connolly’s ethical agon is violent toward divergent subjects which he does not acknowledge at all. As we have seen, the reason why Connolly’s ethical agon appears to be less violent than Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism is that whereas Mouffe suggests that commitment to the ethico-political principles will require violent assimilation through a hegemonic project and the drawing of frontiers, Connolly argues that, for a variety of reason, subjects can voluntarily cultivate the ethos. However, he conceals the fact that the assimilation of the pluralist ethos might not be as voluntary as he suggests; normalisation might also be operative.

As seen, Connolly is explicit that those who differ radically from the pluralist ethos must be excluded from political negotiations. As such, although there is no compulsion to assimilate the ethos, if subjects wish to engage in negotiations with others then they must assimilate the ethos. If they refuse, or if they fail, then there is the likelihood that they will be excluded from negotiations and perhaps find that their concerns are not represented in public discussions or policy. This, however, puts significant pressure on to subjects to cultivate the ethos. Whilst those who conform to the ethos will not find this problematic, those who have divergent desires or impulses may do. Those who are deeply religious or certain, for example, or who resist political engagement like the
Amish, must suppress and domesticate their divergent beliefs so as to assimilate into the ethos: it is only by so doing that they can engage in public negotiations and have a say in political life. This, of course, is hardly assimilatory violence. Whilst the fact that subjects must assimilate the ethos if they want to engage in political negotiations puts pressure on subjects to conform, they can still choose whether or not to cultivate the ethos, and, if so, in relation to what issues and to what extent. In this sense, cultivation is still voluntary.

However, there may be a compulsion to assimilate that renders it rather less voluntary and significantly more forced. One of Connolly's criticisms of late-modern liberal societies, as we saw in Chapter 4, is that they are 'normalising societies,' by which he means societies that discursively and institutionally privilege the model of the normal individual, making it a norm that must be conformed to and pressuring subjects to do so by presenting those subjects who diverge as 'perversified diversities.' "A normalizing society" thus

treats the small set of identities it endorses as if they were intrinsically true; this puts it under tremendous pressure to treat everything that differs from those intrinsic truths to be fundamental threats, deviations, or failures in need of correction, reform, punishment, silencing, or liquidation.

Such normalisation, Connolly claims, would not occur in his ethical agon: "the ethic I endorse," he suggests, will "encourage the self and the culture to come to terms more affirmatively with contingent, relational elements in established cultural identities and to
cultivate a more generous ethics of engagement between contending constituencies.”

As such, rather than pressuring subjects to conform to particular norms of behaviour and rather than encouraging subjects to treat those with different forms of subjectivity as ‘fundamental threats, deviations, or failures,’ the pluralist ethos would push subjects to respect and engage with these differences.

Despite this, however, the pluralist ethos is a prerequisite for engagement in the agon and is therefore the ethos that subjects are encouraged to cultivate: it is, indeed, the ideal form of subjectivity appropriate for political life. In this sense, it is a norm against which subjects are judged. Subjects might not be corrected, reformed, punished, silenced, or liquidated if they fail or refuse to endorse the ethos. But they might be seen as contrary, as dogmatic, as illiberal, indeed, they might be portrayed as a member of a fundamentalist minority that is to blame for the failings of the ethical agon. Consequently, there would be significant pressure on subjects to conform to the norm, to suppress divergent desires and impulses, and to adopt the pluralist ethos. This is what we see with Mill. Those who are rash, obstinate and have a “lowness or deprivation of taste,” as well as those who live according to custom and tradition rather than the norm of individuality, do not need to be excluded or imprisoned, but most subjects will suppress such traits because they will be viewed by others “as a being of an inferior order.”

Similarly, the norms of home ownership, marriage and children in contemporary Britain are promoted to such an extent that those who diverge from this are regarded with suspicion, hesitancy, often with pity, thus ensuring that most subjects

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suppress their radically different desires and conform. The same arguably applies with the pluralist ethos: if it is promoted as the most appropriate form of subjectivity for complex negotiations in the rhizome those who differ might be viewed as in some way deficient, as inferior, as unsuited for democratic politics, as undermining the agon, and as such would be under significant pressure to suppress their divergent desires and conform.

The Violence in Perspective

Connolly claims to acknowledge that radically different subjects must be treated violently so as to secure agonistic negotiations between differences then. But on closer analysis exclusionary violence will have to be applied to a far wider range of subjects than he acknowledges, whilst assimilatory violence, which he attempts to circumvent, is also applied to divergent subjects through a normalising pressure to conform. Thus, a greater numbers of subjects will be treated as radically differently and in need of violent exclusion or assimilation than Connolly admits. It must be noted, however, that the extent of violence toward divergent subjects in Connolly’s vision is much smaller than in many other liberal orders.

Locke, for example, excludes the ‘irrational’ from political life, which subtly includes huge swathes of the population. Connolly, in contrast, only seeks to exclude from contest those subjects who will not engage respectfully or responsively, since they threaten open, respectful dialogue between differences in the rhizome. The number of subjects that are categorised as radically different and subject to violence, therefore, is far smaller than in Locke’s vision. Moreover, unlike Locke, for Connolly, subjects do
not necessarily have to be excluded from the whole of political life. Fundamentalist constituencies who altogether reject negotiations with others may have to be barred from engaging in any kind of political contest. But often the exclusion of radical difference will mean only the exclusion of subjects from debating particular issues on which they have desires and instincts that diverge radically from the required ethos. A virulent animal rights campaigner, for example, might be excluded from debates about vivisection on the basis that he is incapable of being open, respectful or responsive toward those with whom he disagrees, but he may be able to engage in political negotiations on issues about which he is less passionate and more capable of respectful, responsive engagement. Unlike Locke, then, who excludes large number of subjects from political life, Connolly excludes a smaller number of subjects and only from specific negotiations. The extent of violence is thus significantly reduced.

**Conclusion**

In sum, for Connolly, if the suppression and normalisation of difference typical of liberal societies is to be avoided then society needs to be conceptualised rhizomatically. Because this will allow differences to flourish agonistic negotiations will become necessary. Unless these are to degenerate into effectively a state of war the subjects engaged in these negotiations must cultivate a pluralist ethos, a pluralised, radicalised version of liberal tolerance. This will provide an ethical agon in which differences will be far more politicised than is typical of liberal societies, but in which differences can flourish. Connolly acknowledges that this order cannot exist without excluding those subjects who radically differ, who cannot or will not cultivate the ethos. But as has been
suggested, Connolly does not acknowledge the number of subjects who will experience because they diverge from the pluralist ethos.

Despite suggesting that subjects can voluntarily cultivate the pluralist ethos, the ethical agon would be a normalising society in which the ethos would be promoted as a norm to which subjects would be pressured to conform by suppressing and silencing their divergent desires. Moreover, because a multiplicity of subjects will differ radically from the pluralist ethos the exclusion of radical difference cannot be restricted to minorities with fundamentalist views. A whole range of desires and views might have to be excluded from contest on the basis that they diverge too far from the pluralist ethos: those that are dogmatic, argumentative, difficult, bigoted, xenophobic, sexist, racist, intolerant, and so on. Some of these may stem from the subject being fundamentalist, but they may also be desires and views held by subjects who in other ways have cultivated the pluralist ethos. Thus, those who are classed as radically different and who are excluded from contest are not necessarily fundamentalists; they may also be obedient pluralist subjects with fleeting, unruly, radical desires that contradict the ethos. It seems, then, that, rather like Mouffe, although Connolly is aware that radical difference is inescapable, acknowledges that liberalism cannot enable differences to flourish without violence, and offers a sophisticated attempt to rework and politicise liberalism so as to ensure that differences can flourish, his vision is illusory, concealing the number of subjects who it treats violently.
Chapter 7 ‘Wars of Position’: Honig’s Political Agonism

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that Connolly responds to the violence toward difference inherent within liberalism with a vision of a rhizomatic multiplicity respectfully negotiating their differences publicly. However, we also saw that it was precisely in this turn to an ethos that problems emerge, since his requirement that subjects must adopt a pluralist ethos leads him to treat far more subjects violently than he admits. Moreover, we saw in the previous chapter that Mouffe adopts a similarly problematic strategy. She claims that ‘antagonism can be transformed into agonism’ if subjects adhere to the ethico-political rules of the respublica, but in so doing she ignores the fact that if this commitment is to be maintained then more subjects will have to be excluded, monitored and normalised so as to ensure that they assimilate. In this chapter the focus is on the agonism of Bonnie Honig, termed here ‘political agonism.’ As we will see, the reason that Honig’s agonism is termed ‘political’ is that she does not make the same kind of ethical move as Connolly and Mouffe, who claim that subjects ought to adopt an ethos or set of ethico-political principles. For Honig the agon is theorised as a space for political contest and resistance, for clashes between identities and interests; unlike Connolly and Mouffe, therefore, the ethos, the form of subjectivity, of those engaged is of no interest to her. This is what makes hers not ethical but political agonism. Honig thus surrenders the normative guarantees that the ethico-political principles and ethos provide for Mouffe and Connolly and instead embraces ‘politics,’ with all the instability, uncertainty and dangers attached. This, of course, is risky.
Surrendering epistemological foundations means giving up the ground of specifically moral claims against domination – especially the avenging of strength through moral critique of it – and moving instead into the domain of the sheeplly political: 'wars of position' and amoral contests about the just and the good in which truth is always grasped as coterminous with power, as always already power, as the voice of power.¹

As we have seen, Honig suggests that liberal orders such as Rawls’s treat those who have forms of subjectivity that differ from liberal subjectivity as radically different and thus violently. The introduction of agonistic institutions through which these divergent subjects can contest and challenge this violence will enable them to make themselves heard, to contest the violence they experience, to carve out spaces in which they can live differently. For Honig, therefore, in order to enable difference to flourish in liberal societies what is needed is not a new ethos or form of subjectivity but the proliferation of institutions and channels for political contest. This chapter shows, however, that Honig’s more political approach actually conceals the exclusionary violence on which the agon relies, and, more importantly, it ignores the way in which the hierarchies and inequalities of the liberal order will persist even if it is invigorated by political agonism such that subjects who diverge from liberal subjectivity will continue to be treated violently. Section 1 outlines Honig’s turn to Nietzsche, Machiavelli and Arendt and expounds the major dimensions of the political agonism that she draws from them. Section 2 reveals the violence toward radical difference concealed in this vision.

Honig’s Political Agonism

Honig and the Radicalisation of Liberalism

We must begin, however, by noting Honig’s ambiguous relationship with liberalism. As seen in Chapter 4, she contends that both liberalism and communitarianism, whether advanced by Rawls, Kant or Sandel, are ‘virtue’ theories of politics, “theories that displace conflict, identify politics with administration and treat juridical settlement as the task of politics and political theory,” and which consequently create remainders who they treat violently. She suggests, therefore, that virtue theories ought to be countered with virtù theories – as advanced by Nietzsche, Arendt and Machiavelli – “that see politics as a disruptive practice that resist the consolidations and closures of administrative and juridical settlement for the sake of the perpetuity of political contest.” Virtù politics, she contends, will politicise virtue theories, making it possible for the remainders to expose the discrimination, normalisation and exclusion they experience. Thus, although throughout much of Political Theory Honig portrays virtue and virtù as opposing perspectives on politics she does not view them as distinct alternatives: she envisions virtù politics as a supplement to, an invigoration of, virtue politics.

