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The Philosophy of 9/11:
A Critical Analysis of the Main Debates

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Alle mie nonne,

Dora e Lucia

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History, we are told, is discourse. There is no understanding it unless we understand the language in which people think, talk and take decisions. Among the historians tempted by what is called “the linguistic turn” there are even some who argue that it is the ideas and concepts expressed in the words characteristic of the period that explain what happened and why. . . . But unless the facts themselves change, no amount of changing names changes them.

—Eric J. Hobsbawm

Introduction

Any discussion of 9/11 risks being futile at this historical juncture, and must probably take good note of the fact that nothing new or especially noteworthy can be said. The United States has now elected a new president, who in the eyes of many both at home and abroad represents a veritable “new hope.” The election of Barack Obama following the two George W. Bush mandates is arguably the clearest signal that most Americans feel their country can no longer afford to hold the same perception of itself as that which has gained primacy in the military aftermath of the attacks. The judgment that the 2008 election has implicitly passed on American unilateralism seems to me to be so self-evident as to call for no particular elaboration. If nothing else, the current economic crisis, with the unchangeable force of material facts, has helped Americans refocus their priorities, and has forced them to think of defending their own freedom and wellbeing in more moderate and realistic ways. Whether, and to what extent, this initial hope and goodwill will be fulfilled is of course a matter for history to determine.

That nothing new can be said, however, is reason good enough to return on what has been already said. It will be thus made apparent, perhaps, that nothing genuinely new had really been advanced in the first place, and that the wars that have been fought in response to the attacks have largely been supported or opposed for quite irrelevant reasons. This, in a way, will be the object of the present work. I regard what follows as an extension of my early interest in the philosophy of law, though it does not much rely on legal doctrines and principles. It is, rather, a student’s modest attempt to capture philosophically what I deem to be the basic political import of September 11, 2001, by touching upon issues of rationality, natural versus positive rights, and the like. As both law and politics have as their subject matter the existence of communities in need of regulating themselves by means of law and government, political philosophy and the philosophy of law are bound

to ask very similar questions, ultimately questions about some vision of the human condition in the human consortium. From this standpoint, 9/11 can be thought of as a case study that provides general insight into the ancient and labyrinthine complexities of social action.

This study can make no pretense at completeness; its purpose is merely to focus attention on some key philosophical issues and debates that have been raised in connection with the terrorist attacks on the United States. It announces itself as a *critical* analysis because my argument will emerge mainly in the form of criticism, and will be largely guided by the theories and thinkers I have selected. These come from the most varied quarters, not only philosophy but also history and cultural studies, and the reader may be somewhat perplexed to find so different theoretical approaches taken up in the same text. Notwithstanding the obvious difficulties, and in line with my basic intuition, I have nonetheless tried to expose the various underlying assumptions about the nature of human selves, and consequently of human society, that can be found in all said theories.

This essay is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to an analysis of 9/11-type terrorism, and discusses what have been usually taken to be its distinctive characteristics. The most influential analysis of what has been described as the “new terrorism,” largely reflected in the Bush doctrine, is treated at some length. This discussion is necessary to isolate some conceptual mistakes that have guided the American military response. It will also call attention to the inherently political character of all forms of terrorism, of which 9/11 is but an instantiation. This is the most technical and empirical chapter in the essay, and will provide a convenient and solid, if invisible, outline for the ensuing analysis.

The second chapter considers extensively the controversial readings offered by Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek, and reviews them as examples of radical cultural critiques rooted in Marxist interpretations variously linked to the famous work of Theodor W. Adorno. I have called

these readings “intrinsic,” for they see terrorism as a cultural phenomenon to be comprehended solely in its adversarial relationship to the liberal-democratic order it attacks. This is the less scientifically grounded, and more polemical part of the essay, and will provide an entirely different perspective from the previous chapter.

The third chapter attempts an ethical and political synthesis by discussing 9/11-type terrorism and debates about the future of the modern project of liberal democracy as parts of political discourse more at large. I will focus in particular, but not exclusively, on Giovanna Borradori’s interviews with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, which will also allow me to spend a few cautionary words on European integration and what it can tell us about 9/11 and the nature of politics. Against these thinkers, I will defend a moderate reading of Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* which moves in a direction compatible with Joseph Margolis’s valuable, if overlooked, *Moral Philosophy After 9/11*. This is the most politically sensitive part of the essay.

These three chapters, although rather diverse in scope, are systematically related. My intent has been that of seeking a viable internal explanation for 9/11 as a political act—as an act, that is, which calls for concrete policy choices in protection of concrete political interests. Broadly put, each chapter addresses, respectively, the following questions: How and why should 9/11 terrorism be considered as an inherently political phenomenon? What, if anything, does it tell us about the nature of our Western societies, and the U.S. in particular? How are we best equipped to conceptualize our political stance in order to respond to it? Ultimately, these questions, and the answers I will put forth, aim to offer a pragmatic and constructivist reading of terrorism and of how thinking of it in strictly political—as opposed to overly idealistic, as is usually the case—terms can illuminate wiser ways to face it. Lastly, some final thoughts are offered in the conclusion.

Prof. Michele Nicoletti supervised my work with great attention and much appreciated professionalism. His comments and criticisms helped me to make my argument (hopefully) clearer. In the initial phases of my research, I benefited greatly from conversations with Andrea Bellavita, who provided generous guidance. Their kindness has greatly enhanced this dissertation. Any remaining errors of fact and interpretation, as well as the views expressed, are entirely mine.

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1. Toward a Terrorist Enemy

In this chapter I will be centrally concerned with definitional matters. My primary intent will be to isolate some causes of theoretical confusion on the concepts used to describe, and consequently mobilized to guide practical responses to, the terrorism of September 11. The most explicit question will involve a first generic appraisal of the terrorist event itself. From the start, it will have to be decided whether 9/11 presents us, as is often claimed, with drastically new ways of understanding “our world.” My answer will be immediately in the negative. In order to defend my skepticism, I will explore some accounts of terrorism in general, and of 9/11-type terrorism more specifically. This will also include, in passing, a brief consideration of some just war arguments.

One preliminary clarification is in order. Most definitions of terrorism adopt a statist stance that classifies as terroristic exclusively acts carried out by individuals or non-state groups. For reasons that will be made evident as I proceed in my discussion, this chapter will, in contrast, favor a neutral definition that understands terrorism strictly in the tactical sense.

[1]

I shall necessarily begin, as has been largely done in discussions of 9/11, by stating the obvious. At approximately the same time as the second passenger jet hit the South Tower of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, the thought that something utterly revolutionary in world history had just occurred must have instantly crossed the minds of many. That was probably the moment when virtually anyone on the planet—even more so Americans—could be alerted quite clearly that a major crisis was looming, if not already underway. Indeed, it has become from then on much of a commonplace to observe that 9/11

was “one of those few days in life that one can actually say will change everything.”¹ As has been equally pointed out by many quarters, however, contrary to cyclical invocations of historical divides, *everything* did not change.

Predictions about an economic recession following the attacks, for one, have proved to be quite unsubstantiated. Quite on the contrary, the U.S. economy began a phase of expansion in November 2001, which came to a halt only in December 2007, when the long-awaited recession finally bit, bearing therefore little—if any—actual relation to the events of seven years earlier.² September 11, 2001, in other words, was no October 24, 1929. The markets, of course, did suffer, but recovery was surprisingly speedy. More problematic, by contrast, were the corporate scandals led by the Enron and WorldCom cases, which in retrospect look like a small taster for the subprime financial crisis that was to unfold in 2008. At Berkshire Hathaway’s 2008 shareholder meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, vice-chairman Charlie Munger said about the Sarbanes-Oxley Act passed by the U.S. Congress in the wake of the 2001 wave of corporate accounting fraud: “We now know they were shooting at an elephant with a pea shooter. We have convulsions now that make Enron look like a tea party.”³ Airline companies were naturally among the most seriously hit in 2001, yet there seems to be some agreement that their problems might by comparison turn out to be far worse after 2008. Here is Richard Tams of British Airways: “This is a lot worse than 9/11. We are in a crisis situation. 9/11 was a short sharp shock but the underlying economic environment was far better. Now we have rocketing fuel prices and weakening demand. It will be fatal for a lot more businesses.”⁴

But these are economic matters, and they will not occupy us here. However, they shall suffice as hints at the conclusion that if there is anything that in any way resembles the much-cited depression era in our time, it is more likely to be found from the year 2008 onward—and its causes, although arguably not totally unrelated to 9/11 (possibly not be-

cause of the attacks themselves, but of the long-time budgetary impact of the wars that followed), fundamentally lie elsewhere.⁵

Other signals of continuity will be more useful for our purposes. A brief survey of the use of the term “terror” in recent U.S. politics will be of service. Talks of “terror,” “struggle between freedom and fanaticism,” and “weapons of mass destruction,” directed at archenemies Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, were used, for instance, by former Democratic President Bill Clinton as justifications for the bombings carried out in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Iraq in 1998.⁶ Even before 9/11, the U.S. government was using the very language that would then resurface for all to see as a response to the attacks. There was already, it seems, some bipartisan agreement as to the status of the threat and its actors. What is most striking, however, is the clear and much-cited parallel between the latest “War on Terror” launched by the George W. Bush administration and its Cold War counterpart. Although the first major American response to international terrorism was under President Carter as a reaction to the hostage crisis at the 1972 Munich Olympics, counterterrorist activity was strongly reinforced under Ronald Reagan. It was in the first days of his administration that the first “War on Terror” against the so-called “international terrorist network”—i.e., the terrorist network supposedly directed by Moscow, the “Empire of Evil”—was announced.⁷ That war, it was explained, would be fought mostly in Central America and the Middle East, where Soviet-sponsored terrorism was having most impact. It was the Middle Eastern branch of this first “War on Terror,” of course, that became a prime source for the troubles of the second, as both the aforementioned archenemies were—directly or indirectly—armed and supported by the U.S. as valuable allies in the region in the fight against communism.

These are plain facts that are widely accepted and need no interpretation. In fact, they could be, and have been, read as no more than excellent proof that the threat was real, and had been for some time. At a 1998 counterterrorism conference organized at George Washington

University by the Defense Intelligence Agency, then DIA director Patrick M. Hughes arrived dressed as a terrorist, carrying two hand grenades and an M16 rifle, just to shock the audience and warn: “One day, terrorists will attack a building like this, in Washington or New York. They will kill hundreds of people and deal us an unprecedented psychological blow. The question is not whether such an attack will occur on American soil, but when and where.”⁸ Needless to say, he was prophetic. It was only on that dreadful Tuesday morning of September 2001, however, that Americans were forced to ask themselves the long-ignored question that hid behind such prophecy: “Why do they hate us?” Indeed, the question of all questions.

The preferred answer was immediately on the “rally around the flag” side of patriotic fervor. As Robert McChesney has put it, “[t]he picture conveyed by the media was as follows: a benevolent, democratic, and peace-loving nation was brutally attacked by insane evil terrorists who hated the United States for its freedoms and affluent way of life.”⁹ The undisputed fact that the supposed leader of the perpetrators was once a terrorist—or, according to the then standard definition, a freedom fighter—in Afghanistan on behalf of the U.S. was, evidently, just an error of judgment that could be lightly brushed aside. Other facts did not fit the preferred picture—and they were not small facts. Most notably, few Americans remembered—or were reminded—that their country was, and still is, the only state that has been condemned for “unlawful use of force” by the International Court of Justice, because of its military actions and its support of the Nicaraguan Contras guerrillas, who were largely involved in terrorist activities.¹⁰ This was in 1986, and Nicaragua was the base of the Central American branch of the first “War on Terror.”

I must stress again that I am at this point only keeping to a very few generally accepted, if easily forgotten, facts. Nevertheless, virtually no discussion around them was possible in the U.S. in the long aftermath of the attacks, when the question instantly changed to “What should we

do?” The answer to this last question, after all, was clear enough: go and get them, dead or alive—first in Afghanistan, eventually in Iraq. No particular evidence was necessary, and if need be America could go it alone. There were a few notable exceptions to this prevailing climate. One of them was an article by Susan Sontag in *The New Yorker*, in which she commented:

The disconnect between last Tuesday’s monstrous dose of reality and the self-righteous drivel and outrageous deceptions being peddled by public figures and TV commentators is startling, depressing. The voices licensed to follow the event seem to have joined together in a campaign to infantilize the public. Where is the acknowledgement that this was not a “cowardly” attack on “civilization” or “liberty” or “humanity” or “the free world” but an attack on the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions?

Her view, as might be anticipated, was subject to ferocious attacks.¹¹ This was not the right time for anyone to question national unity.¹² Another deviation from the norm was somewhat of a slip of the tongue. Answering a question at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, ABC News President David Westin failed to deny that the Pentagon could be described as a legitimate political target, as opposed to the World Trade Center, a civilian target:

The Pentagon as a legitimate target? I actually don’t have an opinion on that and it’s important I not have an opinion on that as I sit here in my capacity right now. . . . I can say that the Pentagon got hit, I can say this is what their position is, this is what our position is, but for me to take a position this was right or wrong, I mean, that’s perhaps for me in my private life . . . But as a journalist I feel strongly that’s something that I should not be taking a position on. I’m supposed to figure out what is and what is not, not what ought to be.

A week later, he was forced to retract: “I was wrong . . . Under any interpretation, the attack on the Pentagon was criminal and entirely without justification. I apologize for any harm that my misstatement may have caused.”¹³ This clarifying statement was in effect rejecting the possibility that the attackers may have had even the remotest political goal, which is rather odd, considering that political aims seem to be one with usual definitions of terrorism as any activity apparently intended “to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion.”¹⁴ Noam Chomsky, one of the most outspoken critics of American foreign policy, attributes this widespread reticence to discuss all possible historical and political causes, including therefore American responsibilities, partly to an “internalization of values,” and speaks openly of hypocrisy.¹⁵ If Americans wanted to consider things seriously, he argues, they would have to “recognize that in much of the world the U.S. is regarded as a leading terrorist state, and with good reason.”¹⁶ The first basic conclusion I will draw about the place of 9/11 in history will be in line with his contention that what is significant about the event has nothing to do with its scale or its nature, but rather with the fact that “for the first time, the guns have been directed the other way.”¹⁷ For the first time, that is, on American soil.

[II]

This first conclusion needs to be specified, as it may suggest further implied conclusions that I would instead like to rule out. First, it is a very broad statement: all it does is deny that 9/11 has radically altered the terms and categories in which we can describe and comprehend the world; at the same time, it proposes that, although not revolutionary, 9/11 is historically, politically, and philosophically relevant because of the very fact that it happened to the U.S. It is exactly because the point is so general, or even bland, that it requires particular caution. Second, and consequently, as I have been sketching out only a few fairly vague

explanations—if indeed they can be called so—for the event, pertaining especially to U.S. foreign policy choices, it is important that these be not understood as quasi-mechanistic causes, or even as retribution for America’s “wrongs”—or, worse, America’s *essence*. Readers will have noticed in my short reconstruction thus far an underlying assumption that deems it necessary to look for internal explanations, indeed questions the U.S. should pose itself about its own past and present conduct; this, however, is far from taking an oppositional or apologetic stance.

I am taking pains to stress this point upfront because I want to do away altogether with any suspicions of anti-Americanism. The “anti-American” label should be coupled with the epithet “un-American,” meaning unpatriotic (obviously, used by Americans against fellow Americans), much to the same effect. I do not find these labels any more useful than their natural opposite, “Americanism.” I have made explicit reference above to the need to beware of discussions about America’s *essence* precisely because it is my intention to avoid essentialist readings of what America is or is not. Were I to take such route, however attractive—and at times undoubtedly insightful—in rhetorical terms, it would be paved with reductive claims.

The problems are legion. First, the notion of an American essence would imply that a list of—predominantly positive or negative, depending on one’s side—American core values and features that have remained relatively unconstrained through time could be identified, thus sacrificing historical and social complexity;¹⁸ second, it would not take long to derive the equation of whatever “America” is with “Brand USA,” or the “American empire,” meaning everything that represents—alternatively or in combination—democracy, the West, the free world, capitalism, neo-liberalism, liberal imperialism, or globalization, again neutralizing the contingency of historical, political, economic, and social factors; third, it would be likely to engender a corresponding and equally hazy characterization of the opposite side (e.g., a European who believes all Americans are brutes can claim moral superiority for Europe

as the champion of multilateral supranational internationalism; a fervent believer in “American values” can call all Europeans sissy intellectuals); fourth, it would downplay similarities and mutual relationships among parties, while exacerbating supposed differences; fifth, it would easily conflate an evaluation of particular American actions and decisions (e.g., U.S. policy in the Middle East) with an evaluation of American culture or temperament;¹⁹ sixth, and finally, any such list of core values, appropriately interpreted, would all too simply reaffirm the self-congratulatory righteousness of each side of the debate, thus falling into a dead end. I will therefore put a caveat on my first conclusion, to the effect that internal explanations need not be *intrinsic* explanations.