What if virtue and virtù represent not two distinct and self-sufficient options but two aspects of political life? What if they signal two coexisting and conflicting impulses, the desire to decide crucial undecidabilities for the sake of human goods that thrive most vigorously in stable, predictable settings, and the will to contest established patterns, institutions, and

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2 Bonnie Honig, Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993: 2-3. From here on, the majority of references to Political Theory will be inserted parenthetically into the body of the text.
identities for the sake of the remainders engendered by their patterning and for the sake of the democratic possibilities endangered by their petrifications (p.201).

Indeed, she claims that

Politics consists of practices of settlement and unsettlement, of disruption and administration, of extraordinary events or foundings and mundane maintenances. It consists of the forces that decide undecidabilities and of those that resist those decisions at the same time. . . To reduce politics to only one side of these operations . . is to displace politics (p.205).

Honig is similar to Mouffe and Connolly, then; like them she contends, that liberalism as it is typically configured is violent toward a range of subjects that it classes as radically different. In particular, we have seen that Honig is especially concerned with the ways in which Rawls's liberalism subtly normalises and polices those who are “not evil, not intolerant, not criminal – just odd, the least well off, not economically, but socially” (p.149) – those “irresponsible rogues,” “idiosyncratic misfits,” “unlucky louts,” “bad characters” (pp.147-9) “fanciful fellows” (p.127) and other ‘remainders’ whose subjectivities diverge from deliberative rationality. Moreover, Honig is similar to Mouffe and Connolly as she argues that if these differences are to have spaces in which they can exist then liberalism needs to be reworked. Liberalism does not need to be overthrown but radicalised by the introduction of agonistic, virtù politics which will politicise the order and enable remainders to contest and resist the violence they experience, to negotiate spaces in which they can live differently.
However, in another respect Honig differs from Mouffe and Connolly. Whereas they are claiming the superiority of liberalism on the basis that, if suitably reformed, it enables difference to flourish, for Honig liberalism – particularly Rawls’s liberalism – is just one example of a virtue theory of politics that does violence to radical difference and that, consequently, must be countered with virtù politics. What really matters for Honig, therefore, is not so much liberalism as the politics of virtù. Agonistic contest has the same effect on communitarian orders as it does on liberal ones, making it possible for those categorised as radically different to resist and make space for difference. Thus, although Honig is reworking liberalism in a more politicised, agonistic manner, she is not a liberal in the same way as Locke, Mill, Rawls or even Mouffe and Connolly are; her principle concern is with the potential of virtù politics and political agonism.

Nietzsche, Machiavelli, Arendt

Honig pitches against liberalism the work of three virtù theorists, Arendt, Nietzsche and Machiavelli, claiming that their virtù politics provides an antidote to the violence toward remainders inherent within liberalism. She sees these thinkers as virtù theorists for two reasons. The first is the belief Honig identifies in each thinker, that any form of order is always partial, is always exceeded by forces, drives and desires that render the world multiple, changeable and contingent. As Honig puts it in relation to Nietzsche, for example,

> Atoms, the will, things in themselves – none is (antecedently) true; all are interpretations, impositional projections. If it can be said that the world has any total character, Nietzsche says it must be that it ‘is in all eternity chaos – in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a
lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms.\(^3\)

Similarly, "For Machiavelli," she notes,

the prince who possesses virtù is able to act suddenly, spontaneously, gloriously, and adaptively in anticipation of and in response to fortuna, his malicious, seductive, and worthy adversary in a political world that is contingent, unstable, unreliable, unpredictable, and unsystematic. Those who would seek political success in this world must emulate its qualities and make themselves adaptable to any contingency through the cultivation of virtù. Otherwise, their regimes will surely fall victim to fortuna.\(^4\)

Secondly, Honig sees these three thinkers as virtù theorists because of their responses to such contingency and multiplicity. Each theorist, in different ways, endorses political practices that do not attempt to fix or define the order of the self, society or the world but recognise its unfixability. As she puts it in relation to Arendt, for example, it is because of "her Nietzschean conception of the self as multiplicity and of identity as a hard won and not always well-fitting product of action" that "Arendt theorizes politics as an always unfinished business" and proposes a "virtù theory of politics, an activist, democratic politics of contest, resistance and amendment" (p.77). Indeed, she makes this point in relation to all three thinkers:


Whereas virtue theorists assume that their favoured institutions fit and express the identities or formations of subjects, virtù theorists argue that no such fit is possible, that every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering. It is for the sake of those perpetually generated remainders of politics that virtù theorists seek to secure the perpetuity of contest (p.3).

However, although Honig turns to Arendt, Nietzsche and Machiavelli for a virtù theory of politics, there is arguably a more specific vision that she is trying to evoke – a vision that does not correspond to any one of these thinkers' ideals. Through her detailed readings of these theorists Honig elaborates a particular vision of agonistic politics that provides channels through which divergent subjects can contest the violence of the liberal order and create spaces for difference. This vision, termed here 'political agonism,' is explored in the remainder of this section.

**Republicanism and Perpetual Contest**

First, Honig draws from all three thinkers the idea that republican institutions for perpetual contest and argument are crucial. The focus here is on how she does this through Nietzsche and Machiavelli, although her reading of Arendt will be discussed in this respect later. Honig begins with Nietzsche's essay 'Homer's Contest,' which, as we will see shortly, she compares with Machiavelli's republicanism.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Nietzsche's essay is cited directly here, rather than being discussed through Honig's interpretation of it, as 'Homer's Contest' is a crucial influence on agonistic thought and as such it is important to explore it in more detail than Honig does. We can thus see the points that Honig makes about it, in addition to other points that she does not stress as explicitly. This significance of this, moreover, will become clearer in the concluding chapter of this thesis.
'Homer's Contest' is one of the clearest statements on the value of the agon. In this essay Nietzsche writes that "When one speaks of 'humanity' the notion lies at the bottom, that humanity is that which separates and distinguishes man from Nature." But, for Nietzsche, "Man in his highest and noblest capacities is Nature. . . His abilities generally considered dreadful and inhuman are perhaps indeed the fertile soil out of which alone can grow forth all humanity in emotions, actions and works." He contends, however, that although in modern societies these kinds of instincts and passions are categorised as aberrations to be eliminated, the Ancient Greeks recognised that envy, spite, jealousy, anger and so forth cannot be eliminated, that they are natural, ineradicable traits. "Strife and the pleasure of victory were acknowledged; and nothing separates the Greek world more from ours."7

What matters for Nietzsche is not simply that the Greeks admitted that these passions are ineradicable features of humanity but how the Greeks reacted to this. First, Nietzsche claims that the Greeks responded to these traits by seeing contest as a valuable and positive activity. Just as Nietzsche contends in other works that great art and the noble character develop through struggle and competition, so he argues that, for the Greeks, "Every natural gift must develop itself by contest."8 Thus, in the Hellenic world "jealousy, spite, envy, incites men to activity but not to the action of war to the knife but to the action of contest." His point is that the Greeks did not see these traits "as a

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7 Ibid., 54.
blemish" but rather as a tool: if individuals seek to be the most articulate, the strongest, the most successful, then this will lead to contest, but that contest will enable those individuals to develop further. Secondly, though, Nietzsche values this contest because it has a broader social purpose: the Greeks utilised ambition, selfishness and contest for the good of the City. They did this, Nietzsche notes, by providing citizens with an agonistic education, by teaching citizens to be ambitious, envious and competitive. "To the Ancients," he writes,

the aim of the agonistic education was the welfare of the whole, of the civic society. Every Athenian for instance was to cultivate his Ego in contest, so far that it should be of the highest service to Athens and should do the least harm. It was not unmeasured and immeasurable as modern ambition generally is; the youth thought of his native town when he vied with others in running, throwing or signing; it was her glory that he wanted to increase with his own; it was to his town's gods that he dedicated the wreaths which the umpires as a mark of honour set upon his head. Every Greek from childhood felt within himself the burning wish to be in the contest of the towns an instrument for the welfare of his own town; in this his selfishness was kindled into flame, by this his selfishness was bridled and restricted.9

Indeed, Nietzsche continues, "without envy, jealousy, and contesting ambition the Hellenic State like the Hellenic man degenerates. He becomes bad and cruel, thirsting for revenge, and godless; in short, he becomes 'pre-Homeric' – and then it needs only a panic in order to bring about his fall and to crush him."10 So for Nietzsche there is an uncontrollable set of traits in humanity; rather than deny or attempt to domesticate these

9 Ibid., 55, 58-9.
10 Ibid., 61.
traits as Moderns tend to do it is better to channel them into agonistic contest, thus increasing individual excellences and securing the glory and longevity of the City. This means, finally, that he praises the practice of ostracism. In order to ensure that citizens continue to strive for excellence, in order to ensure that their "instincts" do not "turn inward" as he puts it in the *Genealogy of Morals*, in order to protect against the degeneration and ruin of the City, those who dominate the agon must be ostracised to provide a "stimulant":

The all-excelling individual was to be removed in order that the contest of forces might reawaken, a thought which is hostile to the 'exclusiveness' of genius in the modern sense but which assumes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses which incite one another to action, as much also as they hold one another within the bounds of moderation.11

Honig is keen to draw the political lessons of "Nietzsche's brief endorsement of the agon" (p.72). She does so through comparison with Machiavelli. Nietzsche endorses Homeric contest because it perpetuates contest and, "Similarly, Machiavelli endorses republicanism because of its unique commitment to the preservation of contest."12 More specifically, Honig notes that Machiavelli has a view of humanity not greatly dissimilar from Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, impulses such as greed, envy and spite cannot be

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11 Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest,' 57-8. The reference to instincts turning inward was discussed in Chapter 2, where Nietzsche makes a similar point to that expressed in 'Homer's Contest': if the ineradicable instincts of man are unable to "discharge themselves outwardly" then they will turn inward, causing ressentiment and degeneration. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufman. New York: Modern Library Classics, 2000: 523. Honig also notes the continuity between these essays (p.71).

eradicated. Similarly, Honig cites Machiavelli’s warning that “‘Human desires are insatiable.’ . . . They cannot be extirpated but they can be held in a creative and productive tension.” This creative tension is precisely what we find in a republic:

Were it not for their fear of being dominated by the nobles, the people would withdraw from politics, forego the freedom of political action, and forsake virtù to dedicate themselves wholly to their mundane, private pursuits. And were it not for the peoples’ active, political resistance to them, the nobles would put an end to all liberty, public and private, and impose a tyrannical rule on the republic. Because the nobles are always moved by their ambition to dominate the people, and the people moved always by their desire to secure their liberty, their struggle is perpetual. The perpetuity of their struggle, and the institutional obstacles to its resolution, prevent any one party from dominating and closing the public space of law, liberty, and virtù. Machiavelli’s republic, like Nietzsche’s Greek agon, ‘desires, as protection against the genius, another genius.’

For Honig, then, Nietzsche and Machiavelli (and Arendt, although we will come to her later) seek perpetual contest between subjects as “the tumult of the republic signals not disorder but good health and vibrant energy,” providing human, all-too-human desires with outlets (p.71). This does not mean that they seek this to the detriment of institutions and laws. On Honig’s reading they endorse republican institutions and laws, since they provide an institutional setting within which the perpetuation of contest can be guaranteed.

13 Honig, Political Theory, 70. See Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, Book 2, Preface, 125.
14 Honig, Political Theory, 70-1. At the end of this paragraph Honig here is citing Nietzsche’s ‘Homer’s Contest.’ See Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest,’ 58.
Nietzsche follows Machiavelli in looking to law as a potential solution for the perpetual disorder that threatens the condition of human community. . . This is an agonistic conception of law, a conception of law for a vital order dedicated to the preservation of the contest (pp.71-2).

"Like Machiavelli, Arendt believes that one of the points of politics is to found institutions that will last. And, like Machiavelli, she believes that republican forms of government are blessed with a longevity unmatched by other forms of political association (p.116).

Nietzsche and Machiavelli are not specific on the precise law and institutions needed. "This is, after all, a conception of law and institutions whose aspiration is deeply paradoxical: to promote Nietzschean virtù even as it insists on rousing enmity toward 'order, institutions, actuality'" (p.72). However, there are a variety of channels that a republic could use to guarantee the perpetuation of intersubjective contest: from local forums and elections, to regional and national policy-initiating referenda, possibilities for contesting and challenging the policies and practices of the media, financial organisations, companies, and legislation that ensures that demonstrations, civil disobedience and such like are protected from interference. The exact channels and institutions will depend on the specific order being contested; but republican institutions will create and defend channels for perpetual contest.

For Nietzsche and Machiavelli republican institutions and laws will guarantee perpetual contest, thus ensuring there are outlets for ineradicable human desires. For Honig, the importance of republican institutions and laws through which agonistic contest is guaranteed is more closely associated with divergent subjects. For, just as Nietzsche and
Machiavelli recognise that some citizens will always desire power and glory, as we have seen, Honig recognises that, because the world is pervaded by radical difference, there will always be divergent subjects, remainders, who experience the order as violent in some way. Her point, therefore, is that it is better to allow the shape of the order to be perpetually open to challenge, rather than to allow a single group, discourse or set of institutions to create a final ordering of society, since this will provide those who diverge from the order with legitimate channels through which they can contest the violence they experience, rather than forcing them to use alternative, illegitimate methods to resist. Thus, for Honig, the republican institutions that guarantee perpetual contest advocated by Nietzsche and Machiavelli are crucial, not for providing outlets for ineradicable human passions, but for providing outlets for ineradicable differences. As she explains:

To affirm the perpetuity of contest is not to celebrate a world without points of stabilization; it is to affirm the reality of perpetual contest, even within an ordered setting, and to identify the affirmative dimensions of contestation. It is to see that the always imperfect closure of political space tends to engender remainders and that, if those remainders are not engaged, they may return to haunt and destabilize the very closures that deny their existence . It is to see that attempts to shut down the agon perpetually fail, that the best (or worst) they do is to displace politics onto other sites and topics where the struggle of identity and difference, resistance and closure, is then repeated (pp.15-6).

The Radical Public Sphere

However, Honig is not content with the Nietzschean agon or the Machiavellian republic. She claims that republican institutions must permeate society, not simply exist in the formal political sphere or in relation to macropolitical issues. Whilst Nietzsche and
Machiavelli do not necessarily resist this idea, neither do they appear to promote it. Therefore, Honig turns elsewhere to theorise a radical public sphere in which agonistic contest and resistance proliferate throughout numerous areas of life. She undertakes a complex and contrary reading of "a political theorist who explicitly devotes herself to a virtù theory of politics that draws its inspiration from both Nietzsche and Machiavelli: Hannah Arendt" (p.74).

Honig begins by discussing Arendt's distinctive conception of action. Arendt distinguishes between the public and private spheres. The private sphere is the sphere in which people live the day-to-day grind of their lives. In this private sphere, the subject—who is a product of various contingent forces, of biological drives, discourses, laws and habits—is thoroughly determined, following rules dictated by these various contingent forces. The public sphere, however, is where action is possible. It is the sphere of interaction with others, the sphere where public decisions are made and resisted. Here change is always possible since the public sphere is precisely the sphere where subjects come together to contest and change those laws, discourses and habits that determine private life. The public sphere, therefore, is the sphere where the subject can act because she joins "together with others to bring 'something into being which did not exist before.'"\(^\text{15}\)

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Prior to or apart from action, the self is fragmented, discontinuous, indistinct, and certainly uninteresting. A life-sustaining, psychologically determined, trivial, and imitable biological

creature in the private realm, this self attains identity – becomes a ‘who’ – by acting in the public realm in concert with others (p.80).

Action of this kind is unpredictable. When subjects act together their actions bounce off one another, with diverse, sometimes volatile consequences. “Arendt’s actors risk the danger of the radically contingent public realm where anything can happen, where the consequences of actions are ‘boundless,’ uncontrollable, irreversible, and unpredictable.”16 Indeed, action is dangerous because the subject is constituted by multiple contingent drives and impulses that cannot be fully controlled, even in the public realm.

Arendt’s actors are never self-sovereign. Driven by the despotism of their bodies (and their psychologies) in the private realm, they are never really in control of what they do in the public realm either. This is why, as actors, they must be courageous. Action springs up ex nihilo, it is spontaneous, novel, creative, and, perhaps most disturbing, always self-surprising (p.80).

However, for Arendt, action is crucial because freedom lies in acting in the public sphere. Indeed, “to be free and to act are the same.”17 Moreover, public action is crucial for Arendt because, despite its dangers, it is only through public action that creativity, originality and individuality can be achieved – it is only by overcoming one’s impulses to conform to biology, law and discourse that one can become a ‘who.’ “Here, the reason to act is situated in action’s unique, individuating, (antidotal but still sui generis)

power, and in the self's agonal passion for distinction and outstanding achievement” (p.80). “In [Arendt’s] view, human beings denied the opportunity to exercise their world-building capacities live an impoverished life, a life that is somehow less than human, a life without freedom, without happiness” (p.12).

Action of this kind, however, can only occur in a public sphere which is not too regulated, where there is room for spontaneity, creativity, originality and world-building. Arendt, therefore, has serious “concerns about the displacement of politics in an age of modern bureaucracy, administrative politics and normalisation, an age of system.” Such displacements mean that there is less and less space for action in the modern world. “Too much order closes down the spaces of . . . politics” (p.116). It is because of her fear of excessive order that Arendt endorses republican contest. For Arendt, the possibility of action can be safeguarded through an ongoing contest that ensures all attempts to dominate or structure the public sphere are resisted, contested, subverted. Hence, “Arendt’s account of politics, law, and institutions is, like Nietzsche’s, devoted to the preservation of the contest. Like Nietzsche she admires the agon and seeks to protect it from closure, from domination by any one idea truth, essence, individual, or institution” (p.116).

However, on Honig’s reading, Arendt differs from Nietzsche and Machiavelli because she hints at a more radical republicanism, in which institutions and channels for contest permeate areas of life often considered private. This is interesting because Arendt is no theorist of micropolitics. She draws a clear distinction between private and public and strictly limits the issues that can be debated in the public sphere.
Her notoriously uncompromising public-private distinction protects the sui generis character of her politics by prohibiting the politicization of issues of social justice. According to Arendt, these sorts of occupations belong not to politics but to the traditional realm of the household as Aristotle theorized it. Issues concerning race, gender, ethnicity, religion are also barred from politics. These are private realm traits, on Arendt’s account . . . Her citizens might discuss constitutional issues . . . the rule of law . . . the terms of their mutual association, they will probably declare war and peace, and they may even address environmental issues (p.118).

But they will debate little else. Such a restrictive view of politics is problematic for Honig since many of the aspects of the liberal order that treat divergent subjects violently are not macropolitical but micropolitical – the normalising pressure on subjects to be rational and live a well-planned life, for example, or the interrogation and monitoring experienced by the grass counter. These forms of violence require contest within the ‘private sphere’; they cannot easily be contested through the formal institutions and laws of the republic. Yet Arendtian “disruptions of action seem to leave so much in place: god, capital, technology, gender, race, class, ethnicity – none of these is touched by Arendt’s politics” (p.118).

Fortunately, however, Honig contends, “Arendt’s politics beckons beyond itself . . . That is the most promising part of her politics: its unruly excess, its boundlessness, its transgressive impertinence, its spontaneous, local, emergences” (p.204). Although Arendt seeks to relegate certain issues to the private sphere and restrict the public sphere to contest over macropolitical issues, Arendt’s conception of action indicates that this
categorisation cannot be maintained. Firstly, action in the public sphere is unpredictable, it 'springs up ex nihilo, it is spontaneous, novel, creative, and, perhaps most disturbing, always self-surprising.' Political decisions and rules made in the public sphere, therefore, cannot be contained; they impact upon numerous areas of life that are not macropolitical. Rawls’s grass counter, for example, might seek to be left alone to live as he wishes but the unintended impact of the public conception of justice is that it creates subjects who police and normalise him; he cannot escape politics. “Often political action comes to us, it involves us in ways that are not deliberate, wilful, or intended, in ways that cannot be fully captured or captivated by agent-centred accounts” (p.120). As such any area of life could be political.

Secondly, if what characterises political action is that it enables subjects to work ‘together with others to bring something into being which did not exist before,’ then this kind action is possible in all areas of life. To work with others to resist gender or racial stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace, for example, or other forms of violence within the ‘private’ sphere, is precisely to try and bring something into being which did not exist before. And such action is particularly important once one sees that the public sphere can affect all areas of life, since this means that subjects must always be ready to act, to alter the effects of political action if necessary. To draw a distinction between the political and the private – to say ‘this’ is where we are autonomous and ‘this’ where we are heteronomous, to claim that ‘these’ issues can be debated and ‘these’ cannot – is not simply to overlook the possibility that politics will affect many of the issues that Arendt sees as ‘private,’ but also ignores this central insight into action. Thus, Honig rejects Arendt’s public-private distinction: “any reading of Arendt that takes seriously the
agonistic, virtuosic, and performative impulses of her politics must, for the sake of that politics, resist the a priori determination of a public-private distinction that is beyond contestation and amendment” (pp.118-9).

Instead she asserts that Arendt illustrates the pervasiveness of the public sphere, of the need for political action and contest in numerous spheres of life, and the need, therefore, to extend and radicalise republican institutions and agonistic contest, to create a more radical public sphere – one, perhaps, not that different from the ‘radical and plural democracy’ advocated by the ‘early’ Mouffe discussed in Chapter 5. This is not to say that “everything is political on this amended account; it is simply the case that nothing is ontologically protected from politicization, that nothing is necessarily or naturally or ontologically not political” (p.121-2). All areas of life might treat some violently and as such channels for contest might have to be available. We are thus “in a position to identify sites of political action in a much broader array of constations, ranging from the self-evident truths of God, nature, technology, and capital to those of identity, of gender, race, and ethnicity. We might then be in a position to act – in the private realm.”

**Political Agonism and Radical Difference**

Honig derives from Nietzsche, Machiavelli and Arendt a vision of political agonism which she suggests can be introduced into liberal orders. Political agonism will provide republican institutions and channels through which divergent subjects can engage in intersubjective contest, and laws which guarantee the perpetuation of this contest, all of

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which are intended to enable divergent subjects to resist and carve out spaces for difference. But this contest is not restricted to formal, macropolitical issues: political action can affect all aspects of life; as such, if subjects are treated violently outside the domain of macropolitics there are still republican institutions and channels available which they can use to contest this violence and create spaces for difference.