With the first conclusion thus qualified, I can now move on to provide more specific grounds for it, and to consider more substantive implications of thinking about America and terrorism after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. There are, naturally, several simultaneous ways to do this. I shall therefore choose to continue my investigation along the lines I have been drafting thus far. In particular, I shall explore a fundamental question that Walter Laqueur asks in his overview of “anti-Americanism” in various countries after 9/11: “[T]o what extent did reactions to September 11 contribute to a deeper, more realistic understanding of the nature and the roots of contemporary terrorism?”²⁰ To a large extent, this question overlaps with the more general “Why do they hate us?” question; so far I have suggested that in order to find an answer we should look at internal explanations in terms of U.S. actions and decisions. Laqueur seems to agree, although he draws very different implications. He thinks that the question should be reformulated thus: “[W]as America perhaps attacked because it had not retaliated forcefully for many years against earlier terrorist attacks, because it was considered weak, indecisive and therefore a not very risky target?”²¹ Put differently: Is America not right in retaliating *now*? In what follows, I shall review a number of arguments about the nature of 9/11-type terrorism and the wars that have been fought in response to it.

[III]

My first step will be to begin with a preliminary consideration of the crucial moral and political question of whether or not the war on terrorism can be considered a “just war.” A full discussion of just war theory is beyond the scope of the present work;²² additionally, I am perfectly aware that an exact appraisal of the theory would immediately foreclose the possibility of a war on terrorism, for just war theory is designed to regulate *wars*, that is, open armed conflicts between states or other comparable subjects of international law—and terrorism, in and of itself, is quite obviously no such subject. Put differently, historically just war theory has been grounded in a clear differentiation between warring and dueling, where the former is force used by a public authority that is legitimated politically to represent the people under its purview, and the latter is force used by private entities that do not have such legitimacy. Thus, just war theory regulates states’ rights and duties, and appeals to the moral role of coercive violence by states in protecting their citizens from harm.²³ Inasmuch as terrorists lack political legitimation based on the existence of self-determined political communities, and derived from the consent of the members of such communities, they cannot wage proper wars, and wars cannot be waged against them.²⁴

Leaving this latter complication aside, I will however consider the theory both because it is customary to do so in discussions of 9/11, and because it is important for a better understanding of terrorism to pay fuller attention to all the reasons why a war on terrorism as such—or 9/11 terrorism in particular—is problematic. To this end, I will at this stage limit my discussion and criticism to a single proposal put forth in a book, properly titled *Philosophy 9/11*, edited by Timothy Shanahan. Of the fourteen essays that comprise the volume, which provide predominantly critical portraits of U.S. policy, the most supportive of the Bush administration’s approach to fighting terrorism after September 11 is

Brett Kessler’s “Moral Justification for Violent Responses to Terrorism.”²⁵ Kessler, a major in the U.S. Army, sets out to reconcile modern just war theory with what in his view is the particular kind of violence perpetrated by terrorists. He states in the introduction that we face a “radically different world” (p. 149), and thinks that the independent criteria of *jus ad bellum* would make not only the current war on terror, but all wars—including a war on Nazi Germany—unjust. He consequently proposes we rethink the theory so that it “places things in the categories in which we think they ought to be” (p. 150).

He lays out three basic assumptions. Firstly, that “universal laws of nature” based on rationality exist and “apply to everyone in virtue of being human.” Secondly, that we all have a universal right to life that is part of natural law. Finally, that the universal right to life entails a negative obligation not to kill and a positive obligation to protect life (pp. 151–2). He then moves on to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence. Using the examples of police action in the apprehension of a criminal and of self-defense against mugging or rape, he considers legitimate the violence “meant to protect, preserve, or enforce the rights that the common law of nature establishes.”

At this point he concedes, correctly, that his argument is almost entirely based on assumptions; nevertheless, he goes on to argue—with a further tacit assumption—that “terrorism is illegitimate violence of a *particular* sort that can be resisted in a *particular* way, namely with the violence of armed force.” What is particular about the sort of violence that terrorism is, he claims, “seems to depend, first and foremost, on whether there is regard or disregard for . . . our basic humanity, what Cicero called the ‘natural law’” (pp. 153–4). Hence, according to Kessler, terrorism is a particular sort of violence in that it disregards universal laws of nature. One is left to wonder what makes this violence any different from violence he does not deem to be of a particular sort—such as rape or murder, which undoubtedly violate one’s “basic humanity.” The answer he gives is that terrorists aim to “target and kill the innocent

to further their political or religious goals.” This, in sum, is Kessler’s definition of terrorism. Although he indicates that terrorism is *primarily*—therefore not exclusively—directed toward noncombatants, his main focus is, jointly, on the innocent status of the victims and the political goals of the perpetrators. Further, he argues that “as far as the modern international terrorists are concerned, the more death and destruction the better” (pp. 154–5).

In the rest of the essay, Kessler outlines the evolution of the just war tradition and concludes that the conditions required by Aquinas—proper authority, sufficient cause, and right intention—can be considered the quintessential components of the theory. He understands just cause as a “a duty that is serious and weighty enough to overcome the presumption against killing in war”; as means to evaluate if the “duty” is “serious and weighty enough,” he suggests a “comparative analysis of the parties . . . along with consideration of the act or grievance that spurred the consideration for war in the first place” (pp. 164–5). Furthermore, he suggests that the remaining principles of last resort, probability of success, and proportionality, be interpreted as subcategories of the just or sufficient cause requirement, so that the latter can be understood as a weighted average of the former three. This would imply, in particular, that the last resort principle could be offset—in a vaguely utilitarian fashion—by other considerations.²⁶ In this manner, Kessler thinks he has crossed one major hurdle of modern just war theory and modern international law: a state is not required to have first used all other measures conceivably available—especially through the United Nations—and found them to fail, if it has explored all *reasonable* alternatives before going to war (pp. 166–9).

Kessler’s recasting of just war theory is fraught with conceptual, methodological, and empirical problems. The most taxing quandary is obviously the fact that what can be considered reasonable in the search for non-military solutions—not to mention the evaluation of the “serious and weighty duty”—is to be decided as a *fait accompli* solely by the

state that decides to go to war. His theory relies more on the subjective—and largely inscrutable—components of evaluation than on objective requirements: if on the one hand he significantly lessens the burden of proof associated with the last resort principle, on the other he keeps the principle of right intention central. Right intention, as was pointed out by Grotius, does not depend on objective criteria that can be appreciated in relation to all parties involved, but relies entirely on the subjective judgment of the state that decides to wage war.²⁷ Admittedly, the question of what might in actuality be a last resort remains inherently opaque—as indeed do other principles in the theory—in that there is no definitive diagnostic test to determine when lastness is reached. However, replacing last resort with last *reasonable* resort is hardly a solution, as no test to determine what counts as last reasonable option exists either.²⁸ More to the point, one might even wonder if there is any real theoretical and practical difference, if both interpretations are applied impartially. This, of course, is exactly where the problem lies in the real world: the absence of an impartial judge was a long-standing problem of classical just war theory, and yet Kessler simply ignores it, in effect, by rejecting the modern version at the basis of the universalistic international law provisions that regulate *jus ad bellum*.

It is apparent from the outset that Kessler is bent on asserting that terrorism is a particular kind of violence, and can therefore require a particular response in the form of military intervention. His initial assertion that in applying just war theory he will make sure that it “places things in the categories in which we think they ought to be” (emphasis added) could not be more transparent: if one thinks this particular war is right, she simply needs to readjust the theory accordingly. However, even if we grant the point that terrorism in general is indeed a particular kind of violence, why it would license a response in the particular form of the use of armed force is never really explained, but basically taken as a given.²⁹ What is more relevant to our case, Kessler’s analysis suffers from one major conceptual limitation: although he subscribes to the

common view that the terrorism of 9/11 presents us with a “radically different world,” he fails to adequately specify neither how 9/11 terrorism is different from regular forms of crime, which he attempts to do through a fairly sketchy definition of terrorism, nor how it differs from previous forms of terrorism, which he never takes into account.

Kessler’s appeal to universal human rights is crucial, in that it is upon the violation of such rights through the targeting and killing of innocents for political purposes that his whole proposal is built. I understand his definition of terrorism to be correctly grounded in the initial premise of just war theory—namely, that the right of a state to wage war descends from an obligation to protect its citizens from harm. The most famous rendering of this premise is arguably that proposed by Michael Walzer in his theory of just and unjust wars.³⁰ Walzer argues that the state rights of territorial integrity and political sovereignty stem from its citizens’ rights to life and liberty. It is here that a social contract is arrived at whereby individuals who partake in a community consensually transfer their natural rights to the sovereign power of the state, receiving in exchange protection against external threats to said rights. The social contract metaphor links human rights to state rights, and is at the root of a domestic analogy by which the state rights of territorial integrity and political sovereignty can be protected in the same way as the universal human rights to life and liberty.³¹ The defense of these latter rights provides therefore the basic moral limit to states’ actions both in their decision to go to war and in their wartime conduct—in the latter case, the central tenet of the principle becomes that of noncombatant immunity.

Apart from this general stipulation, there is another important respect in which Kessler’s and Walzer’s views would seem to converge. Kessler’s rephrasing of the last resort principle as subcategory of the just cause requirement stems from Walzer’s criticism of it, which is part and parcel with his rejection of what he takes to be unrealistic pacifist positions. Walzer holds that, if strictly applied, the principle would make all

wars morally impossible. Evidently, this has been Kessler's departure point for his overall re-reading of just war theory. The reasons for Walzer's skepticism are twofold: first, theoretically the maximum scope of diplomatic measures could be extended endlessly; second, one could never know that the last resort has been reached if not subsequently.³² It must be noticed, however, that Walzer himself has been somewhat equivocal on the exact import of the principle. For instance, he opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq based essentially on it:

We say of war that it is the "last resort" because of the unpredictable, unexpected, unintended, and unavoidable horrors that it regularly brings. In fact, war isn't the last resort, for "lastness" is a metaphysical condition, which is never actually reached in real life: it is always possible to do something else, or to do it again, before doing whatever it is that comes last. The notion of lastness is cautionary—but this is a necessary caution: look hard for alternatives before you "let loose the dogs of war."

Right now, even at this last minute, there still are alternatives, and that is the best argument against going to war.³³

His stance on Iraq seems to suggest that last resort, though specified to include only reasonable and plausible alternatives, should remain essential to just war theory.³⁴ As remarked above, one might wonder what real difference there is between last resort and last reasonable resort, if both versions of the principle are applied impartially. In any case, confusion on Walzer's position on the principle arises from his treatment of it in relation to terrorism. In a 1988 article, he rejected as "an excuse" the idea that terrorists could vindicate their actions with an appeal to last resort. He explained: "It is not easy to reach the 'last resort.' To get there, one must indeed try everything (which is a lot of things), and not just once . . . most state officials and movement militants who recommend a policy of terrorism recommend it as a first resort; they are for it

from the beginning.”³⁵ Here, it appears quite clearly, he is not defending last *reasonable* resort, but last resort *tout court*.

His conclusion on the application of last resort to terrorism follows closely from his definition of terrorism—mirrored by Kessler’s—as “an attack upon the innocent,” which by sheer virtue of targeting innocents is necessarily thought to be indefensible.³⁶ We face here a glaring paradox, in that elsewhere Walzer justifies the intentional killing of innocents when it is carried out by states. In his discussion of “supreme emergency,” he expresses the view that when a nation at war is faced with the impending prospect of its own annihilation it may justifiably suspend the *jus in bello* principle of noncombatant immunity if doing so could effectively eradicate the threat. He provides the example of the direct targeting of civilians during the British bombings of German cities in 1940–1, which coincidentally he also describes as “terrorism.”³⁷

Walzer’s argument about “supreme emergency” rests on the communitarian basis of just war theory outlined above, and posits that the highest values in international society are those of the survival and freedom of political communities—i.e., states. Walzer is here simply postulating that by way of the domestic analogy the state can be conceived to subsume within itself the protection of individual rights. Otherwise stated, state rights are more important than individual rights for the reason that it is only within the state that individual rights can best be ensured. This is why states are granted the “supreme emergency” exemption, and individuals are not. The upshot of this is essentially that the initial premise of just war theory winds up with a realist *raison d’État* by which the state must be preserved in and of itself.³⁸ It may be easily objected that this is in stark contradiction with the individual rights basis of state power: since the supreme state rights of territorial integrity and political sovereignty have the ultimate goal of protecting individuals’ rights, Walzer has hardly proved—except in a romanticized conception of the values served by a polity—that a state of “supreme emergency” would be capable of overriding the universal human rights

to life and liberty. The reason cannot so easily be that the overridden human rights would be those of another state's citizens, for these are obviously no less important as humans. Yet this, precisely, is Walzer's argument, one that stealthily transforms what started on universalistic premises based on human rights into normal reasons of state.

Furthermore, and in the light of this, postulating that the principle applies to the survival of states, one wonders why it could not lend itself to a situation of supreme emergency in which the freedom of an individual or a group is at stake. Think for example of the black majority under apartheid rule in South Africa. It must be specially stressed that Walzer explicitly qualifies his example of a war action undertaken in a state of "supreme emergency" as "terrorism," although terrorism practiced by a state. C. A. J. Coady thus correctly observes that:

Either we insist that major terrorism (as characterized by the tactical definition) is always morally wrong and never to be allowed, or we accept that there can be circumstances in which the values served by terrorist acts are so important that it is right to do them. If the latter, then this exemption, for supreme emergency of otherwise, cannot be allowed only to states. Its legitimacy must in principle be more widely available, and decided on a case-by-case basis.³⁹

In order to do so without introducing *a priori* an obvious bias in favor of state terrorism, we should first have a firmer grasp of terrorism as a tactic. Kessler's and Walzer's definitions, based merely on the intentional targeting and killing of the innocent for political purposes, cannot be satisfactory.

[IV]

In other words, we must yet clearly define what terrorism is, and subsequently we must determine whether there is something distinctive about its 9/11 variant that would justify recourse to war in response. I am

aware that defining terrorism in a manner that can be universally shared is probably impossible, and I certainly do not feel ready to embark on such a project here. I shall more modestly employ a working proposal contained in another essay in Shanahan's volume that seems to me particularly apt. In "What Is Distinctive about Terrorism, and What Are the Philosophical Implications?"⁴⁰ Michael Baur proposes the following, more robust definition of "terrorism":

(1) the systematic use (2) of actual or threatened violence (3) against persons or against the vital interests of persons (i.e., against the terrorist's direct target) (4) in the pursuit of political, ideological, religious, social, economic, financial, and/or territorial objectives, (5) whereby the violence is sufficiently random or indiscriminate (6) so as to cause fear among members of the terrorist's indirect target group, (7) thus creating a generalized fear, distrust, or instability within certain sectors of society or within society at large, (8) the ultimate aim of which is to influence popular opinion or government policy in a manner that serves the terrorist's objectives. (pp. 13-4)

While arguably not perfect, this definition is a considerable improvement upon Kessler's and Walzer's, and seems to me to capture the most salient aspects of the phenomenon. I shall leave part of the definition unanalyzed, and will only deal with aspects of it that remedy the most prominent weaknesses of Kessler's and Walzer's. To arrive at his definition, Baur has aimed to circumscribe the concept by eliminating both under-inclusive and over-inclusive criteria. He finds that a definition of terrorism risks being under-inclusive in three ways. First, when it does not include violence that is terroristic, even though it is not widely perceived as such. An obvious example would be state terrorism, which coincidentally happens to have been the first form of terrorism in history during the French revolution. Terrorist strategies have been adopted by dictatorial regimes such as Nazism, Fascism, Communism, and others; moreover, Walzer's "supreme emergency" example shows

that liberal states have also used terror tactics. Second, when it focuses on the non-combatant status of the victims. This would disqualify as terrorism actions specifically aimed at military targets—for example, suicide attacks on American soldiers. Besides, terrorism aimed at intimidating government officials would also be excluded. Finally, a definition of terrorism is under-inclusive if it ignores violence perpetrated not only against people but also on their vital interests—for example, terrorism directed at energy facilities or computer systems.

Conversely, Baur finds that definitions of terrorism can be over-inclusive if they incorporate violence that is not genuinely terroristic, even though it might at first glance appear as such. Most notably, this might be the case if one focuses excessively on the non-combatant status of the victims, for military operations clearly also cause the loss of innocent lives. This last point calls for very careful and special attention. Civilian casualties in war are usually described with the somewhat infelicitous expression “collateral damage,” or with an appeal to the principle of “double effect,” which usually enters just war theory in its *jus in bello* form through the principle of proportionality.⁴¹ However, historically there have also been quite a few instances of military actions *intentionally* directed at civilians. Again, Walzer’s “supreme emergency” example could be mentioned. The intentional targeting of innocents by states is troubling enough, but even more unfathomable for Americans should be the fact that the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are perhaps the most destructive and gratuitous instances of use of force against civilians in history. What is more, the term “Ground Zero” was first used specifically in reference to the sites of the bombings on Japan.⁴² What are we to say about them? Certainly not that they are surely *not* terroristic, for if we were to hold this view we would have to grant the absurd and yet logical conclusion that *all* violence directed at non-combatants would not be terroristic. As Baur is keen to point out, he is not claiming that such actions are moral or justified—or, I might add,

legal—but only that the loss of innocent lives is best not understood as a *necessary* condition in a definition of terrorism (pp. 4–7).

In addition to under- and over-inclusiveness, Baur also highlights the related problem of definitions that are purely question-begging. The most obvious tendency in this direction would be to define activities as terroristic based merely on who the perpetrators are—this is where the famous adage “someone’s terrorist is someone else’s freedom fighter” applies. A second tendency would be to judge an activity as terroristic because it is deemed immoral. In both cases, one would be simply postponing the relevant questions—namely, questions about the specificity of terrorist violence *per se* (pp. 8–9). Once again, it must be stressed that we are looking for objective grounds on which to base our analysis: we want, in other words, a neutral, non-normative description of what it takes for an action to be terroristic in nature. This is evident in the way Baur concludes the first part of his essay, which sharply contrasts with Kessler’s premise of “plac[ing] things in the categories in which we think they ought to be.” Like Kessler, Baur is well aware that he will be to a large extent confirming our ordinary understanding of terrorism; but while Kessler goes on to automatically derive assumptions from it, Baur is going to test it. For the time being, however, I will not go into the exact details of Baur’s subsequent analysis, and will content myself with having enumerated the necessary conditions of his definition.

But before I move on to an assessment of 9/11-type terrorism, there is at least one elusive aspect of Baur’s analysis that I have already highlighted which needs to be developed further. In his detailed definition, Baur has rejected the non-combatant status of the victims as a necessary requirement. On the one hand, this has the positive effect of allowing more clearly for actions directed at military, governmental, and non-human targets to qualify as terroristic; on the other, it might also appear to legitimize as non-terroristic military actions specifically aimed at civilians. This last point has already been elucidated, and may be perhaps more clearly restated to imply that a definition of terrorism must not in-

clude military action that causes civilian casualties within the limits of the “double effect” principle—i.e., when people are not intentionally killed or wounded during military operations. However, it is worth pausing to note that this latter conclusion has required an explicit clarification at least partially because of the fact that the term “terrorism” is normally understood in a morally evaluative sense: that is, terrorist actions are taken to be always morally wrong. Baur himself does not escape this, as seems to be reflected in a later passage, in which he writes that:

[T]he terrorist *qua* terrorist is implicitly committed to the principle of uncontained and perpetual war, that is, to the kind of war that can never end through mutual recognition or a negotiated truce, but only through the ongoing suppression or complete obliteration of the adversary. And this, in a word, is what is distinctively wrong with terrorism. (p. 18)

On the contrary, I see nothing in Baur’s definition *in itself* that would imply terrorism to be necessarily wrong. Moral considerations will naturally enter real world judgments about specific actions, but would be insidious if included in a description of terrorism *per se*. Once the question-begging elements—which moral judgments certainly are—in the definition are discarded, as Baur has done, one is simply left with a series of actions that are better understood as a tactic that can be put either to good or bad use. If one considers terrorism simply as a *practice*, it will be apparent that when making moral judgments one is too often dealing essentially with rhetorical strategies. This is clearly reflected in the terrorist/freedom fighter dichotomy: the former is a dysphemism used by those who think certain actions are bad, the latter a euphemism used by those who think the very same actions are good.⁴³ Historically, it is easy to see that these terms have usually been coexistent. To cite but one example, it will be sufficient to recall that for the Nazi and Fascist regimes, partisans were terrorists. As a matter of fact, they were

employing terrorist tactics exactly in an “uncontained and perpetual war” in order to overthrow those regimes: they were certainly not trying to broker a truce or achieve mutual recognition with Nazism or Fascism, just as these were not trying to broker a truce or achieve mutual recognition with the “terrorists” when, for example, they used the terror tactic of taking reprisals against innocent civilians.⁴⁴ Similarly, Russian revolutionary terrorists were seeking total eradication of bourgeois society, certainly not coexistence with it. What it amounts to, in the end, is just a matter of words. This is clearly what Noam Chomsky has in mind when he speaks about a “double standard,” which he thinks would be better described as a “single standard”: “*their* terror against us and our clients is the ultimate evil, while *our* terror against them does not exist—or, if it does, is entirely appropriate.”⁴⁵ This double or single standard also seems to be the problem with Walzer’s ambivalent characterizations of last resort and supreme emergency.

[V]

Now that we have a sufficiently broad, and at the same time sufficiently precise, definition of terrorism, it is time to consider if and how 9/11-type terrorism may deviate significantly from it. One excellent way to approach the question would be to start with the diagnosis of the current world order at the center of the Bush administration’s international security framework.⁴⁶ The National Security Strategy declares that:

Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us. . . . The gravest danger our

Nation faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination. The United States will not allow these efforts to succeed . . . as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed . . . In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action.⁴⁷

This excerpt highlights two central aspects of uncertainty: first, the aforementioned “radically different world” scenario; second, the “path of action” that is supposed to follow from it. Weapons of mass destruction and “shadowy networks” of terrorists—along with “rogue states”—seem to be the key components of the “radically different world.” As I have already observed at the outset of this chapter, however, it appears as though the world has been “radically different” since well before the events of September 11.

Most obviously, it was the end of the Cold War that brought about momentous changes in the international arena. Crucially, during the 1990s the neoconservative majority in Congress never abandoned the view that the world remained essentially a Hobbesian place outside the U.S. sphere of influence. The main new threats were already those delineated in the cited passage above, and the same unilateralist “path of action” was suggested. The neo-conservative view, however, did not yet exert as profound an influence upon the presidential strategy as it did under the two George W. Bush mandates.⁴⁸ It must be stressed that the first Gulf War was considered by many to be the first real test for the new unipolar order dominated by the U.S., and that the outcome of that war, with U.S. forces stationed on the Arabian peninsula, partially to contain the Iraqi regime, is one of the main drivers of Islamic terrorism.⁴⁹ Not coincidentally, the vast majority of al-Qaeda suicide terrorists are either citizens of Muslim countries where American troops are pre-

sent, or of neighboring Muslim countries, or of countries in the region supported by the U.S.⁵⁰

After the end of the Cold War era, strategic analyses about the changing ways of terrorism, on the other hand, had long started to converge on the emergence of “new forms of the phenomenon, both as stand-alone and in the context or more conventional conflict (i.e., as an asymmetric strategy). This new terrorism is increasingly networked; more diverse in terms of motivations, sponsorship, and security consequences; more global in reach; and more lethal.”⁵¹ Given this wide diversity in motivations, sponsorship, and security implications, one would expect that the identification of common motifs among the various terrorist groups would demand great effort and prudence. All the same, 9/11 has reinforced some key ideas that had already started to circulate. In his famous analysis of “new terrorism,” itself also dating from before September 11, Walter Laqueur identifies two main features that in his view differentiate it from the old: the rise of fanaticism, and the availability of weapons of mass destruction.⁵² As will be apparent, these point exactly toward the “crossroads of radicalism and technology” later envisaged in the U.S. National Security Strategy. According to Laqueur, while traditional terrorists had clear motivations—especially nationalist-separatist ones—and ideologies,

[t]he real innovation in the late twentieth century is the appearance of radical religious (or quasireligious) nationalist groups adopting terrorism as their main form of struggle, sometimes within the framework of established religion (mainly Islam, but also Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism), and sometimes in the form of millenarian sects. . . . The new terrorism is different in character, aiming not at clearly defined political demands but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population.⁵³

His diagnosis about the combination of utterly irrational religious fanaticism and the means of mass destruction as an inherently new kind

of terrorist threat was seemingly confirmed by the attacks on America, and was largely attuned to the widespread, apparently un-political conviction that the U.S. had been attacked “for its freedoms and affluent way of life.” Following the rest of Laqueur’s analysis, the “new terrorism” would indeed appear to be not just a product of the famous clash of civilizations, but also of a clash of irreconcilable psychologies. Later on in the same chapter devoted to terrorist motivations, he concludes that:

If the perpetrators were indeed similar in psychological terms to the victims, we would all be potential terrorists. This is clearly not the case, but it offers little comfort. For now that we have entered the age of the weapons of mass destruction, great havoc can be wrought by only a few psychopaths.⁵⁴

Four jet airliners, nineteen hijackers, and a few knives were of course no weapons of mass destruction, but the consequent anthrax scare—later tracked, apparently, to the alleged activity of a famous American microbiologist⁵⁵—was more than enough to alert the population. Still, more than the availability of weapons of mass destruction, what is most notable about Laqueur’s analysis is the importance given to the primarily psychopathological component of the new fanaticism, as opposed to its material roots. In another book written after the attacks, he observes in the introduction:

Present debates about the causes of terrorism deal with topics such as ethnic and religious tensions, globalism and antiglobalism, poverty and exploitation. But these issues could be less important with regard to the terrorism of the future; the smaller the terrorist group, the more outlandish its doctrine is likely to be and the greater the relevance of psychological factors. There is bound to be great resistance to accepting this. But there is no accounting for the perceived complaints and injuries of a handful of people by means of invoking broad social, economic, and political trends. Eventually the old science-fiction scenario of the mad scientist taking vengeance on society could become reality.⁵⁶

While this is certainly part of Laqueur’s rejection of political assumptions “that the misery of the third world is the fault of imperialism and the third world’s exploitation by the developed countries,”⁵⁷ which he had already defined as the “amusing and embarrassing results” of left-wing ideology,⁵⁸ he is also painting a truly frightening, apocalyptic picture of the present-day world. If we are dealing with terrorist psychopaths who are now basically unconstrained in their choice of means, and ultimately aim to annihilate the whole of society, we may indeed be about to see the actualization of what we have learned, especially after World War II, from countless books and movies.⁵⁹ The fact that these fanatics have not yet used weapons of mass destruction is no guarantee for the future; on the contrary, the absence of such terrorist attacks is taken to be a primary signal that they are eventually bound to happen. If that is so, then one could endlessly continue to repeat Hughes’s “the question is not whether such an attack will occur on American soil, but when and where.”

I should at this point note that Laqueur’s mad scientist scenario makes explicit reference to literature and film, which would open up endless possibilities for the present work, some of which are taken up by the thinkers discussed in the next chapter. It is popular culture at large that enters the picture.⁶⁰ To illustrate today’s insidious security environment, for example, just a few weeks after the attacks national security expert Anthony Cordesman renamed it the “Buffy Paradigm,” thus appropriating the structure of the famous TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) to emphasize the unpredictable dangers of terrorist threats, “a future in which there is no way to predict the weapon that will be used or the method chosen to deliver a weapon which can range from a small suicide attack by an American citizen to the covert delivery of a nuclear weapon by a foreign state.”⁶¹ The TV series began four years before 9/11, and ended with apparently increasingly

militaristic tones in the spring of 2003, when the Iraq war was building up in the real world.

If Cordesman is correct, then *Buffy* could be taken as a textbook example of “strategic fiction,” purposely designed to imbue the audience with the institutional security dogma, a sense of impending national doom against which special protection needs to be invoked. As has already been noted, the analogy with Cold War thinking is striking. Doug Davis finds that it is especially the techno-thriller genre that has been recycled from the Cold War years and redirected from the old Soviet menace to the new terrorist threat. In effect, as the language used by Clinton in 1998 would appear to show, this kind of scenario has never really abandoned the American public space. Davis counterpoises *The Peacemaker* (Mimi Leder, 1997) and *The Sum of All Fears* (Phil Alden Robinson, 2002), respectively a pre- and a post-9/11 movie, to show that the latter is basically a rerun of the former.⁶² Even better examples of what Davis calls the “Tom Clancy technothriller” can be found, as with *Buffy*, in TV shows such as *NCIS*, *JAG*, *The Unit*, *Law and Order*, *Alias*, or *24*. As Davis puts it, “these twenty-first-century tales of war-on-terror-to-come blur the distinction between fiction and fact by conflating them in the speculative domain of the future.”⁶³

The foregoing replicates, of course, a *locus classicus* of various strands of critical theory, media theory, sociology, and the vast field of cultural studies—namely, the idea that what counts as reality cannot be measured in objective terms but is socially and historically “constructed,” in particular through representations, in order to serve the specific goals of various actors. One can naturally expect national governments to be the main agenda setters of national policy, and that they will try to shape the public attitudes of their citizens accordingly. For our purposes, however, we need not determine whether the population is correctly informed or rather manipulated—in our case at hand, whether the necessary elements of the apocalyptic picture of national security offered by Laqueur and the U.S. National Security Strategy ac-

tually do obtain in reality or are instead just convenient political credos. For we can, after all, easily assume that weapons of mass destruction and fanatics do or could indeed exist. But even if we grant this—and we surely can—we are back at our initial question of whether or not these elements are sufficient to consider this “new terrorism” radically different in character from traditional forms of the phenomenon.

Contra Laqueur, Liam Harte cogently argues that they are not.⁶⁴ He finds two closely related shortcomings in Laqueur’s assessment. Firstly, he considers the availability of weapons of mass destruction. In order to make his case as starkly as possible, Harte posits that traditional terrorists never use them, while new terrorists always do. Nevertheless, this would not generate any qualitative difference between traditional and new terrorism, but merely a quantitative one, in that it would only imply a greater destructive potential on the part of the latter. Both types of terrorism, however, would retain the same overall aim—they want to produce fear “in the pursuit of political, ideological, religious, social, economic, financial, and/or territorial objectives.” It would be an empirical, not a conceptual differentiation.

Moreover, as seen above, much of Laqueur’s distinction is based on psychological grounds: as he puts it, the difference between traditional and new terrorists would not simply lie in the fact that the former do not have access to weapons of mass destruction, but also in the fact that they would never even consider using them. The grounds on which Laqueur’s contention is based, however, are rather shaky. As Harte aptly remarks, he even appears to refute his own argument when he claims that terrorist strategies—just as military ones—have historically been subject to continual evolution, which suggests that the use of weapons of mass destruction cannot be totally precluded in the future. Another logical fallacy in his reasoning is that he claims that traditional terrorists would never use weapons of mass destruction because these would work against their clearly defined political or ideological goals, whereas new terrorists, who hold beliefs that are purely apocalyptic or pan-

destructionist, would have no problems with such weapons. But, given our definition of terrorism, this would seem to involve by logical necessity that new terrorists could not be properly regarded as terrorists, for they would not be trying to “influence popular opinion or government policy” in pursuit of their cause—they would be trying to destroy them completely.

Which brings us to the second shortcoming of Laqueur’s analysis. Let us recall that the second necessary condition he identifies is that of religious or quasi-religious fanaticism. I may remark in passing that in the first excerpt I have cited Laqueur speaks explicitly of “radical religious (or quasireligious) *nationalist* groups” (emphasis added), and that such explicit reference to nationalism would seem to run against the qualification of new terrorists as lacking distinct political aims. More to the point, Harte highlights that Laqueur goes on in his subsequent reconstruction of terrorist motives to again refute his own argument, when he claims that all terrorisms have at least quasireligious roots, although these have been eclipsed by political ambitions and ideological aspects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Laqueur observes that:

[C]ertain religious elements continued to play a role, even in the traditional terrorist movements. The Russian terrorists about to be hanged, the Irish terrorists starving themselves to death, and the Baader Meinhof suicides in Stammheim Prison all thought themselves to be martyrs—a religious rather than a political concept.⁶⁵

Thus, following Harte, it is safe to conclude that “surely, engaging in terrorism absolutely requires some motivating enthusiasm, subscription to which it is never any abuse of the term to call ‘fanaticism’ . . . regardless of what a given fanatic is fanatical for.”⁶⁶ I may easily add that this last critique of Laqueur’s approach must in consequence be coupled more at large with a rebuke of his psychopathological reading of terrorism, and

especially new terrorism, insofar as forms of radicalism, extremism, and fanaticism—not so loosely, all synonyms—can be traced in all manifestations of the phenomenon. The problem here is one instantly detected by Harte—namely the fact that, while Laqueur speaks of terrorist *motivations*, he is actually talking about terrorist *intentions*. As for the motivations, in effect, traditional and new terrorists seem to share not so dissimilar radical, extremist, or fanatical motives; as for the intentions, on the other hand, both traditional and new terrorists intend to instill fear to further their “political, ideological, religious, social, economic, financial, and/or territorial objectives.” As has already been observed, if new terrorists did not have such objectives, as Laqueur submits, they would not even enter the class of terrorists under our definition. Laqueur’s is a logical fallacy, yet his diagnosis appears to be faulty also in point of fact.