This vision, as seen already, is intended to supplement virtue theories, not replace them, to inject agonistic politics into orders such as liberalism that depoliticise the violence they do to radical difference. Political agonism cannot eradicate such violence from the liberal order. As we have seen, all orders have remainders, resistances, radical differences, that must be confronted. To "take difference – and not just identity – seriously in democratic theory," therefore, "is to affirm the inescapability of conflict and the ineradicability of resistance to the political and moral projects of ordering subjects, institutions, and values." However, political agonism can provide divergent subjects – the unlucky outs, oddballs, misfits, eccentrics and underachievers who experience deliberative rationality and the principles of justice as violent – with channels through which they can resist, through which they can negotiate spaces for difference.

Honig, for example, as we have seen, is critical of Rawls's *a priori* decision to punish and criminalise all those who deviate from the principles of justice on the basis that he "disempowers those (bad characters as well as others) who might seek to politicize the practice of punishment" (p.146). "Because of its pervasive, violent effects on human and

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political life, punishment is one of the most important sites of politicisation in any set of arrangements. Its rifts should not be sealed” (p.145) In a Rawlsian order invigorated by political agonism, therefore, those with contrary ideas about justice, whilst they would not be free to live as they wish, would have channels through which could contest practices of punishment – they would not be viewed as criminals to be punished, but as political opponents to be engaged with. Hence the task of her political agonism “is not to justify punishment so well that it is moved beyond the reach of politicization but to insist that, although justification is always a part of the practice of punishment, it is never seamless, never complete” (pp.145-6) Punishment, like the rest of life, would be open to contest and amendment. The “spaces of politics, power, and resistance . . . should be preserved, even aggravated, for the sake of the remainders of politics” (p.145-6).

The significance of this, for Honig, is not just that it provides subjects with a chance to challenge the violence they experience, to alter laws and policies, and create spaces in which they can live differently. It also means that these divergent subjects will be less likely to resist and subvert the Rawlsian order in violent, disruptive ways.

The renunciation of closure invites the articulation of resistances instead of branding them as antecedent irrationalities for which the system is not to responsible and to which it need not respond responsibly . . . it diminishes the propensity to self-loathing, vengeance, and violence (p.148).
Perpetual Contest, Politics and Ethics

Notably, though, unlike Connolly and Mouffe, Honig embraces a purely 'political' theory. We have seen that the other agonists discussed in this thesis also contend that the violence liberalism does toward radical difference must be countered by agonistic institutions and practices through which those differences can be expressed democratically. However, whereas Connolly and Mouffe claim that this ought to be accompanied by a certain ethos or commitment to a set of ethico-political principles so as to ensure that subjects are not fundamentalist or antagonistic, Honig stresses the importance of the proliferation of contest and resistance regardless of the ethos of the subjects involved. One reason for this is that, for Honig, defining the ethos subjects ought to adopt would transform her agonistic politics into a virtue rather than a virtù theory. It would, ironically, "assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with" (p.2); exactly the conceit for which she attacks virtue theories of politics in the first place. Moreover, for Honig, even if one wished to define how subjects behaved in political life such stipulations are impossible. When subjects engage agonistically, as we saw in her analysis of Arendt, they engage in self-surprising, unpredictable ways that cannot be pre-determined by the actors themselves, let alone by the others; thus contest and resistance cannot be directed, regulated or controlled. Agonistic negotiations must be political: "'wars of position' and amoral contests about the just and the good in which truth is always grasped as coterminous with power, as always already power, as the voice of power,' as Wendy Brown put it.
Honig’s principal reason for advocating a purely ‘political’ approach, however, is that if institutions and channels for contest proliferate, if republican laws ensure that all issues are potentially open to contest, if wars of position are ongoing, then this will make it possible for divergent subjects to politicise and contest discrimination they experience and to create spaces in which they can live differently. The “proliferation of political subjects and subjectivities . . . the continual augmentation and amendment of identities, subjectivities, and even sexualities,” she explains, “keeps the contest of identities going,” meaning, in turn, that no one group will be able to dominate political life and consequently remainders will always be in a position to resist the violence they experience (p.186). Indeed, Honig suggests that to do otherwise is foolish: “the always imperfect closure of political space tends to engender remainders and . . . if those remainders are not engaged, they may return to haunt and destabilize the very closures that deny their existence” (pp.15-6).

Honig thus refuses to advocate the ethos that subjects ought to adopt when they engage in public contest for the sake of the remainders of liberal politics – to ensure that those who differ are always able to make spaces for difference. For in refusing to legislate the kinds of subjects and subjectivities that the political agon requires, Honig can ensure that those various subjects who may be excluded from public contest and negotiations by Mouffe and Connolly because they do not conform to the ethico-political principles or the pluralist ethos, are able to engage in the political agon. She is able to ensure, more specifically, that those oddballs, misfits and others who experience violence within the liberal order will be able to engage in agonistic contest despite the fact that they do not adhere to some model of subjectivity. Honig thus envisions a perpetual contest between
differences, all of them engaging in different ways, not conforming to particular kinds of subjectivity, norms or principles. This perpetual political contest, she suggests, will allow divergent subjects to “open up new spaces for reflection, for dissent, perhaps even for the creation of *new relations and realities*” (p.210).

*Pluralism without Frontiers*

Perhaps the most startling implication of Honig’s political agon, therefore, is that it appears to refuse to exclude radically different subjects from the agon, even those who threaten the agon’s continuity; and Honig suggests, albeit briefly, that this is the case. As is perhaps clear from the analysis of Honig thus far, when she discusses radically different subjects in the liberal order she rarely acknowledges that they might be undemocratic, illiberal subjects seeking to close down the agon and restrict spaces for freedom. Instead, the radical differences with which Honig is most concerned are those that are troubling for the liberal order, but which are not excessively threatening: ‘oddballs,’ ‘eccentrics,’ ‘underachievers,’ ‘unlucky louts,’ ‘idiosyncratic misfits’ who are ‘not evil, not intolerant, not criminal – just odd, the least well off, not economically, but socially.’ These subjects are radically different in the Rawlsian order because they diverge from deliberative rationality, and they are subject to normalisation, policing and disapproval as a consequence, as we have seen; the political agon is intended to ensure that they can contest this violence and negotiate spaces to flourish. But she rarely discusses those other kinds of radically different subjects: the ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘enemies’ that Connolly and Mouffe consider, who seek to close down the agon or undermine liberal democracy.
She does, however, discuss them at one point, albeit briefly and rather indirectly; and in this discussion she suggests that political agon will not need to exclude these radically different, undemocratic subjects from contest. In a short outline (pp.70-3) of Nietzsche's praise for ostracism in 'Homer's Contest' she notes that “According to Nietzsche, it was for the sake of the contest that the Greeks practiced ostracism... It banishes those strong enough to dominate the agon in order to keep the agon open” (p.70). And she eventually returns to this subject in the conclusion to Political Theory, in relation to subjects who seek to dominate or undermine the agon. Here she makes clear that she see ostracism, and by extension exclusion, as anachronistic:

the agon is less easily protected in late modern times in part because it is less easily located and in part because it is threatened not by a single individual possessed of great force but by numerous, overlapping forces, some of which are hegemonic in their aspirations, others of which are simply the expressions of the human, all-too-human yearning for a freedom from politics or contest.20

Rather than endorsing the exclusion of those who threaten the continuity of the agon, Honig instead endorses political contest on the basis that 'wars of position' and 'amoral contest' will ensure that no single 'genius' can dominate or become hegemonic; instead, rival subjects and groups will balance one another. This is a risky strategy, but Honig wagers that the proliferation of contest and resistance will ensure that all perspectives will be contested: “politics never gets things right, over, and done with,” there is always

20 Honig, Political Theory, 209. It must be noted that Nietzsche does not see ostracism as a means of excluding subjects who might want to close down the agon. The practice that he supports is the ostracism of those who are all-excelling on the basis that their hegemony will inhibit the cultivation of excellences amongst others and ultimately lead to the degeneration of the City. The role of ostracism is “not that of a safety-valve but that of a stimulant.” Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest,’ 57.
the possibility of more contest; "The conclusion is not nihilistic but radically
democratic" (p.210). And in some respects Honig’s analysis appears accurate. If liberal
societies are characterised by a multiplicity of differences then there may be
innumerable different groups, subjects and organisations that might threaten the agon in
different ways. It would, therefore, prove very difficult to isolate who should be
excluded. Indeed, if, as we saw in relation to Connolly and Mouffe, divergent,
fundamentalist, undemocratic desires do not just stem from easily identifiable minorities
but are present in all subjects, this makes excluding radical differences an even more
complex, perhaps ultimately impossible, task, in which many intolerable differences will
be overlooked and many acceptable differences may be mistakenly excluded. Perhaps
engaging these radically different, human, all-too-human desires is better than trying to
exclude them.

Thus, as Mouffe suggests, Honig does appear to envision the possibility of “pluralism
without any frontiers,” of “a democratic pluralist politics” which considers “as
legitimate all the demands formulated in a given society."21 Honig clearly does not claim
that consensus and harmony can exist, that all the differences existing in the liberal order
can be reconciled. But she does claim that perpetual ‘political’ contest through
republican institutions can provide a means of enabling the radically different to evade
the violence they experience whilst simultaneously countering those who seek to destroy
the agon.

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2 Evaluating Political Agonism

However, although Honig's vision offers an interesting, daring account of how divergent subjects within liberal societies can contest and remove the violence they experience, there is likely to be much more violence toward divergent subjects in the political agon than Honig admits. Mouffe does not offer any kind of explanation, but she suggests as much when she claims that "postmodern thinkers who envisage a pluralism without any frontiers . . . pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all exclusions."22 This section provides a detailed outline of how Honig's political agonism actually conceals the ongoing violence toward those who are radically different that is likely in the political agon, both the exclusions on which the agon itself is reliant and the violence toward differences in the liberal order that the agon will inevitably fail to eliminate.

The Inescapability of Exclusionary Violence

We can identify the first kind of violence likely to emerge in Honig's vision by returning to her argument that political contest is sufficient to ensure that those radically different subjects who threaten the political agon cannot dominate it. The problem is that if radical differences are inescapable features of liberal orders then there will always be fundamentalists, dogmatic subjects, those with desires and goals that are resistant to, radically different from, liberal and democratic politics. By allowing all subjects to engage in contest and resistance, therefore, Honig sanctions political engagement and contest by subjects who may seek to dominate the agon, to close down political contest, to eliminate certain differences. It is precisely for these reasons that Connolly and

22 Ibid., 120. To reiterate the point stressed earlier, by 'some postmodern thinkers' it is fair to assume that Mouffe is referring to other agonists such as Honig and Connolly, although she is not explicit at this point.
Mouffe do not endorse a fully ‘political’ theory but instead seek to regulate political contest by ensuring that subjects engage in politics according to a certain ethic or ethos, and that those who are radically different, who are intolerant, violent or fascist are excluded.

Honig, as we have seen, does not deny the ineradicability of radical difference. Indeed, she is explicit about this, insisting not just that “dissonance and resistance mark all subjects” but “that every politics has its remainders” (p.147; p.3). When she discusses radical difference she is certainly more interested in oddballs, eccentrics, underachievers and others who diverge from deliberative rationality; indeed, her discussions of these characters distract us from the more threatening radical differences that might endanger the agon. But we have also seen that she does briefly discuss these latter subjects, acknowledging the possibility that those who want to undermine the agon will be present. But, she contends, it is better to engage these remainders than to exclude them on the basis that they can rarely be clearly identified and can be effectively countered through contest and argument.