In the light of the foregoing, Laqueur’s reliance on psychological explanations appears to be highly dubious, especially for its wider implications. For example, Laqueur clearly indicates that new terrorists are irrational, in that only radicals, extremists, fanatics, psychopaths, or mad scientists—again, easily all synonyms—could contemplate the use of weapons of mass destruction to wreak great havoc on large sections of the population; moreover, to do so would show an almost complete lack of identifiable political or related goals. If we were to agree with him, it would have to follow as a necessary consequence that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, which killed a total of approximately 220,000 people, were the work of exactly such radicals, extremists, fanatics, psychopaths, or mad scientists; moreover, it would equally imply that these had no clear political goals in mind. While many would eagerly espouse the former, few would have doubts about what the Americans had in mind: they wanted to force Japan to unconditional surrender. Likewise, bin Laden has issued a rather clear ultimatum: “The American government has no choice but to pull its sons from the holy land [Saudi Arabia] especially and from the Mus-

lim lands in general. It also has to refrain in any way from supporting the Israeli government that occupies our land.”⁶⁷

Readers might be reminded here of David Westin’s rectification after suggesting that one could not honestly exclude that the terrorists may have had political motivations to attack the Pentagon. As in this previous case, we are once again facing an account of terrorism—more accurately, 9/11 terrorism—which more or less explicitly denies that terrorist actions could be understood on objective, rational grounds. If we adhere to our definition of terrorism, however, it will be obvious that terrorists do articulate demands, and that their existence must be acknowledged. Which, of course, does not mean that one must also agree with or concede to them.

Robert Pape has conducted a study of all suicide attacks carried out in the world from 1980 to 2003, covering therefore what Laqueur calls the “new terrorism,” and has found that:

The data show that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world’s religions. . . . Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. Religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.⁶⁸

If Pape’s analysis is accurate, then Laqueur’s assessment is proved to be seriously misguided in at least two respects. First, the fanatical explanation simply does not hold. Second, terrorist objectives are in fact clear and indeed share the same outline as that of traditional nationalist forms of terrorism. Moreover, Pape’s empirical study is entirely based on suicide terrorism, and as such addresses the most extreme form of the phenomenon in terms of the sacrifice that it entails on the part of the terrorist—in this case, the total destruction of both the attacker’s and

the victims' lives. This highlights yet again something I have already pointed out, namely the fact that Laqueur basically confuses terrorist motivations with terrorist intentions. To use Pape's lexicon, these could be called, respectively, the "individual logic" and the "social logic" of terrorism: the former qualifies the psychological features that arouse an individual's willingness to commit him- or herself to the terrorist cause, to the point of committing suicide; the latter qualifies the terrorist cause itself—that is, the political objectives that terrorist groups want to obtain.

We might well hypothesize that individuals may be driven in their choice to join the terrorist ranks by psychopathological compulsions, or by ideological or religious indoctrination, but ultimately terrorist acts will—and indeed must, if they are to count as terrorism—aim at the satisfaction of some political demands. What is more, Pape shows that in most cases "altruistic," communitarian motives are behind an individual's adherence to terrorism: that is, the terrorist is usually genuinely devoted to promoting some goal that is to a certain extent considered acceptable or even desirable within the surrounding community.⁶⁹ Put differently, quite often the social and individual logics of terrorism appear to merge.

[VI]

If my line of thought thus far is correct, a second conclusion about the status of 9/11 in history may be added to my first provisional proposition. If, in view of the marked continuities I have underlined, nothing revolutionary has ultimately happened, then perhaps a simple fact must be duly and unconditionally recognized: the political nature of the attacks of September 11. This second conclusion strikes me, as it will readers, as even more general and unsophisticated than the first; yet, as I hope I have shown, the political character of terrorism is exactly what has been at pains to be acknowledged. Such acknowledgement does not

entail ethical approval, say, of al-Qaeda's fatwas, but simply that their political demands are there to be taken notice of. They are not irrational—quite on the contrary, they are *very* specific, if only in the extreme. What needs to be recognized is neither more nor less the political goals of terrorism, not necessarily the moral justifiability of terrorism in itself. Terrorism, once it is correctly understood as a tactic, is morally neutral—moral judgments will be formulated on a case-by-case basis, depending on a full assessment of the individual circumstances, and largely on the side on which one stands.

Of course, I am naturally inclined to have no doubts that the specific grievances that lie behind September 11 are fully understood in the political arena, and indeed are shared by many, both in the U.S. and abroad. Even so, quite plainly, the U.S. cannot be expected to just accede to them in the real world. The consequences of accepting terrorists as adversaries with legitimate political demands would overwhelmingly fly in the face of political correctness. A seemingly contradictory statement, this is nonetheless ineluctably true. The catchphrase will be that “the United States does not negotiate with terrorists”—the precondition is precisely that terrorists do not exist politically. Unfortunately, neither do they exist as criminals, which would imply that they should be prosecuted and found guilty according to the law of the land, or international law. The reasons are at once too legion and too obvious to summarize here. However, a difference should be made at least theoretically clear between those demands that are called irrational because they cannot be met based on *one's* contingent logic (or, more vulgarly, one's interests), and demands that simply have *no* logic. By the same token, theoretical confusion should be avoided between the use of terrorism as a tactic and an evaluation of the whys and wherefores it is adopted in a particular occurrence. A condemnation of the former, however ill-formed, should not obfuscate the relevance of the latter. This confusion, I submit, has contributed to support a “war” launched against an enemy that is not really identified as such.

In stressing the importance of the political nature of terrorist demands, I understand myself to be formulating something quite along the lines of Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy dichotomy as foundation of the political.⁷⁰ At this point, I shall only limit myself to its most basic lesson: that is to say, that one's enemy has to be recognized objectively and taken seriously. To this basic lesson, I will add Heinrich Meier's observation that Schmitt's concept of the political is intimately bound up with knowledge, and especially self-knowledge.⁷¹ Of course, I am aware that real or apparent contradictions might arise from Schmitt's vision, and I will try to elaborate on them in the final chapter. However, I shall use these initial insights to suggest here a fundamental association between the two tentative conclusions I have arrived at: If 9/11 is particularly relevant because it was an attack on the U.S., and the nature of this attack must unequivocally be perceived as political though recognition of the enemy's demands, then a genuinely political understanding of 9/11 terror will offer first of all a deeper knowledge of America—not simply why it was attacked, but most importantly how it wants to respond.

2. Toward an Enemy *Within*?

In the previous chapter I have focused on the issue of terrorism in order to identify a viable notion of a “terrorist enemy.” My project is for the moment left on hold. In the present chapter, in contrast, I shall in a way extend my point against essentialist readings of 9/11, and I will therefore focus on the status of the “victims.” To this end, I shall review two very influential examples of such readings by Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek. Both philosophers focus not on terrorism as such, but rather on its emergence in relation to the victims’ “body,” intended as a more or less unified social, economic, and political system. As the victims are Americans, these readings inevitably offer some version of what America stands for not only in itself, but also as the hegemon of what is called the West. I will show how their analyses converge in crucial respects, and how strongly they reflect the critique of totalitarian irrationalism as an integral element of the Western culture industry that was advanced fifty years before by Theodor Adorno. Throughout, I shall aim to expose their profound theoretical and critical weaknesses for a political appraisal of September 11.

[1]

Various mass movements spread all over the world in which people seem to act against their own rational interests of self-preservation and the “pursuit of happiness” have been evident now for a considerable length of time. It would be a mistake, however, to call such mass phenomena entirely “irrational,” to regard them as completely disconnected from individual and collective ego aims. In fact, most of them are based on an exaggeration and distortion of such ego aims rather than on their neglect. They function as though rationality of the self-maintaining body politic had grown malignant and therewith threatened to destroy the organism. This malignancy, however, can be

demonstrated only after the autopsy. Often enough the consequence of apparently rational considerations leads to ultimately fatal events . . . Irrationality is not necessarily a force operating outside the range of rationality: it may result from the processes of rational self preservation “run amuck.”⁷²

The above quotation—part of the introduction to an essay on a seemingly unrelated subject—would appear to be of some interest in light of my foregoing discussion of terrorism. Based on it, it might be asked: In what way, if any, is terrorism “irrational”? From this standpoint, taken at face value and without any reference to context or theoretical framework, I suggest that for our purposes it could be spelled out in at least two opposite directions. A first, perhaps weaker way—initially taking Laqueur as a model—would be to hypothesize that the irrational “mass movements” in question are those of the terrorist organizations, and particularly those of the “new terrorism” committed to apocalyptic ideals of total destruction. According to this first interpretation, moreover, we could also postulate—now essentially refuting Laqueur—that their apparently “irrational” use of terrorism is in effect an aberration of the perfectly rational political goals of the communities that the terrorists purport to represent. Terrorism would thus be irrational in that it would work against the rational communal interests of self-preservation it is thought to serve.

A second reading would explain this very same terrorist “irrationality” as an outcome of an internal malfunction of the victim’s “rational” system. Conceived of this way, the terrorism of September 11 could be seen as a somewhat hysterical overreaction to what I have called “America’s essence”—or at least what passes for it. Whether it be democracy, freedom, or the like, it would be suggested that it was the natural instinct of self-conservation of America’s essence itself, regarded as the ultimate embodiment of modern rationality, that has ultimately given birth to the terrorist monster that now threatens to extinguish it. After all, the inescapable fact that what are now called terrorists were fi-

nanced by previous U.S. administrations as “freedom fighters” should speak for itself.

While both readings are defensible in their own terms, they are somewhat off the mark from the author’s original intent, which is inscribed in a more general critique of the “culture industry.” In the passage, from a study conducted between November 1952 and February 1953, Theodor Adorno is introducing his analysis of the “Astrological Forecasts” column in the *Los Angeles Times*, where he finds that these horoscopes, although totally inoffensive in appearance, are actually permeated with reactionary leanings. He argues that readers are therein offered consistently conservative perspectives on their material circumstances and preferred conduct in life. In an attempt to flatter and magnify their egos, they are encouraged to see their supposedly natural personal traits reflected in their daily lives, as if these were themselves natural. On the one hand, they are made to feel important, as if to compensate for their fears of insignificance; on the other, they are advised to acquiesce to whatever difficulties and tensions they may encounter, thus reinforcing conformity to the very institutions that generate their sense of alienation. People are thence persuaded to cultivate a certain attitude of passivity, and meekly acculturate into the mainstream.

Very broadly stated, what we are offered here is—at least superficially—a variant of Plato’s cave allegory. Individuals, it is said, are made to believe that the world they experience is an exact rendition of an independent realm of facts, while in effect it is nothing more than a representational system meant to deceive and imprison them. In Plato’s cave, people see mere shadows of the real objects, which are in turn copies of ideal forms that are only accessible through thinking—i.e., reason. For Adorno, the culture industry turns individuals into objects of an “administered life,” simple consumers that are only artificially free to choose between pseudo-unique products that are in fact homogenous. But apart from the basic “deception” argument, the two views are actually quite opposed. Rationality is the major point of divergence.

The ideal purpose of the cave allegory, one that is never brought to life but only stated as possible and desirable, is that of gaining access through reason to the ideal forms that will ultimately provide men with knowledge, a firm model of what is good. Such model would have to be drawn in the political sphere of a still unrealized Republic, where a proper education could enable a few talented citizens to detect the difference between appearance and reality, and consequently guide all others. Adorno's purpose, by contrast, is that of mounting a critical theory of exactly such eternal "forms" as they appear to have been grasped in modern times. Max Horkheimer, founder of the Frankfurt School of which he and Adorno were key thinkers, counterpoised this critical stance to the "positivist" illusion of what he called the "traditional theories"—of which Plato's is an ancient exemplar—derived from mathematico-logical models and the natural sciences. Whereas these purported to describe reality objectively, as in a dualist conception that sees facts as independent of the historical contingencies of the theory itself, critical theory sets out to see its role as deeply immersed in the historical and cultural context. Its aim is to identify what is wrong in contemporary society and suggest a progressive change to transform it:

The illusion that traditional philosophy has cherished about the individual and about reason—the illusion of their eternity—is being dispelled. The individual once conceived of reason exclusively as an instrument of the self. Now he experiences the reverse of this self-deification. The machine has dropped the driver; it is racing blindly into space. At the moment of consummation, reason has become irrational and stultified. The theme of this time is self-preservation, while there is no self to preserve.⁷³

These are roughly the limits within which I shall venture to move in this chapter, and are—perhaps not so strikingly—the limits within which a not inconsiderable part of the debates around 9/11 have been situated. The questions to be answered remain the two fundamental questions

that were posed in the previous chapter—viz., “Why do they hate us?” (or better, “Why do *we* hate *ourselves*?”) and “What should we do?”—but now they are addressed from a more sophisticated epistemological standpoint. What is at stake here is essentially the world as we—Americans and Westerners in general—know it, or think we know it.

The opposite ends of the eternal forms of “traditional theories” and the historicity of Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s “critical theory” can be seen effectively summarized in the way Giovanna Borradori launches her dialogs with Jürgen Habermas, heir to the Frankfurt School, and postmodernist Jacques Derrida.⁷⁴ In suggesting that philosophy’s involvement with the global terrorism of 9/11 should start by asking what philosophy can say about history in general, she holds that its unique position at this historical junction should be found within the Enlightenment tradition. As opposed to Aristotle’s natural philosophy and its Platonic influence, which saw in the specificity of history a negation of the universal aspirations of philosophy, the Enlightenment’s break with the past, and its promise to free men from the dominant forces of their time, find a natural ally—indeed, a mission—in philosophical thinking.

There is here an apparent paradox. Borradori proposes that after all we should not think of her two interviewees as coming from totally different directions, in that both Habermas’s neo-Kantian communicative ethics and Derrida’s deconstructionism would appear to share the same ultimate goal of human emancipation, and the transformation of society, through critique of existing models. If we were to follow up this line of reasoning, we would strive to find *anything* within a loosely post-structuralist or postmodernist framework that could not meet this description. Take, for example, the famously extreme theses of self-proclaimed “intellectual terrorist” Jean Baudrillard. The following will be a good place to start:

Radical analysis is to be measured with the event itself.
It does not consider it as a fact—any interpretation in

terms of “facts” is a “factitious” interpretation. And if it is true that most events let themselves be reduced to the status of fact, those deserving the name of events are those that escape such reduction. The analysis is not even their mirror, as any face-to-face with the “real” is impossible—the real itself is impossible, and the fact that it takes place does not detract from its objective impossibility.⁷⁵

Assuming that this passage can be explicated, Baudrillard is here urging a “radical analysis” of 9/11, and with it nothing more than a radical critique of what he thinks to be the current models of social oppression and domination. However, neither Habermas nor Derrida, who set out to do the exact same thing, ever claim that “the real itself is impossible.” It would appear that some relevant and clear-cut differentiations are desperately needed. Borradori herself is eager to specify, in a note, that the postmodernism of Derrida should be distinguished from Baudrillard’s. Derrida, she argues, does not repudiate all standards of validity and truth, and finds them especially in the assertion of an ethical dimension.⁷⁶ Baudrillard, by contrast, thinks that “[t]he world was given to us as something enigmatic and unintelligible, and the task of thought is to make it, if possible, even more enigmatic and unintelligible.”⁷⁷ And so he does.

[II]

It must be first noted that Baudrillard’s notion of the impossibility of the real sounds amazingly similar to Jacques Lacan’s, yet should not be confounded with it. The Lacanian Real is best understood in a “chronological” account.⁷⁸ It is split via the Imaginary or Mirror Phase between a pre-symbolic Real and the Real that emerges after the immersion in the Symbolic—the Symbolic, identified with the subject’s acquisition of language, being the system of social rules, laws, codes, and prohibitions that institute human reality for the subject.⁷⁹ The pre-

symbolic Real, which remains purely noumenal and embodies the subject's pre-social condition of pure nothingness, becomes progressively appropriated within the Symbolic with the subject's entrance into the social order. However, it eludes the Symbolic and can never become fully symbolized; consequently, it remains alongside the Symbolic and continues to exist in it as a reminder of the subject's previous state, thus acting as the driver of desire. During his or her life, the subject will try to regain the material plenitude of the pre-symbolic Real so as to escape the alienation produced by its absence in the Symbolic order. As Philip Shaw explains: "In Lacan's theory, the Real is the ultimate contradiction in terms in so far as it both precedes and succeeds the symbolic. As such, the Real is impossible and appears only as the failure or void of the symbolic."⁸⁰

For Baudrillard, by contrast, the real (i.e., reality) has been absorbed by a hyperreal of signs. According to him, modernity is dead, as we have entered a new era of simulation in which a play of signs, images, and codes has replaced production as the organizing principle of reality. In this realm of hyperreality it becomes impossible to trace the mechanisms that govern the individual's thought and behavior, which are totally embroiled in a maze of images and spectacles where meaning itself is dissolved. As Douglas Kellner explains:

Modernity was the era of Marx and Freud, the era in which politics, culture, and social life were interpreted as epiphenomena of the economy, or everything was interpreted in terms of desire or the unconsciousness. These "hermeneutics of suspicion" employed depth models to demystify reality, to show the underlying realities behind appearances, the factors that constituted the facts. . . . Meaning requires depth, a hidden dimension, as unseen yet stable and fixed substratum or foundation; in the postmodern world, however, everything is visible, explicit, and transparent, but highly unstable. The postmodern exhibits signs of dead meaning and frozen forms mutating into new combinations and permutations of the same.⁸¹

It is therefore all too obvious that Baudrillard's analysis of 9/11 should be conducted in a purely semiological dimension. The seeming reality of the attacks is immediately transformed into semiotic play. His focus is consequently on the symbolic collapse of the two towers, whose architecture is taken to be the pure sign of the capitalist "jungle"—indeed a double sign, as if to strengthen the total effacement of its referent.⁸² Not only a graphical embodiment of capitalism, it is also selected as the architectural sign of globalization's monopoly on violence—again, the doubling of the sign signifying a perfect incarnation of such monopoly. The destruction of these architectural "monsters" thus prefigures the annihilation of the global system of which they are emblems.

In one page, Baudrillard says that the towers were unlike other New York buildings, which mirror each other "in an endless specularity," because they did not really have a façade, and thus stood testimony to the faceless, unchanging nature of the global "system";⁸³ in another he can have it the other way and claim that the towers did in fact mirror each other—all things considered, one cannot fail to notice that they were two—because "the system can function only if it can exchange itself for its own image, reflect itself like the towers in their twinness."⁸⁴ In any case, the significance of 9/11 consists for him in the attack on these symbols of global monopoly, and in the simultaneous reaffirmation of a singularity it brings about.

This singularity, argues Baudrillard, functions like a virus internal to the "system," whose origin can be traced back to the fall of Communism, when the violent monopoly of global liberalism was apparently secured and infinitely reproduced. To the terror of globalization, one can only respond with the asymmetric terror of a "symbolic challenge and death," which will ultimately cause the system to respond by itself committing suicide, as did the towers. More to the point, Baudrillard holds that the system was actually complicit with this symbolic challenge, in that it had already made us all dream about its own death in the public fanta-

sies and images that can be found in disaster movies: “A situation science fiction dreamed of from the beginning: that of some obscure force that would wipe [the Americans] out and which, until that point, merely existed in their unconscious (or some other recess of their minds). And all of a sudden, it materializes through the good grace of terrorism!”⁸⁵

But how can this symbolic “good grace” be successful? Exactly because the terrorists have decided to play the symbolic card, and in this manner have refused to fight on the home turf of the system—viz., the realm of reality. However, one should not forget that for Baudrillard reality has basically ceased to exist: the system operates precisely by “substituting the signs of the real for the real”⁸⁶—the system itself is nothing but “symbolical.” If the current world, as he claims, is devised as a function of signs and codes that are exploited by the “system” to construe its “reality,” if “our virtual reality, our systems of information and communication, have themselves too, and for a long time, been beyond the reality principle,”⁸⁷ in what way are the terrorists playing a different game from the virtuality of simulacra generated by the system? Baudrillard had already explained this mechanism in his famous *Simulacra and Simulation*:

In the end, throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the deconstruction of every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. . . . Well, today it is this same logic that is even more set against capital. . . . As long as the historical threat came at it from the real, power played at deterrence and simulation, disintegrating all the contradictions by dint of producing equivalent signs. Today when the danger comes at it from simulation (that of being dissolved in the play of signs), power plays at the real, plays at crisis, plays at remanufacturing artificial, social, economic, and political stakes. For power, it is a question of life and death. But it is too late.⁸⁸

This passage is quite telling of what Baudrillard thinks has happened on September 11. The “system,” it is said, was originally able to establish itself as the voice of objective truth by effectively invalidating any dividing line between true and false, which invalidation was accomplished by instituting a realm of empty signs that are passed for reality. This is where, he claims, we have left the “universal,” wherein “there was still a natural reference to the world . . . [a] kind of dialectical tension and critical movement,” and have entered the “global,” meaning “the supremacy of positivity alone and of technical efficiency, total organization, integral circulation, the equivalence of all exchanges.”⁸⁹ One can see how, for all the changes in language, the terms of the debate have remained essentially those offered by Adorno and Horkheimer—put in other words: the rational “reality” of capitalism is actually sustained on the perpetual administration of irrational and entirely homogenous “simulacra.”

Baudrillard is proposing that the 9/11 attack on the system was itself a simulation—i.e., that it was symbolic—and that it can be considered a veritable “event” precisely because it was symbolic. We are thus in the second option offered in the citation above: the system can now only respond by reproducing the “real.” It does so by treating the symbolic attack as if it were grounded in the “true” state of affairs of its own rational “reality”—e.g., “freedom” and “democracy” are in peril, so we need a war against terror. The system can thus pretend that nothing revolutionary happened, and can consequently continue on its monopolistic path of global dominance. However, what Baudrillard is saying here is simply ineffectual: if the monopolistic reality established by the system is virtual, then there can be no attempt on the part of the system to go back to any reality it can manufacture that is not itself virtual—the system would simply remain firm in its empire of simulacra. As already observed, the system and the terrorists would appear not be playing different games at all.

Indeed, granting this, one should go even further. What need is there to theorize that it is a symbolic or virtual game that is being played in the first place? Are not the terrorists ultimately aiming to destroy the kind of “real” to which the system is committed through its symbols? And if so, are they not merely trying to replace *that* real with *their* real? This objection, as raised by Caroline Heinrich, is taken up by Baudrillard.⁹⁰ However, the point is summarily dismissed by means of a splendidly circular argument. Having posited that the attack is symbolic, Baudrillard insists that we should only think of it as symbolic. We should not take the “real” religious discourse—or any other discourse, for that matter—of the terrorists into account: it must be taken for granted that “[t]he terrorists are making an attack upon a system of integral reality by an act which has, in the very moment of its perpetration, neither true meaning nor reference in another world.”⁹¹ The terrorists, he proposes, have no identity or meaning of their own, but are simply trying to sabotage the system:

The aim is simply to wreck the system—itsself indifferent to its own values—by means of its own weapons. Even more than the system’s technological weapons, the key arm they appropriate, and turn to decisive effect, is the non-meaning and indifference which are at the heart of the system.⁹²

So it would appear that neither the system nor the terrorists have any identity or meaning: the terrorists are using the symbolic non-meaning of (i.e., the “integral reality” engendered by) the system to their own advantage, and in place of it only offer their own non-meaning (i.e., *their* reality). Neither non-meaning, of course, has any referent in the “real” Real: the system has effaced it voluntarily at its foundation, and the terrorists simply lack it. In other words, we are back around to where we started—the objection has not been answered, but implicitly confirmed, although in reverse.

It is readily apparent that, as long as he insists that we are dealing with symbolic non-meanings on both fronts, Baudrillard fails to actually say anything.⁹³ He is clearly convinced that what makes 9/11 an “event” is the singularity of the attack as counterpoised to the sameness of the “system” that has been hit. Yet it is not made in any way clear what would make this singularity distinctive and worth pursuing, nor where it would lead us. Why should we be persuaded that an “integral” non-meaning should be disrupted simply to be superseded by a “singular” non-meaning? There is no way out of this conundrum if one does not recognize some sort of meaning, some sort of “human objective,” and grounds it in some version of reality to which one should arrive by demystifying “reality” as we currently know it. In fact, Baudrillard himself cannot escape this, for he is definitely advocating whatever his notion of difference is (i.e., some notion of “real” reality—an “ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil”) against what he takes to be the embodiment of indifference (i.e., “false” reality—the system’s “destruction” of said distinction). Ironically enough, however, he is destined to fall prey to his own punning logic: how can he possibly assert that “[w]e have to face *facts*,”⁹⁴ and that “it is a *fact*” that “no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree,”⁹⁵ when he has incontrovertibly warned that “any interpretation in terms of ‘facts’ is a ‘factitious’ interpretation”? His interpretation seems very factitious.

[III]

A partially refreshing break from the cruel ironies of Baudrillardian thought is offered by Slavoj Žižek. If nothing else, the Slovenian philosopher is not afraid to speak of truths and say loud and clear—although, characteristically, his assertions are made under the guise of rhetorical questions—what he thinks we should learn from 9/11: namely, what if we simply have to accept the old Marxist adage that “the only

true ‘solution’ . . . is Socialism?”⁹⁶ Unfortunately, he fares considerably less well in explaining *why* socialism would be a solution, let alone a “true” one. Although Žižek almost seems—somewhat surreptitiously—to prove the late French *penseur* fundamentally wrong-headed without even mentioning him, they converge in many ways. In fact, their reflections might quite similarly be called attempts at being moral by being obscenely immoral. The title of Žižek’s book on September 11, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, is taken from a line in the movie *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), which in turn was a reference—perhaps involuntarily, a false one—to Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*. In a famous passage at the opening of the book, moving beyond Borges’s image of a map so meticulous that it covers the whole territory of the Empire, Baudrillard explains hyperreality thus:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of the territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to [Borges’s] fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*.⁹⁷

Notwithstanding this literal homage, however, the movie’s point, if there is one, seems to be rather different from this idea of reality as an object obliterated in a hyperreal of signs. In the film there is no superimposition of the map (i.e., the Matrix) upon the territory (i.e., reality): one is either in the Matrix or in reality, and the two levels remain clearly distinct. Once the film’s hero, Neo (Keanu Reeves), is unplugged from the cables that connect him to the Matrix (i.e., the virtual world he had always perceived to be real), he simply enters the real world. What is left

of it may well be a dystopian desert, but the map has not canceled it. In effect, Baudrillard himself has correctly rejected the movie as illustrative of his own thought.⁹⁸

So, it should be argued, *The Matrix* does not prove that Baudrillard is wrong, but only that the movie has misread him, or has somewhat arbitrarily set some references apart for its particular purposes. Which, necessarily, would also apply to Žižek's appropriation of the Baudrillardian reference. Even so, the analogies are so manifest as to require some pause. Žižek, for example, often speaks in terms quite close to Baudrillard's:

Virtual Reality . . . provides reality itself deprived of its substance, of the hard resistant kernel of the Real—just as decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like coffee without being real coffee, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being so. What happens at the end of this process of virtualization, however, is that we begin to experience “real reality” itself as a virtual entity.⁹⁹

When virtualization reaches a point where virtual reality becomes one and the same with “real reality,” it seems to me that one is describing exactly Baudrillard's simulacra—viz., signs bereft of all meaning. Žižek even refers explicitly to “hyperreality.”¹⁰⁰ This is somewhat confusing, for Žižek's psychoanalytic semiotic interpretation is not at all dependent upon this notion, and is instead entirely based on his usual Lacanian reading of Marxist–Hegelian dialectics and the antagonism of the Lacanian Real with its Symbolic counterpart. It might be said that if for Baudrillard the terrorist event “has nothing to do with the Real,”¹⁰¹ for Žižek it has *everything* to do with it.

Also in his case, however, old shadows loom large, in that *The Matrix* is used to illustrate once again how we are immersed in a cave-like dimension of ideological sameness. As a matter of fact, the Symbolic is nothing more than a precondition for the establishment and maintenance of this state of infinitely reproduced regimentation. To put it

more colorfully, Žižek thinks that today we are all “suckers”—an admittedly inelegant rewording of Agamben’s *Homo sacer*—unwittingly obsequious to the dominant ideology of liberal democracy. This is his introduction to his discussion of the Wachowskis’ movie in another essay:

When I saw *The Matrix* at a local theater in Slovenia, I had the unique opportunity of sitting close to the ideal spectator of the film—namely, to an idiot. A man in his late twenties at my right was so absorbed in the movie that he continually disturbed the other viewers with loud exclamations, like “My God, wow, so there is no reality!”

I definitely prefer such naïve immersion to the pseudo-sophisticated intellectualist readings which project refined philosophical or psychoanalytic conceptual distinctions into the film.¹⁰²

It goes without saying that in the remainder of the essay Žižek will provide exactly a “pseudo-sophisticated intellectualist reading” of the movie, one that will disclose to the “idiot”—that is, us—what he is really thinking (or what the movie should have said, as opposed to what it would have us believe), even though he does not know he is thinking it.

The problem with this “ideal spectator” seems to be that he honestly thinks he is happy, while on the contrary he is not. His perceived happiness is entirely dependent on a precarious illusion of wholeness that is created for him once he enters social reality—i.e., the Symbolic. This superficial sense of harmony, however, only hides an irrational core—i.e., the Real—that is made not to transpire in order for reality to appear as an orderly and stable whole, which it is not. This illusion is necessary to conceal the impossibility of the plenitude of the Real coming about in the social order, and therefore the traumatic lack of it that is inherent in the Symbolic. What Žižek, by way of Hegel, calls the Sublime—the lost Idea, the repressed object of desire that cannot be fully grasped by the Symbolic—is precisely the expression of such inconsistency.¹⁰³

On September 11, so goes the argument, Americans and all Westerners, the “ideal spectators” of the catastrophe, were given the opportunity to realize precisely that, while they think themselves to be happy, they are not really happy at all. Enclosed in the matrix of the Symbolic order, they live in the perfect, static consumer paradise: everything is provided for them, except what they really desire. The terrorist attacks were hence an instance of the Sublime, a trauma, the irruption of the desired object of the Real in the smooth operation of the Symbolic.

In other words, liberal democratic Westerners wish to be annihilated (viz., they want to shatter the reality they live in), though they dare not confess it. In a likewise fashion, the images of destruction that are seen in disaster movies, and which have foreshadowed the attacks, serve as evidence of these very fantasies. To put the point more bluntly: when we saw the aliens zap the White House and the Empire State Building in *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), we subconsciously wanted it to happen. The entire social construct is effectively based on the repression of such fantasies, which psychoanalysis is supposed to unearth. Žižek explains what our reaction should be:

Lacan’s notion of “traversing the fantasy” as the concluding moment of psychoanalytic treatment . . . may seem to fit perfectly the common-sense idea of what psychoanalysis should do: of course it should liberate us from the hold of idiosyncratic fantasies, and enable us to confront reality as it really is! However, this, precisely, is what Lacan does *not* have in mind—what he aims at is almost the exact opposite. In our daily existence, we are immersed in “reality” (structured and supported by the fantasy), and this immersion is disturbed by symptoms which bear witness to the fact that another, repressed, level of our psyche resists this immersion. To “traverse the fantasy” therefore, paradoxically, means *fully identifying oneself with the fantasy*—namely, with the fantasy which structures the excess that resists our immersion in daily reality.¹⁰⁴

Notice that the underlying motif that we live in a world dominated by anomie and the absence of an Event or Act is shared by both the Slovenian and the Frenchman. Compare, for example, Baudrillard's assertion that the horror of the attack on the towers was equivalent to "the horror of living and working in sarcophagi of concrete and steel,"¹⁰⁵ with Žižek's pronouncement that "[w]e in the West are the Nietzschean Last Men, immersed in stupid daily pleasures."¹⁰⁶ By contrast, the terrorists have "a destiny, a cause, a form of pride or of sacrifice,"¹⁰⁷ they "are ready to risk everything, engaged in the struggle even up to their own self-destruction."¹⁰⁸

A "fantasy," a "cause" or "struggle," is thus what we need to liberate ourselves from the chains of our deceitful cave-like condition. For Žižek, the matrix of false happiness that we experience as reality is structured like life in the dinosaur kingdom of *The Land Before Time*, an animated series that "provides what is arguably the clearest articulation of hegemonic liberal multiculturalist ideology."¹⁰⁹ The scheme works in a way analogous to that of Adorno's horoscopes, so as to coax and cajole our egos. The big dinosaurs, of course, devour the small ones, but in the end, for all their differences, all dinosaurs are made to appear equally and absolutely necessary. Only harmless horizontal differences are tolerated, while all vertical conflict that threatens to disrupt the social order is forbidden. Mimicking "the Freudian opposition of the public Law and its obscene superego double,"¹¹⁰ individuals are thus officially treated as equal subjects, but are in fact no more than "suckers" that simply go along with what they are told their place in the hierarchy is.