However, what if there are radically different subjects who are easily identifiable? They may be subjects who are easily located because they refuse to engage with others in the agon and instead use alternative, violent, undemocratic methods. Or they may be identifiable because they seek to use agonistic contest so as to dominate and close down the agon. These subjects or groups surely cannot be tolerated. They do not adhere to the rules of agonistic contest, they do not seek democratic legitimacy, and often will not even engage in political contest but instead use other means to be heard. Like fascist or
terrorists groups, they do not engage through democratic institutions. As such, they cannot be effectively challenged or countered by other groups and subjects in the political agon. The only way to protect the agon from these subjects is to exclude them from any kind of political contest and to suppress them. Thus, although Honig provides a radically democratic rhetoric, claiming that political engagement and contest is an alternative to exclusion, actually some radically different subjects might have to be excluded from political contest, ostracised in Nietzsche’s terms, so as to keep the agon open. Her rhetoric conceals the need for such violence toward radical difference.

**Questionable Assumptions, Perpetual Inequalities**

We can perhaps excuse Honig’s concealment of this kind of exclusionary violence. For, as we have seen, Honig’s vision is not centred on these kinds of radically different subjects who reject the agon, but on the underachievers, oddballs, eccentrics and others who diverge from deliberative rationality and the principles of justice and are treated violently as a consequence. Her aim is to ensure that these subjects, not fundamentalists, have democratic channels available to them. And this, surely, is the overriding reason why Honig does not concern herself with whether subjects will accept or use the agon: her focus is providing oddballs and eccentrics with channels for political contest, and she assumes that these subjects will use the republican institutions provided to engage in contest.

This assumption is evident throughout Honig’s work, as we have seen. It is precisely because of this assumption that Honig endorses the agon, arguing that institutions and laws which create a framework for perpetual contest are needed on the basis ‘that
attempts to shut down the agon perpetually fail, that the best (or worst) they do is to
displace politics onto other sites and topics, where the struggle of identity and
difference, resistance and closure, is then repeated.’ It is because of this assumption that
Honig concludes her discussion of Nietzschean and Machiavellian republican
institutions by saying that, “If legitimate, institutional avenues of expression are not
available, instincts and ambitions will seek other avenues of expression, and the result
will be destabilizing conspiracies and the eventual overthrow of the regime” (p.71), the
implication being that if institutional channels are available then divergent subjects will
use them rather than seek other avenues. Honig, in other words, not unlike Mouffe,
recognises that differences will not be eliminated, but if there are republican institutions
then the differences can be channelled into them. Hence she says that “In the absence of
institutional sites, politics might well go underground” (p.122).

But will these republican institutions enable oddballs and underachievers to resist the
violence they experience in the liberal order, to politicise the normalising practices of
liberalism and create spaces for difference? There are good reasons for thinking
otherwise – for thinking that these divergent subjects will continue to be subject to the
assimilatory and normalising practices of the liberal order because the republican
institutions will actually prove wholly ineffective for them. Consider the following
contrast. In Connolly’s ethical agon, the whole of liberal society has been rhizomatically
reworked such that there is no longer a hierarchy in which the normal liberal individual
is perceived as the norm from which all other forms of subjectivity are perverse
deviations. Moreover, when subjects engage in democratic negotiations with one another
they do so in an open, respectful and responsive manner because they have to some
extent cultivated the pluralist ethos. As such, when oddballs, eccentrics and underachievers are involved in political debates other subjects do not view them as inferior; they listen to their concerns, demands and grievances, engage with their arguments and respond to their claims. The rhizomatic conception of society and pluralist ethos, in other words, lead to a degree of political equality between subjects, such that all subjects, even those who might be considered oddballs or eccentrics, are listened to by others and can therefore find political negotiations effective. 23

In Honig’s agonistic liberal order, by contrast, society is not reconceptualised rhizomatically or nonhierarchically; rather, the Rawlsian liberal order is still in place, meaning that the deliberative, rational individual is still portrayed as the normal subject and all others as deviations from this. Moreover, subjects have not endorsed any kind of ethos that leads them to engage respectfully, openly or responsively with those who differ; indeed, there is no ethos, no form of engagement required, and as such subjects can be as intolerant, dogmatic, unresponsive and prejudiced as they like in contests. As such, all the inequalities and hierarchies between subjects in the liberal order that stem from the implicit privileging of the normal, rational deliberative individual will also be present in the liberal order invigorated by political agonism. And consequently the kind of political equality that obtains in Connolly’s ethical agon does not obtain in Honig’s political agon. The oddball or the underachiever might attempt to use the republican

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23 This idea of political equality maps closely onto Carol Pateman’s more participatory understanding, in which “political equality” refers to equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions.” It differs significantly from the alternative understanding of political equality found in the work of ‘elite’ theorists of liberal democracy such as Schumpeter; as Pateman explains, for them political equality “refers to universal suffrage and to the existence of equality of opportunity of access to channels of influence over leaders.” Carol Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970: 43, 14.
institutions to contest the normalisation they experience but other subjects with whom he engages will continue to see him as strange, as lazy, as irrational— in short, they will continue to view him exactly as he was viewed in the Rawlsian liberal order. It is likely, therefore, that he will not be viewed as a subject worth listening to, engaging with, responding to. And consequently it is likely that using the republican institutions will be ineffective: they will not enable him to contest the violence he experiences or create spaces for difference; the violence he experiences in the liberal order will persist.

The radical reworking of liberalism evident in Connolly’s vision, then, creates a degree of political equality between subjects. Honig, by contrast, rejects the ethos and thus leaves the inequalities of the liberal order in place, meaning that divergent subjects are likely to find that they are unequal and unsuccessful in political negotiations. Of course, the pluralist ethos is not the only way to achieve political equality or to make effective use of republican institutions. Democratic theory indicates a range of interrelated attributes that enable subjects to use republican institutions effectively. Firstly, subjects can best use democratic institutions if they are capable of constructing cogent arguments: effectively explaining their grievances and problems, suggesting plausible alternatives, and so forth. This might entail following the ideas of political liberals and deliberative democrats and constructing arguments not only that others can understand but forwarding arguments that “they could not reasonably reject” as Rawls puts it.24 Or it

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might entail being persuasive, making good use of rhetoric. For as even Aristotle makes clear, those who are capable of powerful rhetoric can become demagogues; they bring their concerns "before the public assembly," and through persuasive argument and leadership convince the majority; thus, "while the people rule over all, they rule over the people's opinion, since the majority follow their lead." Quite likely, effective arguments will emerge from a combination of rhetoric and using arguments that others can accept.

Secondly, the ability to formulate cogent, persuasive arguments is largely dependent, in turn, upon the subject's education and political skills. The better education they possess and more accomplished at political argument they are, the more likely it is that the subject will be able to communicate clearly, logically, persuasively, intelligently and thus make their case convincingly. We might note in this respect that Nietzsche is aware of the need for a certain level of education and skills if subjects are to be able to use the institutions of the agon. Although Honig does not discuss this aspect of 'Homer's Contest', we have seen that Nietzsche praises the 'agonistic education' of the Greeks on the basis that it trained citizens, teaching them to engage in contest for the good of the city. The significance of education and political skills has also been stressed in an interesting way recently by Iris Marion Young. She insists not only that inequalities in
give arguments to which others cannot reasonably reject, claiming that this enables them to arrive at a consensus. The argument here for arguing thus is on grounds of expediency: if subjects give arguments others cannot reasonably reject then they are more likely to convince them and thus find the democratic institutions effective.

26 Indeed, as Iris Marion Young has indicated and as we will see shortly, the idea that arguments can be impartial and acceptable to all without also being couched in rhetoric is mistaken — the idea of an impartial argument is an impossibility. See Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 120-32.
27 Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest,' 58-60. This will discussed further in the concluding chapter of this thesis.
education lead to different abilities to formulate cogent, persuasive arguments, but also that what is perceived as an effective argument in liberal societies derives from specific institutional contexts of the modern west. . . they have been male-dominated institutions, and in class- and race-differentiated societies they have been white- and upper class-dominated. . . the norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people. 28

Forwarding convincing arguments does not simply entail having a certain level of education but also having a particular kind of education that enables one to argue in culturally acceptable ways.

Thirdly, and crucially, the effectiveness of democratic institutions and the possibility of political equality also depend upon the status of the subject. The subject's aim in engaging in political argument is to convince other subjects; as such, the way in which other subjects perceive them is fundamental to whether or not their concerns and arguments are listened to. Connolly's suggestion of a rhizomatic society and a pluralist ethos are intended precisely to reduce the hierarchies between subjects that exist in liberal societies. Moreover, as we have seen, Connolly also follows Rousseau and 'participatory democrats' such as Macpherson and Pateman in stressing that if equality in the status of subjects engaged in argument is to be achieved then, as Rousseau puts it, "no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell

28 Young, Inclusion and Democracy, 123.
himself— in other words, a level of economic equality is needed. Hence Connolly suggests that a condition of “robust democracy” is a level of material equality. This ensures that “everyone has effective standing as a citizen” and “each has the effective opportunity, should it prove attractive or necessary, to participate in the common life of the society.” Equal political skills, education, status and effective use of democratic institutions cannot be achieved, in other words, without a degree of economic equality.

Finally, effective use of democratic institutions comes most often from a further attribute not connected to political equality, namely, numerical size; those who are members of a large constituency are most likely to find democratic institutions effective regardless of their arguments, education, political skills and perhaps even status. This might not be the case in deliberative democracy, in which, at least in theory, the “unforced force of the better argument” ought to win. However, in agonistic contests, ‘wars of position’ between competing individuals and groups, numerical size is likely to be a significant factor. This, indeed, is one of Aristotle’s major objections to democracy. He fears (like Locke, it seems) that “If we take justice to be what is decided by a numerical majority” — as, for Aristotle, is the case for democracy — “they will act unjustly, confiscating the property of the rich and less numerous.” But the point is that those who are part of the majority are likely to find democratic institutions the most effective.

The political agon might not be invigorated by a pluralist ethos leading to a level of political equality that enables oddballs and underachievers to use republican institutions effectively, then, but if they have any or some of these attributes then they will be able to use the institutions effectively anyway and thus create spaces themselves. The problem is, however, that Honig is simply building republican, contestatory institutions into the liberal order; she is not suggesting any reforms in the way in which subjects are educated, develop political skills, or the way in which income and wealth are distributed. This means that many of the divergent subjects who experience violence may not possess some or all of these attributes. For if anyone is going to be unable to formulate cogent arguments, to have a good education or political skills, to have limited resources and not be a member of a sizable group then it is likely to be these divergent subjects who, precisely because they are perceived as odd, are on the margins of liberal society. Thus, it might be that the oddballs, underachievers, the unlucky louts and others that Honig discusses will actually be the least able to use republican institutions.

Consider Rawls's grass counter, the "nondeliberating subject" who spends his days counting blades of grass (p. 152). He experiences constant interrogation and policing by fellow Rawlsian subjects deciding whether he is acting rationally, asking him to justify his behaviour, monitoring him. Radical republican institutions provide channels through which the grass counter can resist this violence, through which he can make the claim that he should be left alone to count grass if he so desires. But in order for this to be

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34 This, of course, is not to say that she is expressly against such reforms. Nietzsche claims, as we have seen, that an 'agonistic education' is needed; Honig says nothing about this, thus neither affirming nor rejecting it. In terms of wealth distribution, she does not explore the possibility or see it as a condition of effective democratic politics, but Honig does claim that there "might be room in this virtù alternative for something like Rawls's difference principle" (p. 159).
effective the grass counter must formulate cogent arguments. Even assuming that the
grass counter is intelligent and well educated and therefore capable of doing so, he is
likely to be lacking in the other attributes that make for effective political engagement.\textsuperscript{35}
From the perspective of the normal, deliberating majority he has a very low status: he is
not seen as a democratic citizen worthy of listening to and engaging but as an oddball
who might have psychological problems and needs to be watched. Moreover, far from
being connected to a sizable group he is a loner. Thus, he is unlikely to possess the status
and the numerical strength that will enable him to convince others of his arguments. As
such, the political agon will not enable the grass counter to contest the violence he
experiences, to negotiate spaces in which he can live differently. The violence will
persist.

Similarly, consider Honig's discussion of politicising practices of punishment in the
Rawslian order. As seen, for Honig, practices of punishment ought to be open to public
contest. Bad character, unlucky louts, or those campaigning on their behalf, may
attempt to use the republican institutions to alter the violence they experience in the
liberal order; but like the grass counter, like other misfits, eccentrics and oddballs – and
like many outsiders, undesirables and others within contemporary liberal societies such
as gypsies, asylum seekers, Muslims or the mentally ill – they may find it hard to
formulate arguments, they may have little education and limited experience of political
engagement, and their arguments will quite likely receive little attention on the basis that
they are being advanced by or on behalf of criminals and deviants who reject the

\textsuperscript{35} We can assume this because, as Rawls says: "He is otherwise intelligent and actually possesses unusual
skills, since he manages to survive by solving difficult mathematical problems for a fee." See John Rawls,
principles of justice. Even the *Group d'Information sur les Prisons* established by Foucault in 1971 to provide information about the treatment of prisoners, especially political prisoners, and supported by many prominent French intellectuals including Deleuze and Sartre, was ignored by the French government and public, arguably for precisely the same reasons: it was campaigning for those with a minimal status, for those viewed as criminals, deviants and malcontents. Thus, Honig may call for a politicisation of practices of punishment, but in a liberal society such as Rawls's, in which those with divergent ideas about justice and punishment are treated as criminals rather than political opponents, these political engagements will quite likely be ineffective.

**Displacing Resistance**

However, it is not just that the political agon – by introducing institutions for agonistic struggle into a liberal order without also attempting to develop subjects' capacities for political engagement – continues to allow the liberal order to suppress and normalise divergent subjects. There is perhaps a more violent ramification of this still. For if agonistic institutions are delivered with the promise that they can be used to enable those who differ to challenge and cast off the violence they experience, but these institutions fail and divergent subjects continue to experience the liberal order as violent, then arguably these divergent subjects will resist. This idea is hardly anathema to Honig who has made it clear on numerous occasions that this is a danger: that if 'legitimate, institutional avenues of expression are not available, instincts and ambitions will seek

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other avenues of expression, and the result will be destabilizing conspiracies and the eventual overthrow of the regime'; indeed, 'In the absence of institutional sites, politics might well go underground.' However, for divergent subjects in the political agon the republican institutions are effectively absent: they do not provide the means for creating spaces for difference; on the contrary, they allow the violence they experience to persist. As such, perhaps these divergent subjects will seek other avenues of expression.

The ineffectiveness of the agonistic institutions, for example, may well fuel the grass counter's frustration with and resentment toward both the liberal order and the republican institutions. Honig recognises that the grass counter might react to Rawlsian subjects policing him. She therefore invokes Nietzsche, noting that:

There is little room here [in the Rawlsian approach to the grass counter], for example, for the Nietzschean 'spirit who plays naively – that is, not deliberately but from overflowing power and abundance,' a spirit who plays with blades of grass but also with things that are 'called holy, good, untouchable, divine.' Nietzsche's free spirit has an ideal but it is his own: he 'should not wish to persuade anybody' to it, he would not want to justify it, because he would not 'concede the right to it to anyone' and he demands the same courtesy in return. 'This is what I am; this is what I want: – you can go to hell!' he screams in protest. How would the well-meaning citizens, police-officers, and caseworkers of justice as fairness respond to the grass counter who spoke to them this way? 37

Honig uses Nietzsche to demonstrate that the grass-counter may well be angry and resentful of interrogation, demanding instead that he wants space to live as he wishes.

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However, imagine that the grass counter then tries to use republican institutions to carve out a space of freedom, but these also fail him. At this point the Nietzsche of *Beyond Good and Evil* might provide a better account of how the grass counter might react. Nietzsche suggests that when we are forced to live in unnatural ways, to sit “at tables where we did not belong,” we sometimes experience “after-dinner nausea” — “a mild, moderate, reticent person suddenly goes into a rage, smashes dishes, upends the table, screams, raves, insults everybody.”38 The trapped, frustrated grass counter might react in more radically different ways than just screaming in protest. Indeed, following Lacan or Žižek, after countless by-passers had stopped to question him and the democratic institutions have failed him, the grass counter might explode in resentful anger. His frustration and desire to be left alone might suddenly burst forth in the form of an aggressive, violent act against the latest questioner. The grass counter might thus ‘act’ in the Lacanian rather than the Arendtian sense, undertaking “an act of annihilation, of wiping out” the Rawlsian order that questions and polices him. This is not to say that the grass-counter will change anything, that he will be successful. But the point of the act is just to act, regardless of outcome, *against* the order: “not only” would the grass-counter not “know what will come out of” his act; “its final outcome is ultimately even insignificant, strictly secondary in relation to the NO! of the pure act.”39

Similarly, if the bad characters had sought to make themselves heard through republican channels which failed them then perhaps they will also engage in more radical acts of resistance. Honig appears to assume that the bad characters of Rawls’s order who want

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to contest punishment are 'unlucky louts' who reject Rawls’s principles of justice by favoring desert-based or utilitarian conceptions of justice, for example (p.147). But bad characters could also be subjects who have been treated violently by the policies and norms of the liberal order: by the normalising stress on achievement and success, on the well-planned, deliberative life, or they could be amongst “[t]oday’s ‘exceptions’ – the homeless, the ghettoized, the permanently unemployed” – who Žižek sees as the “symptom” of the liberal capitalist economy.40 These oddballs and exceptions might be frustrated by their claims, arguments and grievances being persistently ignored by the authorities and other citizens. But, crucially, because they have been treated violently by the liberal order, and because, following that, the institutional channels have been so unresponsive, they may attempt to resist the violence in radical ways.

The point is that the republican institutions of the agon are likely to fail the oddballs and bad characters that are treated violently by the liberal order. This not only means that they will continue to experience the violence of the liberal order, but it also means that, sick and tired of being excluded, judged, policed, normalised, and demonised for being divergent, these subjects might well resist in much more radical ways than Honig foresees. As such, perhaps more violence will be needed in the political agon so as to ensure that these frustrated, angry subjects do not undermine the agon. Thus, the oddballs and eccentrics, far from being provided with channels through which they can resist the violence that they experience, will actually have to be subject to more violence: violent assimilation and exclusion so as to ensure that they do not challenge

and undermine the liberal order or the political agon. Ironically, then, the failures of the political agon may turn the oddballs and differences who it was aimed to help into precisely the minority of subjects that threaten its continuity and must be violently silenced.

Conclusion

We saw in previous chapters that Connolly’s ethical agonism and Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism explicitly require subjects to cultivate ethico-political principles or a distinct ethos. Honig’s political agonism, by contrast, is less demanding. The liberal order needs to be reworked not by a radical new subjectivity but by a proliferation of republican institutions and channels. This will enable divergent subjects to engage in contest and open up new spaces in which difference can flourish. However, on closer examination Honig’s vision, her shift away from the ethical toward the political, obscures extensive violence toward radical difference. Although she suggests otherwise, those who threaten the longevity of the agon would have to be excluded from agonistic contest to protect the continuity of political agonism. Moreover, because political agonism is injected into a liberal order the divergent subjects – the oddballs and eccentrics – it is intended to help will be unable to use the institutions effectively as the hierarchies and inequalities of liberal order will still be in place. This not only means that these subjects will continue to experience violence but also means that they might resist more radically and explicitly and thus be subject to even greater violence. Thus Honig’s vision of divergent subjects engaging in contest and shaping the liberal order is illusory, concealing persistent violence toward radical difference.
Conclusions

*Behind the Illusion*

The aim of this thesis was to dispel the illusion that liberalism enables differences to flourish. It has therefore demonstrated that liberal political thought – from classical to radical variants – has ignored Hobbes’s insights. For Hobbes, the liberal order protects individual freedom and encourages subjects to live as they wish and compete with one another, but those who are too different, who are radically different, who challenge the legitimacy of the leviathan and the solidity of the people, cannot be tolerated: they must be subject to spectacular violence. Post-Hobbesian liberals emphasise liberalism’s capacity to enable differences to flourish; they justify and advocate liberalism on this very basis. But they ignore, conceal or obscure the limits of liberalism, the number of subjects who will be treated as radically different, who will not and cannot flourish in the liberal order, who, in fact, will be treated violently in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

More specifically, this thesis has demonstrated that the post-Hobbesian liberals examined justify liberalism on the basis that it enables differences to flourish, but in so doing they conceal the fact that they envision their liberal orders being populated by particular kinds of liberal subjects. Not just subjects who agree to abide by the law of the liberal order as for Hobbes, but subjects who also act and live in peculiarly liberal ways: who are rational, deliberative, individualistic, committed to the principles of liberal democracy, or even to a radicalised, pluralised version of liberal tolerance. Those who diverge from this, it has been shown, are treated violently. Sometimes post-Hobbesian liberals acknowledge the need for this violence, insisting that those who would use
liberal politics to subvert liberalism or harm others must be excluded from political debate. More frequently, however, subjects who diverge from the requisite form of subjectivity experience far subtler, unacknowledged forms of violence which exclude them from politics, silence them on certain issues, criminalise, normalise, pressure, police, monitor or control them. Thus, it has been demonstrated that these post-Hobbesian liberal thinkers present an illusion of difference, they claim that liberalism enables differences to flourish, but do not acknowledge that more subjects are categorised as radically different and are subject to violence than they make explicit.