Paradoxically, says Žižek, the pervasiveness of this hegemonic ideology is best reflected in those manifestations that would seem to question it most. Movies such as *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), for instance, convince us that there is a real world outside the symbolic reality created for the protagonists, while in fact the only Real is that which appears epiphenomenally as a void in the Symbolic itself—to claim that there exists a reality outside the Symbolic

furtively reinforces the illusion that the social order we experience is in and of itself complete and consistent.¹¹¹ Similarly, a postmodern pastiche such as *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, 2001), while professing social criticism and subversion, actually rehabilitates old formulas of marginalization and subordination.¹¹²

Žižek is thus proposing that we recognize the emergence of, and consequently fully embrace, the impossible Act that came about on September 11. We must accept that “life is not just a stupid process of reproduction and pleasure-seeking, but that it is in the service of a Truth.”¹¹³ It only remains to be decided, of course, what this “Truth” is. In one page, Žižek censures the end of the “postmodern deconstructive sliding of sense” and the calls for “firm and unambiguous commitments,” which merely “lull us into the falsely secure conviction that nothing has really changed”;¹¹⁴ in another, quite contradictorily, he chastises the rejection of absolutes practiced by postmodern liberal democrats and postmodern deconstructionists in the name of the relativity of all positions, which only strengthens the false democratic credo and frustrates all genuine antagonisms.¹¹⁵ It appears that for Žižek a “postmodern deconstructive sliding of sense” is only good insofar as it sustains a “firm and unambiguous commitment” to what *he* thinks the “Truth” is. Which “Truth,” of course, cannot be found in democracy:

The idea of a [sic] “honest democracy” is an illusion, as is the notion of the order of Law without its obscene superego supplement: what looks like a contingent distortion of the democratic project is inscribed into its very notion—that is, democracy is *démocrassouille*. The democratic political order is of its very nature susceptible to corruption.¹¹⁶

We should thus choose to perform the Act—to embrace the Freudian death drive, the pre-symbolic incestuous pure Thing—and abandon our state of mere democratic existence. (Which, since he rejects democracy as such, would necessarily involve some unspecified version of non-

democratic socialism.) It is only by acceding to this drive that “I, the subject, am active, in so far as I externalize, posit outside myself, the gaze *qua* object, the impenetrable stain for which I am active and which designates my effective place—I ‘am really’ that impassive stain, the point of the gaze which I never see, but for which I nevertheless ‘make myself seen’ by means of what I am doing.”¹¹⁷ No marvel, then, that for Žižek it is the miraculous dark stain of the plane that we could glimpse for a second on our TV screens on September 11 that is to guide our “struggle.”¹¹⁸

According to the Slovenian, the key message of the attacks “is not some deeper ideological point, it is contained in their very first traumatic effect: terrorism works; we can do it.”¹¹⁹ Since, as stated by the standard Saussurean–Lacanian *doxa*, we are subjects split and alienated in language, we should look at words to show us the way beyond our present anemic condition. The best language Žižek suggests for the purpose, as might be expected, is Russian, with its capacity to separate the ordinary meaning of a concept from its moral absolute. For example, in Russian one word designates factual truth, while another absolute Truth; one personal freedom, another its metaphysical counterpart. This radical gap effectively reproduces what Žižek takes to be the foundational fraudulent scheme of liberal democracy: democracy only promises the mundane meaning (i.e., a state of false happiness), but not the pure and absolute one (i.e., true autonomy and freedom).¹²⁰

Recourse to such linguistic niceties, however, only procrastinates the aforementioned problem of having to decide *what* “pure and absolute” Truth is. In the introduction, Žižek lays out upfront his point that what we have to displace is the unquestionable dogma of liberal parliamentary democracy. Broadly put, his critique of the dogma in question is nothing but a reiteration of the Marxist claim about the repressive dimension of authority, which functions so as to sustain a belief in the inviolability of the social status quo—that is, the Symbolic order. Žižek holds that today this dogma is maintained by a forced logic of choice be-

tween democracy and fundamentalism: the very fact that the false alternative is posed proves that the “system” is forcing us to choose itself, the only possible option, as if it were a girl who refuses to grant that a boy may not agree to marry her, or a priest who will not take a negative answer when he asks if one believes in God. One cannot really choose how to answer the question, because the answer one gives will only be an effect of the question itself.

To accept the question in the first place means subjugating to the assumptions and ideas structured by the language of the Symbolic order. The subordination of individual agency to the words spoken by the social structure is such that the subject cannot possibly resist the representational role that is commanded onto him/her, as “the subject doesn’t speak, he is ‘spoken’ by the symbolic structure.”¹²¹ Consequently, all that the subject is allowed to desire is what the authority of the Symbolic order decides he or she must desire: the subject’s desire only exists as a replication of the desire pre-inscribed in the Symbolic. The same idea is expressed through the matrix metaphor: “This utter passivity is the foreclosed fantasy that sustains our conscious experience as active, self-positing subjects . . . in our innermost being, we are instruments of the Other’s (Matrix’s) *jouissance*, drained of our life-substance like batteries.”¹²² This implies that a truly negative response is not available within the language instituted by the system; thus, if a real “no” is to be asserted, and the subject’s real desire is to be fulfilled, a perspective shift has to occur—the system must be renounced in its totality, must be made Void, and its language must collapse.

However, only an unredeemable ahistorical structuralist would subscribe to so monolithic a view of individual agency. At the risk of being overtly trivial, it will suffice to take quite literally the two examples Žižek provides to show that they are severely misplaced. It is a fact readily observable in our—for the sake of argument, symbolically constructed—daily experience that people do make decisions regarding marriage and religion, and it will be easy to see that marriage refusals

and atheism are all but uncommon. The rejected girl and the priest may well dissent, but dissent does not keep the boy and the atheist from walking away, nor does it force them to kill the girl and the priest in order to do so. A number of quite varied factors, largely dependent on rational calculations, must be brought into assessment if one wants to elucidate why they do so. Nothing implies that there must be a radical split between the literal meaning of the subject's decision and its underlying outcome—i.e., that the subject is making a choice to which he or she cannot fully commit—and that the subject “spoken” by “the Other” will finally have to pledge full allegiance and obedience to the authorities of patriarchy and religion. Similarly, when urged by the American Big Other to perform the role of faithful and obedient allies in the coming “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” France and Germany simply had to say “No, thank you.”

Žižek's account gives unrestricted explanatory power and authority to the subject's alienated and subjugated pre-social and unconscious condition, at the exclusion of the social and conscious one.¹²³ Once the subject's social development is subsumed under the oppressive role of the Other, the autonomy of the subject is almost entirely discarded, and the complex dynamics of conscious and unconscious processes are basically arrested. However, no evidence or argument is given to justify such claims, nor to elucidate how such unsupported facts about individual psychology could be replicated at the level of entire political communities. One is instead tempted to wonder if what Žižek is describing is actually not “liberal parliamentary democracy” but a psychoanalysis session: no matter how vehemently the patient may deny the largely preordained phallogocentric interpretation offered by the analyst, he is always constitutionally pronounced wrong.

Žižek is not in the least committed to any serious conceptual distinctions, nor does he allow history any real voice. In addition to his categorical attack on democracy as the only alternative to fundamentalism, elsewhere he argues that “the true choice is the one between capi-

talism and its Other (at this moment represented by marginal currents like the antiglobalization movement).¹²⁴ Every which way, a political form of government (democracy) is thus equated wholesale with an economic system (capitalism) and what is indiscriminately taken to be its sole current incarnation (globalization); likewise, Islamist fundamentalists are equated with antiglobalization activists. Specific historical, social, and geographic variants are totally neglected; there remains only the “violent experience of how, across the cultural divide, we share the same antagonism.”¹²⁵ Anything that resists what are elected to be the two complicit and ontologically corrupt projects of democracy and capitalism is worth undertaking in order to one day reach “the only true ‘solution’”—so, today, we should join in the anti-global cause, or Islamic fundamentalism. Any conflict is explained away as an ideological displacement of the true conflict against democracy and capitalism. As a result, the only way Žižek finds to make real sense of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to see it not as rooted in specific and localized historico-political circumstances that can be studied, but as a simple manifestation of a holistic anti-capitalist global struggle.¹²⁶

On this account, we are expected to believe that U.S. capitalism is the same as German or Japanese capitalism; that globalization (reduced mainly to the economic sphere, without much reference to socio-cultural and political factors) has the same logic in the U.S. and the Netherlands; that there is no difference in how democracy operates in America, Sweden, and Mexico; and that no appreciable transformations within each country have occurred or are really worth examining. Crucially, perhaps in an attempt to repress the inconsistencies of his analysis, Žižek does not at all demand that we reflect before action: “True materialism . . . consists precisely in accepting the chanciness *without* the implication of the horizon of hidden meaning—the name of this chance is *contingency*.”¹²⁷ Following Lenin, he thus cites Napoleon’s “on attaque, et puis on verra” to conquer our critical-reflexive attitude and put our unconditional hope and trust in the Act, which we are supposed

to perform contingently without any prior awareness of possible dangers and consequences.¹²⁸ Quite conveniently, he thereby omits to remind us of what happened to Napoleon in Russia.

[IV]

As in the aforementioned case of the democratic dogma, it often becomes quite intriguing to read Žižek against himself. It is his discussion of happiness that is perhaps most interesting.¹²⁹ As seen above, we in Western capitalist countries are not happy, even though we think we are. Ours is a hypocritical happiness, in that it is fixated and predicated upon the satisfaction of desires that are not really our own, but are imposed on us by the Other in the language of the Symbolic order. Consequently, when today's leftist academics make leftist demands about full employment, immigrant rights, and the like, they are not really voicing their demands (remember that the subject does not speak, but is only "spoken" by the Other—a variant of Marx's "they do not know, but they are doing it"), but those into which they have been steamrolled by the capitalist system. They know perfectly well that their demands are impossible to meet, and indeed they count on this in order to preserve the benefits of their position (i.e., their false happiness) within the system. Yet again, this would require an active calculation on their part, one that Žižek can distance himself from in the very moment when he, apparently unbridled by the system's linguistic chains, uncovers their secret plot. Alternatively, however, it should not be too difficult to notice that the very same mechanism Žižek delineates could correspondingly be applied to him: one could easily form the hypothesis, for example, that when Žižek asks of us that we disrupt the capitalist system and perform the Act that will eventually lead us to the long-sought goal of (non-democratic) Socialism, he knows perfectly well that nobody could seriously listen to him, and so he can "hypocritically retain [his] clear radi-

cal conscience” while continuing to give lectures about the big Other in capitalist countries around the world.

Žižek’s Lacanian-inspired psychoanalytic semiotics is particularly problematic as a political critique of ideology, which is exactly the position it aspires to gain. As Žižek welcomes “radical and violent simplification,”¹³⁰ I shall simplify. For all their vagaries, his analyses all derive deductively from a closed way of thinking based on a few argumentatively unjustified, and as such irrefutable, postulates, which inevitably lead to the same unassailable conclusion. First, subjects are immersed in language (language founds the social rules, laws, codes, and prohibitions the subject must adhere to in order to become a social animal), and their experience is *ipso facto* structured in advance by it. The big Other of capitalist ideology “interpellates” subjects through the maintenance of the Symbolic order instituted by language. Language essentially predetermines what the subject can think, say, and do in social reality; consequently, everything we need to know about any particular real experience can be understood as a function of it. Second, the Symbolic must appear internally coherent and self-sufficient in order for the subject to effectively misrecognize him- of herself as free in the role “spoken” by the Other. However, there exist splits and gaps that signal internal instability. These lapses are the transitory manifestations of a pre-symbolic, unconscious, and transcendental realm in which the subject was in an actual state of freedom and plenitude (i.e., the Real), which becomes forever lost and only illusorily replaced with the entry in the Symbolic, and whose “hard kernel” exceeds symbolization. Third, instances of such lapses in the fissures and fault lines of the Symbolic are what the subject needs to detect if true freedom is to be regained. While in the Symbolic the subject tries to become the self “spoken” by the Other, and to desire what the Other imposes, he or she is destined to fail, for all he or she really wants to become or desire is that which has been lost. It is exactly this lost object of absolute *jouissance* (multifariously called the Real, the object a, desire, the drive, the fantasy, the

repressed, the Truth, the Thing, the Trauma, the Cause, or the Sublime) that sometimes appears as a malfunction in the language spoken by the Other, and shows unequivocally in its miraculous appearance that it is not only the subject that is incomplete as a self in the Symbolic, but the Symbolic itself that is lacking. Knowledge of this lack in the Symbolic should thus force the subject to perform the Act (i.e., to “traverse the fantasy”) that will restore true fullness and freedom. Which freedom, it quite astoundingly turns out, is (non-democratic) Socialism.

Any interpretation Žižek provides is basically a rumination around this fixed set of arbitrary assumptions and whimsical deductions, which are simply projected onto the latest cultural and political attraction. Invariably, Žižek will always suggest that there are such incongruities (encounters with the Real, or any of the like) in our social reality (the Symbolic, Ideology) that will show us that democracy and capitalism are inherently corrupt; in order to resolve these incongruities, we should simply follow the road they reveal—we should “traverse the fantasy” and do away with the prison-house of democracy and capitalism. The changeless underlying logic seems to be that since capitalism and democracy are constructed by their iron cage of language, they are false, and only aim to conceal the effacement of our true freedom.¹³¹

The only problem, it must once again be stressed, is that we do not, and cannot, know what our true freedom is; yet, Žižek has no problem whatsoever finding that “the only ‘true’ solution” is Socialism. For the sake of argument, let us accept that the Lacanian-inspired premises are valid. The whole edifice is built on the pre-symbolic (pre-linguistic and unconscious) existence of a metaphysical realm (the Real) that is supposed to encapsulate everything the subject needs in order to be a fully independent entity. This is the realm of “non-Being,” in which the subject is free from the ideological determination of the Symbolic. But apart from this negative definition of the Real as non-Being opposed to the state of Being that is created in the Symbolic, the Real has no content whatsoever. It is strictly noumenal, and cannot be known—it is pure

Void. The Real is impossible as such, and we only come to experience it in those instances when it emerges momentarily as an anomaly in the Symbolic. In Žižek’s political reading of Lacan, however, it is posited to be the eternal and all-powerful Master of Truth that can at last overcome the falseness inherent in the Symbolic. (And, since the Real is void, it can be filled with *anything*—so why not Socialism?) As Robert Paul Resch puts it:

In place of a Lacanian theory of the subject whereby I might work through the fantasy that I was always already there as an independent, autonomous, unified subject, and thereby achieve knowledge of myself and my history (I was this infant with these parents in this society; I am this structural unity of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic registers), Žižek substitutes a Lacanian fantasy of narcissistic omnipotence of an absolute Freedom whose philosophical form is Idealism.¹³²

At the end of Žižek’s personal reading of Lacan, we are therefore not presented with a developmental account and a viable “therapy” that can help subjects to better recognize their authentic non-autonomous place in society, and reorient their experience accordingly, having acquired knowledge of, and outflanked, the hidden mechanics, and the incompleteness, of the Symbolic. For example, we do not have a “therapy” that can help politicians—and, at the communitarian level, nations—make better choices and remedy past mistakes made on fallacious grounds. Indeed, mistakes (and decisions of all sorts) cannot technically be made at all, for the subject does not speak. This is because, inasmuch as the system is inherently corrupt, subjects cannot restore what is torn in it—there can be no reform, but only revolution. We are thus offered a stark alternative between the passivity of symbolic determination and the Act of pre-symbolic absolute freedom—which absolute freedom, the pure Void of the Real, is exactly what it is impossible to achieve.¹³³

The insurmountable obstacle, in fact, is that as soon as one steps out of the Symbolic order of democracy and capitalism—or any other

Symbolic order, for that matter—one does not at all arrive at absolute freedom (which is impossible, a mere pre-social state of non-Being and Void), but inevitably at yet another Symbolic order. In Žižek’s case, the Symbolic order of (non-democratic) Socialism. Let us consider once again Žižek’s discussion of happiness. Happiness betrays desire, in that it is dependent not upon the subject’s true desire (which tends toward the Real and freedom) but upon the desire imposed by the big Other of the Symbolic (which contents itself with false happiness). In any Symbolic order, it is desire, the search for the Real of true freedom, which disturbs the smooth operation of the system. Thus in Czechoslovakia it was desire that subverted the Symbolic order of Czechoslovak Socialism, and threw Czechoslovaks (later to become the citizens of the Czech and Slovak Republics) into the new Symbolic order of democratic capitalism: “Desire,” says Žižek, “was the force which compelled the people to go further—and end up in a system in which the vast majority are definitely *less* happy.”¹³⁴ An astute reader might here observe that, if happiness betrays the subject’s true desire, and said desire tends toward true freedom, then if people are less happy now in the Symbolic order of democratic capitalism than they were under that of non-democratic Socialism, it should necessarily be inferred that currently they betray desire less than they did before, and are therefore freer. Consequently, non-democratic Socialism could hardly be a solution to democratic capitalism—it actually appears to be quite the opposite. If what Žižek means here is “genuine happiness,” as opposed to the false happiness provided by capitalism and democracy, then he simply provides no evidence in support of his assertion that Czechs and Slovaks are less happy now that they are part of the European Union than they were in the good old days when Russian tanks were pounding Prague.