Locke contends that limited government based on consent will free individuals from arbitrary power and allow them to live freely; but, although he admits that enemies must be dealt with violently, he subtly excludes the political views of the propertyless by categorising them as unreasonable. Mill argues that subjects can live as they desire insofar as they do not harm others; but fails to make clear that those who are not rational, deliberative individuals who free themselves from custom and tradition will be subject to normalising pressure. The ‘early’ Rawls forwards universal principles of justice so as to provide a framework within which subjects can pursue their own conceptions of the good; but he neglects the normalisation and policing experienced by misfits who diverge from deliberative rationality. The ‘later’ Rawls contends that the principles of justice ought to be arrived at via procedures that all reasonable people can accept; but he ignores the way in which these procedures, and what counts as reasonable, can only be established by excluding radically different subjects proposing alternatives. Mouffe channels differences into agonistic institutions so as to tame them; she recognises very clearly that subjects must develop appropriate ethico-political
principles and she admits that some might have to be excluded; but she underestimates the extent of exclusion, surveillance and normalisation that will be needed to maintain subjects’ adherence to these principles. Connolly argues for agonistic negotiations between subjects with a pluralist ethos; but he overlooks the normalising pressure to assimilate, as well as the dangers of blaming the failures of the agon on a small number of subjects who refuse the ethos. Honig proposes the proliferation of republican institutions through which subjects can resist the violence they experience in the liberal order; but, by failing to demand any conditions be met, she ignores the fact that these divergent subjects are likely to be unable to make effective use of these institutions.

These visions of liberal order are not, of course, equally violent. There are, firstly, significant differences in the number of subjects who are treated violently and the proportion of each subject’s life affected by this violence. In Locke’s order, for example, the majority of subjects will be considered unreasonable, treated as radically different from liberal subjectivity and have their political views excluded from consideration, and, because this exclusion means that these subjects can have no legitimate political involvement, it will affect a large portion of their lives. In the early Rawls’s vision, although most subjects will be self-policing, only those unlucky louts who reject the principles of justice or misfits who diverge from deliberative rationality will be excluded or normalised. This violence will, however, affect much of their lives: the grass counter is not excluded from political contest but is constantly interrogated and policed, whilst the unlucky lout is criminalised and punished. In Connolly’s vision, by contrast, violence is likely to be experienced by a far smaller number of subjects: those who fail or refuse to adopt the pluralist ethos and those who are pressured into cultivating it.
Moreover, the violence experienced by divergent subjects in Connolly's vision will only impact upon certain aspects of their lives. Some subjects might be forced to assimilate the pluralist ethos in respect to certain issues, they may be compelled to subdue certain desires on occasion, they may even be excluded from particular agonistic negotiations; but, unlike in Locke’s and Rawls’s visions, in Connolly’s liberal agon, a large proportion of subjects’ lives would remain untouched by the violence needed to maintain the order.

Secondly, there are also differences in the types of violence experienced by divergent subjects in these liberal orders. Hobbes and Locke, for example, contend that violence toward the radically different, especially those who are classed as enemies, must be extensive: they “may be treated as Beasts of Prey, those dangerous and noxious Creatures, that will be sure to destroy him, whenever he falls into their power.”¹ For Mouffe the liberal order will inevitably entail suppressing subjects advocating alternative discourses, and there will be ongoing surveillance and normalisation so as to maintain conformity to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy. For Connolly and Mill, although exclusions will be necessary, the violence of the liberal order will be significantly less intense than for Hobbes, Locke and Mouffe, principally taking the form of a normalising pressure on subjects to become rational deliberators or to cultivate a pluralist ethos.

There is, then, little doubt that the extent of violence relied upon by the liberal visions varies considerably, in terms of the number of subjects treated violently, the proportion of subjects' lives that are touched by this violence, and the types of violence that are used. Fundamentally, however, all of these post-Hobbesian liberal visions treat larger number of subjects as radically different than they acknowledge: there are always more subjects who experience violence because they diverge from the model liberal subject than these theorists admit. We can conclude, therefore, that in claiming that liberalism enables individual freedom and difference to flourish, these liberals present an illusion, concealing the full extent of violence toward difference within it. There are a number of implications that stem from this conclusion.

**The Real of Liberalism**

First, arguably the illusion of difference is not simply presented by the liberal thinkers examined in this thesis but in liberal political thought more generally. For although this analysis has focused on a small number of liberal thinkers they nevertheless represent quite different versions of liberalism, from mid-seventeenth century classical liberalism to twenty-first century 'militant' liberalism, and it has been shown that extensive violence toward difference is inherent to each. The thesis has focused particularly on radical liberal theorists who explicitly aim to deal with the violence experienced by divergent subjects, and it has demonstrated that even their visions continue to treat more subjects as radically different and in need of violent assimilation or exclusion than they admit. Whilst we have not observed that *all* theories of liberal political order are violent toward divergent subjects, then, we have seen numerous liberals, even those that begin by recognising this dynamic, present an illusion of difference behind which is extensive
violence toward those who are categorised as radically different. We can perhaps extrapolate, therefore, to suggest that the illusory nature of the claim that liberalism enables differences to flourish does not just apply to the thinkers examined here but to liberal thought more broadly.

Indeed, we might go further than this and suggest that violence toward radical difference is in some ways equivalent to the Lacanian Real of post-Hobbesian liberalism. The Real, as Stavrakakis says, "resists symbolisation – this is the definition of the real."\(^2\) The Real is that which is excluded from the imaginary-symbolic order; which, precisely because of this exclusion, cannot be symbolised, articulated or expressed from within that order. But, paradoxically, the Real is also constitutive of that order, since without the foreclosure of certain phenomena from the imaginary-symbolic order any kind of coherent or solid order would be impossible. The Real is thus a troubling, unsettling core at the heart of the order that cannot be articulated but without which it would crumble. Violence toward difference is not the impossible Real of liberalism – it can be articulated, experienced and identified. But it occupies a similarly paradoxical position within liberal political theory.

For as we have seen, liberal political orders have to violently assimilate or exclude those subjects that cannot or will not adopt a liberal form of subjectivity – whether that is liberal subjectivity based on rationality, individuality, the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy or a pluralist ethos. Without this kind of violence the liberal political orders advanced would be constantly threatened by those who diverge from them, they

would be in danger of disintegrating. As Douglas puts it, "any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces." Violence toward radical difference is thus constitutive of liberal political orders. On the other hand, though, the justification and appeal of liberal conceptions of political order is the claim that liberal societies enable difference and individuality to flourish. As such, liberal political theorists cannot articulate the full range of subjects who must be treated violently in their visions. If they were to do so – if they explained that the violent assimilation and exclusion of numerous subjects is fundamental to maintaining the liberal society – then the very justification and appeal of their vision would be undercut. It could no longer be offered as the form of order in which difference and individuality can flourish – hence post-Hobbesian liberals cannot articulate this violence, instead concealing it behind an illusion of flourishing diversity, as we have seen repeatedly throughout this thesis. Thus, like the Real, violence toward difference is constitutive of liberal visions but must remain unarticulated.

'Real' Liberalism

The conclusion that liberals present an illusion of difference behind which subjects are treated violently is of more than just theoretical significance however. If liberalism's claim to enable difference to flourish is illusory it is not just liberal theories that are in question; so are existing liberal societies. Liberal societies, like many liberal theories, are explicit about some of the differences that they cannot tolerate. Those who oppose liberal democratic principles and ideals – fundamentalist religious groups, neo-Nazi and

fascist organisations, or animal rights groups that use violent intimidation, for example — are frequently explicitly categorised as radically different, as intolerable, and excluded from legitimate political contest in liberal societies, often by being criminalised and imprisoned. However, the analysis undertaken in this thesis indicates that perhaps other subjects in liberal societies who are not anti-liberal or illiberal but do diverge in some way from liberal ideals of subjectivity also experience violence, but violence of a much subtler kind.

In recent years, for example, the right of Muslim women to wear the *niqab*, or full veil, has been increasingly questioned in liberal democracies across Western Europe. There are undoubtedly a variety of interconnected reasons why this suspicion has emerged — 9/11, rising Islamophobia, the media, stereotypes suggesting that women are forced to wear the veil. But another reason is that the liberal order can only tolerate diversity in dress insofar as it is not perceived to challenge any of the principles of liberalism, insofar as different styles of dress remain as politically and symbolically insignificant as "the multitude of 'ethnic cuisines' in a contemporary megalopolis," as Žižek puts it. But choosing to wear the *niqab* is perceived as significant, it is perceived to challenge liberal subjectivity in a variety of interrelated ways: it appears to contradict the Millian sense

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4 This is particularly the case in Britain and the Netherlands, typically viewed as two of the most 'liberal' countries in Western Europe. In Britain, in 2006, senior government ministers initiated and fuelled a debate on the place of the *niqab* in British society, whilst in the Netherlands women were banned from wearing the *burka* in schools in 2003, the debate about this resulted in 2005 in an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt in parliament to legislate a universal ban of the *burka*, and this ban became a major issue again in the run-up to November 2006 elections. Moreover, many of the arguments that are occurring in other European countries — Austria, France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, amongst others — about the *hijab* are now turning to the issue of the *niqab* and *burka* too. For a brief overview of this increasing controversy see 'Muslim Europe,' *The Guardian*, 21st October, 2006, available at http://education.guardian.co.uk/raceinschools/story/0,,1929207,00.html.

5 Slavoj Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,' *New Left Review* I, no. 225 (September-October 1997): 37.
that freedom ought to entail detaching oneself from custom, tradition and religion, not
affirm them; it is often perceived as symbolising female oppression, patriarchy and the
lack of women’s rights; and it is frequently viewed as a “visible sign of separation,” a
sign that the wearer does not consider herself a part of the liberal community, the
‘people’. Whether or not citizens of liberal democracies are right to see wearers of the
*niqab* as challenging liberalism thus is an open question. But the point is that the *niqab*,
whilst it is not viewed as specifically anti-liberal, is *perceived* to challenge liberal
subjectivity in various ways. Muslim women are, therefore, argued to be in need of
assimilation, whether through education, social pressure or legislative power, since the
*niqab* is seen a difference too far, as a radical difference that exceeds the constraints of
liberal subjectivity.

Moreover, there are various other subjects and minorities in existing liberal democratic
societies who are not anti-liberal or illiberal in any sense, but experience similar forms
of assimilatory and exclusionary violence, and perhaps this violence also stems, at least
partly, from the fact that they seem to diverge from liberal ideals of subjectivity: gypsies
are subject to abuse and live in poverty because they will not assimilate into the
‘people’; those with mental health problems are looked down upon, are figures of fear,
because they cannot live the rational, well-planned lives of liberal subjects;
underachievers are judged failures because they cannot plan ahead and make deliberate,

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6 In Britain, for example, Ali, forwards the former two reasons as to why women ought not to wear the
veil, Toynbee proposes the second reason, whilst senior politicians such as Jack Straw present the third.
See: Ayaan Hirsi, Ali, ‘Muslim women are the key to change,’ *The Sunday Times*, 29 October 2006; Polly
Toynbee, ‘Only a fully secular state can protect women’s rights,’ *The Guardian*, 17 October 2006. For
Jack Straw’s comment that the *niqab* is “a visible sign of separation” See Jack Straw, *The Lancashire
Telegraph*, 5th October 2006 or his comments on *Today*, 6th October 2006, interview available at
http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/.
purposive choices about their future; those who are socially awkward are looked down upon because they unreflectively make difficult company; those racked by identity-crises about their sexuality or gender, say, are seen as misfits, as being unable to work out who they are. All of these subjects, amongst others, are treated violently in existing liberal societies in subtle ways. And whilst this violence surely stems from a variety of sources – from the capitalist economy, for example, or xenophobia, discrimination, and cultural norms present within real liberal societies – one such source is surely liberalism itself, which puts subtle, unacknowledged normalising pressures on subjects to conform to a certain model of subjectivity and treats violently those who fail.