The Lacanian subject is by necessity caught up in a circle. Once the tug war between the Symbolic and the Real begins—viz., once we enter social and political life—there is no way to put an end to it: for of course there will always be some form of social and linguistic organization

structuring human life, and it will always be upset by something that exceeds this structuring process. At a lecture in 1973, responding to a student's revolutionary zeal, Lacan himself made a similar point:

As he was just saying, we should all be part of it . . . we should close ranks together to achieve . . . well, what exactly? What does organization mean if not a new order? A new order is the return of something which—if you remember the premise from which I started—it is the order of the discourse of the master . . . It's the one word which hasn't been mentioned, but it's the very term organization implies.¹³⁵

One of the upshots of Žižek's thought is that it has all the appearance of a conspiracy theory: everything that happens is attributable to the great machinations of the big Other of democracy and capitalism, and all the evidence that can prove otherwise only has the effect of confirming the theory. Baudrillard reasons similarly when he refers to 9/11 conspiracy theories: although a secret plot by the U.S. Government would establish unequivocally that the towers did not commit suicide (as if the collision with two jet airliners can somehow establish the opposite), it would nonetheless be absolute proof “of a self-destructive internal violence, of a society's obscure predisposition to contribute to its own doom.”¹³⁶ So, in a way, the suicide hypothesis can be salvaged in a win-win game. For both Žižek and Baudrillard, irrespective of theoretical terminology, the system has to follow its path to doom, and we only need an Event or Act to help it happen.

Once more, reading Žižek against himself can be illuminating. Žižek is giving us yet more examples, all characteristically based on “dialectical reversals” and the “identity of the opposites,” of why we should choose to perform the Act. After discussing the English royals, he repeats a variation on his trope that Adorno's totalitarianism is a necessary outcome of the liberal (i.e., democratic and capitalist) Symbolic. He compares Adorno's totalitarian notion of saying “we” while meaning “I,”

thereby “presenting one’s contingent subjective opinion as the impersonal objective/collective truth,” with its liberal equivalent of saying “I” while meaning “we,” which “present[s] the impersonal commonplace as your intense personal experience.” However, one should not forget that Žižek intends to direct us exactly toward the “impersonal objective/collective truth” of the Real (it is worth remembering, non-democratic Socialism): Should it be concluded that Žižek has totalitarian inclinations?

He then addresses the figure of James Jesus Angleton, C.I.A. chief of counterintelligence for 20 years during the Cold War. Angleton’s obsession, inculcated originally by a K.G.B. defector named Anatoly Golitsyn, was that a massive conspiracy was in place whereby the C.I.A. and other Western intelligence agencies had been riddled with Soviet moles. What is more, he was convinced that the internal sources of trouble that could be observed in the Soviet bloc were part of a frame-up to reinforce Western confidence in the weakness of the opposing side. As a result, under his leadership the American counterintelligence remained essentially unproductive, for the simple reason that he considered everyone a potential suspect; to the point that a friend of Angleton’s has retrospectively concluded in a study that he probably was the real mole in the agency. Žižek therefore explains:

That is the truth of the paranoid stance: it is itself the threat, the destructive plot, against which it is fighting. The neat aspect of this solution—and the ultimate condemnation of Angleton’s paranoia—is that *it doesn’t matter* if Angleton was merely sincerely duped by the idea of a “Monster Plot,” or if he was in fact the mole: in both cases, the result is *exactly the same*. What, then, constituted the deception? Our failure to include in the list of suspects the very idea of (globalized) suspicion, that is, *to put the very idea of suspicion under suspicion*—and this “short circuit,” the coincidence of opposites, is the point of Hegelian self-relating negativity.¹³⁷

I suppose this example, if interpreted moderately in light of the current “war on terror,” should put us correctly on guard against the “symbolically constructed” paranoia of terrorism itself. However, it would also be perfectly correct to derive from it that one should be extremely wary of Žižek’s globalized suspicion of Democracy and Capital.

[V]

By way of conclusion, I shall return to Adorno and face up the notion that our Western rational processes of self-preservation might have “run amuck.” By the term “rationality,” I would have to refer to the rather fixed, if uneasy, amalgam of modernity, post-modernity, democracy, capitalism, globalization, and liberalism that appears to emerge from the three thinkers I have discussed in this chapter. Arguably, the best metaphor for this allegedly bedeviled condition is that advanced by Horkheimer of a “machine” that has “dropped the driver.” Or, put differently, we, Westerners, do not drive the machine, but are only driven by it.

Stephen Crook identifies three main “dogmatic propositions” in Adorno’s treatment of authoritarian irrationalism.¹³⁸ First, irrationalism (particularly anti-Semitism, which could stand for any fear of a big Enemy) is part and parcel with the Enlightenment project of modernity, and not simply a deplorable violation of civilization dependent on unexpected conditions or occurrences. Second, this irrationalism can be investigated in the psychological, cultural, economic, political, and social dynamics inherent in modernity. Third, given their ability to manipulate individuals, a fundamental symmetry is drawn between the culture industry and authoritarian propaganda.

The dynamics that are supposed to explicate modern irrationality are often put by Adorno in psychoanalytic terms borrowed heavily from Freud. Once married to a Marxist critique of capitalist ideology, they yield to the same monolithic conception of individual agency offered by

Žižek: if a certain amount of simplification is allowed, the individual's power of action and free thought is, with minor theoretical variations, progressively eclipsed by the oppressive and static symbolic representations of capitalist ideology, which force individuals to be dependent on, and conform to, authority. In the Baudrillardian-semiotic vernacular, it could be said that our post-modern condition replaces human reality with the hyperreality of the capitalist and global system. Which system, by virtue of its very structure, is invariably taken to advance toward self-destruction.

What analyses of such type almost totally overlook is empirical verification. Indeed, reliance on any kind of data is despised as subservient to the “rationality” they seek to displace. The authors only provide rather debatable psychoanalytic and semiotic bases for their assessments: we have to accept what they say about the position of individuals relative to the reality supposedly established by authority practically on faith. They presuppose that human events are best understood by appeal to unconscious and symbolic processes, which inevitably leads them to ignore more concrete and convincing explanations drawn from the study of conscious or merely implicit attitudes and behavior. Moreover, the absence of verifiable hypotheses produces a kind of closed thinking that verges on the dogmatic and the ideological.

Perhaps more crucially, because of their ideological bias, these interpretations fail to acknowledge that the dynamics they describe may actually be more or less inescapable in *any* political community and ideology. As Crook observes in relation to Adorno:

It is an entirely unquestioned assumption . . . that while political error is grounded in psychopathology, political correctness can flow only from psychic health. . . . The challenge is surely to ask directly whether cultural activities and political movements of which we approve might not be driven, in part, by the same principles as are those of which we disapprove.

It is questionable that these principles can be best grasped by formulating hypotheses about the unconscious.¹³⁹ Before we come to a dead end by resorting to some form of nihilism or by throwing ourselves in the arms of some Messianic Act of “challenge and death,” as both Baudrillard and Žižek suggest, it would perhaps be wiser to remain within, and test, the more reasonable or average limits of our everyday experience. This is what I shall attempt to do, gradually, in the next chapter.

3. Partisan Enemies

It is now time to draw the separate strands of my argument in the preceding chapters together. As I hope will be apparent from my foregoing discussion, little effort has been devoted to understanding the basic outline of what I take to be the earnestly political nature of the “event,” and the conclusions that can be obtained from it. Governments, of course, have acted politically (which is obviously their job), whether by joining the American military campaign or more or less politely refusing to do so. But the premises on which they have done so are rather uncertain and diverse. Little can be said about them, in my view, if one does not understand how the political nature of terrorism itself can be reconciled with the political nature of human agents, including countries, and the conditions under which it operates.

[1]

My first basic contention in the opening chapter has been that September 11 has not, at least in essence, changed “our world.” I was there arguing against the idea that 9/11-type terrorism, and consequently responses to it, should be thought of in fundamentally different terms from older manifestations of the phenomenon. My discussion in the previous chapter, on the other hand, was based on a refutation of Baudrillard’s and Žižek’s characterizations of 9/11 as a revolutionary instantiation of a “symbolic” or “sublime” object that should tear down our preexisting ideological reality. It is in point here to notice that the assumption that we are facing something substantially new and drastic is shared, although in diverse—or rather, opposite—ways, both by the doctrine of the “new terrorism” that underpinned the War on Terror and by the two philosophers’ radical analyses, which conversely seem to propel some type of countervailing “war” on the “system.”

Indeed, none of these dissections of 9/11 would hold if they did not presuppose the advent of an at least potentially disrupting force threatening what I shall continue to call—for reasons of economy and consistency—“the system.” This force, of course, is terrorism—and, to a crucial degree, a new form of it. The idea of a “new terrorism” reflected in the Bush security strategy, for instance, is inextricably linked with what is diagnosed as the protean and fragile security environment of the new unipolar world of which the U.S. is the just ruler. Žižek and Baudrillard, at the other end of the spectrum, hold that it is exactly this unipolarity—identified with the “violence” of the aforementioned amalgam of modernity, post-modernity, democracy, capitalism, globalization, and liberalism—that is the threat to real truth and freedom, which the new “symbolic” terrorism can somehow recapture. Put in the most unrefined terms: in the former view, the new terrorism is a bad thing because the system is at heart good; in the latter, it is a good thing because the system is inherently rotten.

The argument that is starting to emerge on my part is instead based on the proposition that what is variously described as new is in fact a seamless continuation of both old concepts and old states of affairs. On the one hand, the least that can be said is that today’s volatile security environment—whether correctly grasped by the exact language of the Bush security strategy or not—was certainly not *created* by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but at best only *confirmed* by them. On the other, it is readily visible that the ideological, “symbolic” reality inventively described by Baudrillard’s and Žižek’s respective theories is not at all a new state of things: Baudrillard’s “hyperreality” is at least as old as the end of the Cold War—noticeably, the same period when the new unipolar role of the U.S. was being defined; Žižek’s “sublime object” of ideology is the same “object” that he has always found to structure and challenge the oppressive reality of capitalism.

It is worth stressing again here that I am obviously *not* proposing that nothing happened on September 11. On the contrary, the first con-

clusion I have drawn in the first chapter was in due recognition of the historical, political, and philosophical relevance of the terrorist acts that were committed on that date; such relevance, however, does not so much stem from a momentous reversal of historical, political, and philosophical categories as it does from the mere fact that the attacks were stricken against what as yet remains the world hegemon. It is for this reason, I propose, that what matters most is not the attacks themselves as much as the American response to them. This is the bulk of the *internal* explanations I set out to outline. Moreover, I would like to bring readers' attention to the fact that I have, as far as I could, retracted from moral judgments both with regard to terrorism as such and with regard to the attributes of American hegemony as either overall beneficial (as in neo-conservative readings) or overall detrimental (as in what I shall classify as neo-Marxist ones). This is meant to reflect my proviso against *intrinsic* explanations.

I thus submit that the analyses I have so far sketched provide us, with mixed fortunes, with different vocabularies intent, under their own steam, on explaining away our current historical juncture in accordance with their own previously formed politico-moral conceptual schemes. What is central here, I must again point out, is that although entangled with preexisting classifications, all these theories derive their cogency from the idea that 9/11 represents a historical break or intensification that necessarily calls for a new “path of action”—of course, the path of action proposed by the theory at hand, be it a preventive war or a “symbolic challenge.”¹⁴⁰

My position may by contrast appear particularly weak, insofar as it could at bottom seem to deny any real specificity to the so-called “event.” One way to counter it could be to move decisively along the lines of Hegel's formulation of the quantity–quality transition principle. Put succinctly, it may be argued that whatever continuities there might exist between the pre- and post-9/11 worlds, the attacks represented a quantitative peak in consequence of which a qualitative transformation

has occurred that requires an effectively new course of action. Yet again, it can be noticed how something approaching this appealing strategy had already been employed prior to 9/11, to quite different ends, by both the likes of Laqueur and Baudrillard: for the former, religious fanaticism and the availability of weapons of mass destruction had basically created a new, irrational brand of terrorism; for the latter, simulation had reached a point where the system had effaced “the territory” and replaced it with its falsely “rational” symbolic “map,” which terrorism now aims to tear to pieces.

The point was made even earlier and more explicitly by Adorno, in a passage that prefigures Baudrillard’s movement toward hyperreality, in his discussion of horoscopes and modern irrationality:

As always with arguments intended to discredit interest in the specific modernity of phenomena by stressing that there is nothing new under the sun, this objection [that fortune telling has a long history] is both true and false. It is true in as much as the institutionalization of superstition is by no means novel; it is false in so far as this institutionalization has reached, by means of mass production, a quantity which is likely to result in a new quality of attitudes and behavior and in that the gap between the systems of superstition and the general state of mind has been widened tremendously. . . . [People] don’t even see the sorcerers at work any more nor are they allowed to listen to their abracadabra. They simply “get the dope.”¹⁴¹

I shall not at this point reinstate my particular criticisms of these loosely quantitative–qualitative reconstructions. It will however be worthwhile for my purposes here to retrieve Liam Harte’s basic confutation of Laqueur’s identification of a qualitatively new form of terrorism with respect to mass destruction: the difference, it will be recalled, would only be quantitative, making it possible for terrorists to kill on a larger scale. To this, it must be added that terrorism would—and indeed must—nonetheless retain its basic set of motivations and intentions. These two

objections are quite strong ones, in that they significantly downplay, if not nullify, the role of the two chief reasons Laqueur provides in support of his thesis—viz., fundamentalism and weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, one does not really know what to make of Baudrillard’s semiotic pretensions, insofar as it remains utterly unclear what kind of reality, as opposed to his professed hyperreal, Baudrillard thinks has been lost in quantity and proposes terrorism would allow us to regain.

Notice that I am not making a sweeping claim that quantitative modifications are not possibly able to cause qualitative transformations: I am simply denying that this was the case with 9/11—which, it should in addition be insisted *contra* Laqueurian positions, did not at all involve weapons of mass destruction. Until it is proved with a given degree of certainty that a genuinely qualitative transformation is in place, such a marked change cannot simply be postulated, as do Laqueur and Baudrillard, on rather slender grounds. A hunch or a lucky guess will just not do (see also Adorno’s suppositional “likely to result”). The loose, and perhaps unintentional, reliance of these analyses on the aforesaid Hegelian principle does, however, usefully lay bare their underlying tendency to start from, and end up in, vaguely moral characterizations. Apropos of this, Stanley Cunningham remarks that:

Hegel uses examples drawn directly from classical virtue theory, wherein moral predicates correspond to real (un)ethical states of affairs. Moral qualities, that is, emerge as real properties of aggregates when the same sequences or quantities attain a certain magnitude. (We think somewhat along these lines when we say or read “Bigger is better” or “Small is beautiful.”) Hegel’s principle is useful in this context as a purely heuristic device—that is, as a philosophical principle that helps us in the business of interpreting forms of political discourse, in the language of ethics, as they reach a certain magnitude or accumulation. Although this language may be less specific than, say, “unjust,” “cruel,” or “deceptive,” it explicitly situates the magnitude within the ethical domain.¹⁴²

I will rephrase this to mean that the evaluation of the “ethical domain” will depend on the presumption that the magnitude under consideration is, for some immanent and often unstated qualities, favorable or harmful in a given situation. This is where it is made manifest at a theoretical level how all these analyses start from pre-given politico-moral positions and set out to interpret given phenomena accordingly. One can see this in Walzer’s patent state bias in the case of the supreme emergency exception, or in Baudrillard’s and Žižek’s unmitigated condemnation of the capitalist symbolic system. In the first example, what separates licit from illicit conduct, all other things being equal, is the sheer fact of belonging to a formally organized body politic; in the second, the mere existence of a system deemed to be unbearably oppressive justifies, in effect, recourse to any form of resistance, including the “symbolic challenge” of terrorism. This bias becomes more evident as we approach, in the transition from quantity to quality, particularly intense situations where human freedom in its highest form is thought to be at stake. Thus, when the existence of a country is supposed to be in grave danger, even the intentional killing of innocents becomes acceptable; likewise, when the global capitalist system—or worse, democracy itself—is supposed to have grown hegemonic to an intolerable, “hyperreal” degree, immolating oneself becomes the Act of absolute freedom.

Put differently, the moral evaluation of terrorism will depend on the relationship, negative or positive, that its disrupting force is considered to have with the preexisting system it attacks. This is yet another reason—indeed, I submit, the primary reason—not to think of 9/11 as something that has significantly altered our conceptual categories; on the contrary, it can again be said that it is not the terrorism of 9/11 as such that ultimately comes under analysis, nor the “event,” but rather directly the system that precedes it.

[II]

Let us here pause and consider, for a moment, the very notion of democracy that sits at the center of this system. Let me begin by going a while back in time. On two consecutive evenings in 1867, two public lectures were delivered at the Edinburgh Working Men's Club and Institute on the issue of whether or not male suffrage should be extended in Great Britain. On the first evening, the revered scholar and poet John Stuart Blackie was clearly opposed to such development; on the second, his Chartist rival Ernest Charles Jones replied with a staunch defense of it.¹⁴³ Acting as the guarantor of "the fine social balance of [the British] mixed constitution," Blackie pursued an argument that closely mirrors the estimation of a quantity/quality trade-off, to the effect that, as suffrage is expanded, society on the whole becomes less able to regulate itself: "I have heard of a patient who, having benefited by a prescription to take six drops of a strong medicine per day, took a bottle, and killed himself"—by parity of reasoning, he ponders, will not democracy kill us all if we take more drops of it? Against "general assertions about the transcendental virtues of democracy," he was therefore of the opinion that male suffrage should not go much beyond the Great Reform Act of 1832. To grant universal suffrage, in his view, would have been pure folly. Declaring himself to be "earnestly desirous that all classes of the people should possess that weight in [government] which a fair consideration of their relative positions, and a just estimate of the quality and the quantity of their social contributions, might recommend," he undertook the task of enumerating and counterbalancing the virtues and vices of the democratic principle.