**Clarity and Candour**

Perhaps a further implication of this analysis, therefore, is that if liberals are to avoid deceptively presenting an illusion of difference then they ought to be more candid. For Schmitt, the “high points of politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy.”\(^7\) Hobbes reaches such a high point, clearly acknowledging precisely who is too different to be tolerated and admitting that significant violence will be required to ensure that they do not trouble the order. Arguably post-Hobbesian liberals ought to follow Hobbes and Schmitt here, by recognising in concrete clarity and making explicit who will be viewed as radically different and treated violently within the liberal order. In so doing liberals will reveal the limits of liberalism – the forms of difference that it subtly prohibits and curtails. But, precisely because of this, they will also make it possible to evaluate how far violence

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toward these radical differences is justified, to consider whether the maintenance of their liberal ideal is worth the violence done to divergent subjects — or whether, in fact, it requires too many subjects to be assimilated and excluded to be defensible.

This kind of candour, however, will significantly alter the nature of liberal discourse. As we have seen repeatedly, liberals justify and promote liberalism through the claim that it enables diversity to flourish. To acknowledge the full extent of violence toward difference within it, therefore, would significantly undermine the justification for liberalism. Indeed, if violence is similar to the Real of liberalism, as has been suggested, then once it is revealed, the gaps and fissures within and limits of liberal discourse will become clear in the same way that the occasional “nightmarish apparitions” of the Real expose the unsutured nature, the limits — the impossibility — of the imaginary-symbolic order.  

It may, therefore, no longer be feasible to suggest that liberalism enables difference to flourish; liberals will have to admit that liberalism enables certain forms of difference to flourish, but not others; that these others are actually subject to violence. Liberals may, in fact, have to generate new justifications for liberalism, decoupling it from diversity and difference altogether. There are many possibilities. But the point is that if liberals want to avoid presenting an illusion — and there is an if here, given what is at stake — this may require them to significantly alter the way in which they present and justify liberalism.

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This candour is particularly important for the radical agonistic thinkers. They admit the impossibility of a society without remainders and seek to deal with the way in which liberalism is violent toward divergent subjects. Indeed, they contend that “it is very important to recognise those forms of exclusion for what they are and the violence that they signify, instead of concealing them,” as Mouffe puts it; they ought, therefore, to be more explicit about the extent of violence within their visions.⁹ For Mouffe and Connolly this requires acknowledging that subjects will be permitted to contest and negotiate their differences only if they adopt a certain form of subjectivity and that those who diverge too far from this will have to be excluded. It requires admitting that excluding those who are radically different will be difficult because a multiplicity of subjects will diverge from the ethos in different ways at different times; as such, huge numbers of subjects – perhaps on occasion the wrong subjects – will be excluded from certain contests and any focus on fundamentalist minorities will make them into scapegoats. And it requires admitting that maintaining the kind of pluralist ethos or commitment to the respublica required will necessitate extensive assimilatory violence: monitoring and normalising subjects to ensure they comply, or, for Connolly, putting a normalising pressure on subjects to conform. In other words, these more ‘ethical’ agonists must admit that, because they want their agonistic visions to be populated by particular kinds of subjects, their radicalised, reworked liberalism comes at a price, namely, extensive violence – far more of it than they currently acknowledge.

The strength of Honig’s political agon lies in not requiring subjects to conform to a particular model of subjectivity which, as seen for Mouffe and Connolly (and other

liberals), requires more extensive violence than proponents are willing to admit. The political agon thus avoids much of the violence toward divergent subjects found in other versions of agonistic liberalism. However, Honig simply introduces the agon into existing liberal societies. She needs to acknowledge the violence that stems from doing this: from the way in which all the inequalities, hierarchies and violence of the liberal society it is intended to challenge, are simply transferred onto the agon, meaning that those who diverge from norms of liberal subjectivity are unable to use the agon effectively. Perhaps most important for Honig, therefore, is the need for an explicit consideration of the conditions for an effective political agon. There are, of course, numerous possible conditions, some of which were discussed in Chapter 7. However, two in particular presented themselves.

Firstly, because divergent subjects are likely to be those who have only limited education or social skills – oddballs and misfits, eccentrics and underachievers – it is surely crucial that citizens of the political agon have a certain level of education and political skills and, indeed, are ready and willing to engage in political contest. There are various ways in which this might be achieved, but one approach is that subjects ought to be given what Nietzsche calls an ‘agonistic education,’ in which children are educated by “struggling against one another” in such a way that they not only develop their competitive skills and desire for victory but also inculcate commitment to and pride in the City: an agonistic education meant that “Every Greek from childhood felt within himself the burning wish to be in the contest of the towns an instrument for the welfare of his own town; in this his selfishness was kindled into flame, by this his selfishness
was bridled and restricted." Moreover, perhaps if the political agon is to enable divergent subjects to contest violence and create spaces for difference then a second condition might have to be met: that of greater economic equality. For as seen, subjects need to have relatively equal status if those who diverge are to have any chance of convincing other subjects of their arguments. One way of equalising status is by ensuring that all subjects endorse a pluralist ethos, as we find with Connolly. But a more political approach – which does not require subjects to cultivate a new form of subjectivity – is to create greater material equality. This will not guarantee that subjects will have equal status when they engage with one another through the agon. After all, many of the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in liberal societies stem from the ways in which subjects diverge from the liberal model of the rational, deliberative subject, and these are precisely the inequalities that the political agon itself is intended to enable subjects to contest. However, reducing material inequalities will contribute toward equalising the status of subjects, as we have seen. It helps ensure that “everyone has effective standing as a citizen” and that “each has the effective opportunity, should it prove attractive or necessary, to participate in the common life of the society.”

If these conditions were introduced perhaps the oddballs and misfits of liberal society would be able to make more effective use of the political agon and create spaces for difference. Violence would not, of course, be eliminated. The status of subjects is never likely to be equal, and there will always be some subjects who refuse to respect the agon. Moreover, these conditions themselves cannot be introduced without remainder.

An agonistic education might create more politicised, competitive citizens and enable divergent subjects to use republican institutions effectively, but it may silence various other impulses in subjects – conformity, passivity and so forth – and conflict at various points with liberal ideals of citizenship and education. Similarly, economic equality conflicts with liberalism’s use of capitalism as a way of taming individuals’ passions and could only be imposed through a coercive project that significantly altered the relation between capitalism and liberalism. Thus, if these conditions were met oddballs and misfits might be better able to use the agon, but they, and others, would still experience violence. However, Honig does not consider these conditions, or examine the ways in which liberalism must be reformed so as to meet them. And her failure to do so means that she conceals the way in which the political agon results in divergent subjects continuing to experience violence because they deviate too far from liberal subjectivity.

*The Return of the Real*

Liberals, then, ought to acknowledge the full extent of violence toward difference within their visions – both because this enables us to consider whether such violence is justified and because, for Honig at least, once we acknowledge the presence of violence we may be able to consider further conditions that might limit it. However, there is an additional, more tangible – and for liberals far more compelling – reason why they must desist from presenting an illusion and acknowledge the full extent of violence toward radical difference within liberalism.

Whilst the central argument running through this thesis has been that liberalism treats divergent subjects violently, what has also been clear in the work of many of the
theorists considered is that when radical differences are suppressed, normalised, domesticated, assimilated, marginalised or excluded they do not disappear but re-emerge, often in surprising and unpredictable ways. We saw in Chapter 2, for example, that for Lacan, “what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real,” and that for Foucault “Where there is power, there is resistance.”12 We have seen that for Schmitt “Liberalism negated the political; yet liberalism has not thereby eliminated the political from the face of the earth but only hidden it.”13 We have seen that for Hobbes, Nietzsche, Mouffe and Honig ineradicable passions, instincts or differences can never be suppressed; attempts to do so simply displace them into other areas. We have seen that even for Locke “The People generally ill treated, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavily upon them.”14 And Hardt and Negri concur: “the will to be against . . . does not seem to require much explanation. Disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts. To us it seems completely obvious that those who are exploited will resist.”15

We have seen, in short, that violence toward radical difference will always fail: attempts to exclude or assimilate differences will produce resistances in new, perhaps surprising, ways. And this matters because if liberalism is always violent towards radical differences then it will generate and constantly be confronted by new, unexpected forms of resistance. These may often be limited kinds of resistance: recalcitrant drives,

14 Locke, Two Treatises, 415.
excessive urges, subversive desires, sometimes explicit acts of contest and protest, more rarely still, act of disobedience, rioting and violent retaliation, all of which unsettle the liberal order. But perhaps, as the violence experienced by divergent subjects continues unabated, as it becomes clear that this is not an unfortunate side-effect but integral to maintaining liberal order, as it is realised that the liberal claim to allow difference to flourish is illusory, then perhaps these divergent subjects who experience this violence will resist in a more dramatic and spectacular fashion – in a way that does not simply unsettle the liberal order but undermines it.

This possibility is discussed by Žižek. He argues, in a similar vein to Mouffe, that political contest within liberal democracies is minimal, that there are no widely supported alternatives to the current hegemony of neo-liberalism, and, indeed, that “Apart from anaemic economic administration, the liberal-democratic centre’s main function is to guarantee that nothing will really happen in politics.” However, his contention is not that the liberal democratic order needs to be radicalised, as Mouffe suggests, but that it ought to be destroyed. His point is that, given the lack of possibilities available to subjects of liberal democracies, they have little choice but to engage in a “radical political Act as the way out of this democratic deadlock.” An act, of course, is unaccountable and dangerous:

an Act always involves a radical risk, what Derrida, following Kierkegaard, called the
madness of a decision: it is a step into the open, with no guarantee about final outcome ....

16 Slavoj Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, 135-54.
The Act occurs in an emergency when one has to take the risk and act without any legitimization.\textsuperscript{17}

Whilst we need not sympathise with Žižek's suggestion that a radical act that breaks with the liberal order is the best or only way of removing it, his argument does indicate why the violence of the liberal order might ultimately lead to its own destruction.\textsuperscript{18} For if the liberal order consistently treats divergent subjects violently, if it forcibly assimilates subjects into or excludes them from it, then many of these subjects might become increasingly frustrated and desperate. It is thus feasible that they will reach the point at which it is better to step into the open and act, to attempt to destroy the violent liberal order and establish an alternative, than remain within it. This revolt might be dangerous or ineffective. But this "risk has to be assumed" if the existing order is to be subverted\textsuperscript{19} – and divergent subjects, treated violently by a duplicitous liberal order, may well happily bear this risk.

Perhaps the major implication of this thesis, therefore, is that liberals must reveal those subjects who are subtly classed as radically different and treated violently within the liberal order, not just because candour is important, but because failure to do so endangers liberalism. For just as Marx recognised the contradiction inherent to capitalism, that "What the bourgeoisie . . . produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers," this thesis has indicated that liberalism produces its own grave-diggers.\textsuperscript{20} By

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 151-3.
\textsuperscript{19} Žižek, \textit{Welcome to the Desert of the Real!}, 154.
assimilating and excluding subjects, by treating violently those who do not adopt a liberal form of subjectivity, and by concealing the extent of this violence behind an illusion of flourishing difference, liberalism might generate alienated, excluded and angry divergent subjects who could ultimately be pushed to engage in a radical act of resistance, a "shattering ethico-political act," that destroys the liberal order. It is not just, then, that liberalism has violence toward difference at its core, but also that it may contains the seeds of its own destruction.

21 Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, 66.
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