Five key democratic propositions are thus each offset by a countervailing statement. First, the fact that "[a]ll men are naturally free" cannot be considered in isolation from the recognition that "[a] congregation of the masses of people, blown up with the idea of liberty, could only produce confusion and anarchy, unless these masses are willing to

submit themselves to the constraints of reason and law.” Second, the general truth of natural equality is also naturally blind to what Blackie terms “the first lesson of social science,” namely, the principle of human difference and excellence. Third, the natural right of popular sovereignty and self-government is nothing but a dangerous fiction, for “[a] multitude of human beings indiscriminately congregated, that is, acting only as a quantitative force without any regard to quality, never did, and in its very nature never can, perform the functions of governing.” Fourth, a representative government composed of delegates of the people risks endorsing “hasty conclusions” and “the one-sided violent views of great masses of men . . . at the call of ambitious demagogues and the spur of venomous faction.” Finally, as democracy means that the majority wins, and nothing more, it can only guarantee that “the greatest show of hands” will prevail, but in no way “the greatest show of reason.” On the contrary, holds Blackie, “an appeal to the decision of the majority is always the resource of despair; and, if there be any other method of attaining a more reasonable result in matters of social action, these methods ought first to be exhausted.”

As can be seen, all Blackie’s points converge around what is easily the basic problem of democracy, and quite obviously its very condition of existence: the power of the majority and its congenital—should we say, irrational—vulnerabilities. The argument verges once again on essentialism, for Blackie too observes that “every social organism contains in its own essence the connate seeds of its own destruction . . . which there is no possibility of preventing, except by the inoculation of a counteracting principle from within.” More to the point, not unlike a Baudrillard or a Žižek, he basically equates democracy with America, a nation he claims—citing de Tocqueville and pro-Confederate James Spence—to be pervaded by “gross corruption and shameless unscrupulousness.” All this may be well said, but Blackie fails to acknowledge with equal frankness, except by eloquently excusing it, that non-democratic government is quite evidently amenable to the same rules.

Although Blackie proclaims himself “in nowise connected with what is popularly called the Aristocracy,” his position often sounds unashamedly elitist, as when he explicitly upholds “the aristocratic principle of subordination and superiority” against democratic equality. His opinion on the proposed electoral reform, however, is quite clear, and in the large, one may say, at least for his time, a mildly conservative one:

The first care of a wise Reform Bill at the present crisis should be not to disfranchise the natural civic aristocracy of the country in favour of the democracy. It is a law of God which cannot be contravened, that the high should rule the low; and that civil government should not be thrown into the hands of those who, by nature and the unchangeable constitution of things, are least capable of governing. Do I then mean to treat the working classes as serfs—to give them no voice in what concerns their own life and liberty, to declare them for ever incapable of social manhood? Not at all. I do not grudge them representation; I only refuse them domination.

Suffrage, in other words, should not be universal; however, the fair and adequate representation of all classes must somehow be guaranteed. One observation is here not out of place. Notice, in particular, the naturalistic vision in Blackie’s language: not for a moment does he suspect that his opinion about the balance of aristocratic and democratic principles may not reflect universally valid facts of life and reason. It will be perhaps no surprise that the same disposition was cultivated by his opponent in his response of the following evening. Jones’s tone is also frequently religious, as when he defends the prospects of mass education by qualifying it as enabling people “to think rightly and to act honestly in the position God has allotted to [them] in life.” Later on, near the end, he openly concludes that “democracy is but Christianity applied to the politics of our worldly life.” In any event, neither Jones nor Blackie can be shaken in their conviction that absolute democracy,

or inversely a democracy to be contained, is the will of nature, reason, and God.

I have briefly attracted your attention to this not widely known polemical exchange from the nineteenth century because of its topic, surely not an untimely one, and because it appears to me to encapsulate quite clearly the general parameters of everyday political discourse—and as for that, of all discourse—the first of which is the aforementioned reliance on an underlying, and practically inescapable, moral and ideological stance. In this case, the crux of the matter is set out as starkly as possible, with either orator claiming reason and God on his side. It does not take long to see how this oppositional, vaguely or openly religious tenor could be found replicated, almost verbatim, if only more violently, in the current world of what has been famously described as the clash of civilizations.¹⁴⁴ The main difference here is that Blackie and Jones were discussing in a regulated public political space as peers, while today's opposing parties—"democracies" and "terrorists"—are quite obviously not equal political competitors. I am now approaching the moment in my discussion when moral—and, jointly, political—evaluation will enter the picture. For the time being, however, I shall limit myself to remarking that, put very plainly, and whatever reservations one might maintain, there is little way to resolve the dispute if one does not take sides and decide which party, whether in point of principle or out of pure convenience, she thinks is best supported by "reason," whatever one takes reason to be.

One excellent way to break the impasse would be to say, as is more often than not suitable to say, that neither party is completely right nor completely wrong. This would be a very liberal way to proceed, and I take myself to have to some extent followed this course in the previous two chapters, where I have taken issue with both neoconservative conceptions of a new terrorism and neo-Marxist essentialist readings of the American "system." With respect to democracy, it will perhaps be wise to follow the venerable Eric Hobsbawm, who reminds us "of the fact,

which is too often overlooked, that the well-being of countries does not depend on the presence or absence of any single brand of institutional arrangement, however morally commendable,”¹⁴⁵ and that democracy is absolutely superior to non-democratic government only if no further complications from other factors—say, the myriad factors that might contribute to the free election of a tyrannical regime, as with Weimar—are incurred. One of the most rhetorically overlooked facts about democracy is that it does not require as a necessary complement what is usually downright assimilated to it—that is, liberalism. It is usually taken for granted that “democracy” is to be understood as “liberal democracy.” It should always be kept in mind, however, that “much of the case for liberal democracy rests on its constitutional liberal component rather than its democratic, or more precisely electoral, component. The case for free voting is not that it guarantees rights but that it enables the people (in theory) to get rid of unpopular governments.”¹⁴⁶

Moreover, once the foregoing is acknowledged, one needs to turn to government itself, and to the conditions that allow “the people” to get rid of it, if need be. In order to do so, the people must first of all know what their government is doing, what it is *not* doing, and if what it is doing or not doing is correct—say, if the “new terrorism” it says it is fighting is actually new and operative as it is described to be—and in accord with their interests. It is simply dangerous, of course, to assume on faith that this is the case. I will here follow once again Noam Chomsky, who explains democracy thus:

One conception of democracy has it that a democratic society is one in which the public has the means to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free. If you look up democracy in the dictionary you’ll get something like that.

An alternative conception of democracy is that the public must be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled. That may sound like an

odd conception of democracy, but it's important to understand that it is the prevailing conception.¹⁴⁷

Chomsky's appraisal of liberal democracy is not especially far from that of the theories presented in the previous chapter, and is not at all dissimilar from Blackie's aristocratic conception of democratic liberalism either.¹⁴⁸ To reproduce the lexicon used heretofore, it can unceremoniously be said that the picture he depicts is that of a public that has to be "interpellated" or "contained," symbolically or otherwise, in order for "the system"—i.e., the powers that be—to continue on its "monopolistic path." Except for the fact that it is a brutally realistic, critical, and constructive assessment, rather than a decidedly pessimistic and oppositional one in which subjects do not, and cannot, speak, unless they reject the system in its totality. He does not so much think in terms of oppression as in terms of propaganda, broadly intended.

The ability of subjects to speak in the face of propaganda is here essential, especially when considered in contrast with the conception of language held, to various degrees, by both critical theory and authors of a broadly post-structuralist or postmodernist persuasion. While for these, notwithstanding the purported reappropriation of individual agency attempted from the poststructuralism of the 1980s onwards, the structural powers of language remain ultimately indeterminable and central to the subject's "position," for Chomsky freedom "has nothing to do with language. Language is the way we interact and communicate so, naturally, people use the means of communication to try to shape attitudes and opinions and to induce conformity and subordination. This has been true forever, but propaganda became an organized and very self-conscious industry only in the last century."¹⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he explains the theoretical connection, which he takes to be only an abstract one, between his linguistic theory and his political work:

At the core of this capacity for language, it's been recognized for centuries, is what is sometimes called a

creative aspect, the free ability to . . . express our own thought without limit, within constraints but without limit, in novel ways, and so on. This ability is somehow a fundamental part of human nature. It's the core of Cartesian philosophy, for example. And you can learn something, not about how we do it, that's beyond inquiry, but at least about the mechanisms that enter into it.

. . . Also, in theory, you can learn something about these aspects of human nature, moving over to the domain of human affairs, including politics, but also personal life or anything else. Anyone who takes any stand on anything—say you're in favor of keeping things the way they are, or some minor reform, or revolution, or whatever it may be. If you're serious about it, if you're acting as a kind of moral agent and you think what you do should meet certain minimum moral standards, you're taking that position because you think it's good for people. It's going to somehow bring out and amplify and offer possibilities for their fundamental nature to express itself.¹⁵⁰

Although Chomsky is careful to specify that the connection between language, politics, and morality is only that of a “family resemblance,” and that no “deductive connections” are possible, he can definitely be taken to argue for a more enabling and empowering notion of human agency in the face of the various determinist mantras of post-structuralism. This conception of agency is decisive in a historical understanding of propaganda, in that once it is recognized that “[t]he techniques are maybe more sophisticated, with television and lots of money going into it, but it's pretty traditional,”¹⁵¹ a number of realistic and achievable responses become available. The repercussions for his brand of political activism, I thus propose, are probably stronger than he admits, as is perhaps implied in his conviction that “there's no external force that can constrain the violence of the most powerful state, whether it's the United States or anyone else. But the constraints can come from within.”¹⁵²

Throughout his numerous books, Chomsky has provided a very compelling account of the continuities of American foreign policy and

the associated flow of rhetoric and information that the public should comprehend in order to influence political choices in a more virtuous manner. In sharp contrast to quantity–quality deductions, what emerges from his detailed account is that American foreign policy can be understood as a relatively coherent whole, whose language has remained basically unaltered, particularly in the last decades: “[W]e can look at recent history, at the institutional structures that remain essentially unchanged, at the plans that are being announced—and answer the questions accordingly. I know of no reason to suppose that there has been a sudden change in long-standing motivations or policy goals, apart from tactical adjustments to changing circumstances.”¹⁵³

[III]

The impasse of having to decide where “reason” (or “the truth”) stands, however, remains, for one cannot help but establish for oneself what one thinks the best “management of [our] own affairs” should be. Chomsky clearly has no doubt: “I think you should have a good deal of respect for Enlightenment ideals—rationality, critical analysis, freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry—and should try to amplify, modify, and adapt them to a modern society.”¹⁵⁴ Bear in mind alternative views such as those of a Baudrillard or a Žižek, and you begin to see the salience behind Giovanna Borradori’s claim that the formerly fiercely opposed visions of Habermas and Derrida do in fact come together, at last, in their defense of the Enlightenment, a term I can now add alongside modernity in the syncretic amalgam I have identified to constitute “rationality.” Consider, especially, Derrida:

[I]n this unleashing of violence without a name, if I had to take one of the two sides and choose in a binary situation, well, I would. Despite my very strong reservations about the American, indeed European, political posture, about the “international antiterrorist” coali-

tion, despite all the de facto betrayals, all the failures to live up to democracy, international law, and the very international institutions that the states of this “coalition” themselves founded and supported up to a certain point, I would take the side of the camp that, in principle, by right of law, gives a perspective open to perfectibility in the name of the “political,” democracy, international law, international institutions, and so on. Even if this “in the name of” is still merely an assertion and a purely verbal commitment. Even in the most cynical mode, such an assertion still lets resonate within it an invincible promise. I don’t hear any such promise coming from “bin Laden,” at least not one for *this world*.¹⁵⁵

It would thus appear that we have finally reached some agreement. But not so fast. Such candid confession cannot so easily dissipate the patent contradiction that aligns Derrida’s deconstructive logic of “undecidability”—itself a purportedly progressive version of post-structuralism, as opposed to Baudrillard’s pessimistic counterpart (think, in particular, of their mutual insistence on “difference”)¹⁵⁶—with Habermas’s curt dismissal of “idle postmodern talk.” It is quite telling that Habermas uses this expression in a discussion of religion where he finds that Christianity played the role of “important pacemaker” for “the essentially unchanging horizon of social modernity and [its] associated normative self-understanding,” which is now threatened by the “dark side” of globalization.¹⁵⁷ No wonder, then, that the two philosophers diverge markedly on the question of tolerance, defended by Habermas within the context of constitutional democracy, but whose Judeo-Christian roots Derrida finds simply unredeemable.

Although one faces—largely as an unmistakable consequence of such distinct theoretical frameworks—different sets of problems with each of the two philosophers’ responses to 9/11, they are certainly comparable in essential respects. To begin with, unlike the analyses described in the previous chapters, they are far more cautious as to the revolutionary status of the “event,” even though both Habermas and

Derrida see the importance and novelty of its symbolic dimension—or, as Derrida calls it, its “impression.”¹⁵⁸ Even in their case, however, one finds an undaunted conviction that “[t]he explicit ideology of the terrorists who attacked the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on 9/11 is a rejection of the kind of modernity and secularization that in the philosophical tradition is associated with the concept of Enlightenment.”¹⁵⁹ For Habermas, “[g]lobal terrorism is extreme both in its lack of realistic goals and in its cynical exploitation of the vulnerability of complex systems”;¹⁶⁰ for Derrida, the *potential* invisibility and virtuality of global terrorism instantly obfuscates all traces of identifiable political objectives.¹⁶¹ What is more, Derrida repeats a variant of the “rationality run amuck” thesis, construing 9/11 as an instance of a suicidal autoimmunity crisis of the West.¹⁶² Although this thesis is always inviting, whether conceived of from a psychoanalytic or semiotic perspective, it fails to recognize the difference between an unconscious act of suicide and very conscious but counterproductive policy choices, such as those that led the U.S. to support the mujihideen (later to become the Taliban regime in Afghanistan) in the 1980s. Irrespective of the fact that “we do not know what an event *of* the unconscious or *for* the unconscious is,”¹⁶³ we are expected to believe that an unknown unconscious logic of psychopathological autoimmunity can tell us something about 9/11.

The enormous and totally unargued assumption that the terrorists do not have any discernible political voice, but only aim to “wreck the system” (which system, according to some versions of the argument, has “committed suicide”), thus resurfaces as an *argumentum ad nauseam*. Without reading Pape’s comprehensive survey of suicide terrorism, this should be a rather outlandish assumption for anyone who has read even a fragment of bin Laden’s statements; yet, it is faithfully recited and relied upon. Chomsky is here forthright:

[W]e can be quite confident that [September 11] had little to do with such matters as “globalization,” or “eco-

conomic imperialism,” or “cultural values,” matters that are utterly unfamiliar to bin Laden and his associates . . . It is convenient for Western intellectuals to speak of “deeper causes” such as hatred of Western values and progress. That is a useful way to avoid questions about the origin of the bin Laden network itself, and about the practices that lead to anger, fear, and desperation throughout the region, and provide a reservoir from which radical Islamic terrorist cells can sometimes draw. Since the answers to these questions are rather clear, and are inconsistent with preferred doctrine, it is better to dismiss the questions as “superficial” and “insignificant,” and to turn to “deeper causes” that are in fact more superficial, even insofar as they are relevant.¹⁶⁴

The “preferred doctrine” Chomsky is referring to seems to include both the vocabulary which servilely conforms to the declared state policies and, with no exceptions, all the theories heard in the previous chapter, to the extent that it may be taken broadly to embrace the pre-given theoretical and academic positions taken by each thinker. (I may here incidentally remind readers of Žižek’s vitriolic, but self-defeating, attack against leftist academics.)

A basic theoretical blindness to the terrorists’ political goals is thus the common denominator of all said theories, to which we can now rightfully add Habermas’s and Derrida’s. As already seen, the upshot of this theoretical attitude is that what is discussed is not this particular instance of terrorism (including what the terrorists want, why they want it, and how one should respond) but what the theory at hand already thought about the world (or, rather, the “system”), which terrorism merely confirms. As one should expect, therefore, Habermas’s and Derrida’s respective analyses of 9/11 are meant to reflect their pre-existing theoretical orientations. What now becomes most peculiar about them is their pronounced continental European utopianism, and its unassailable faith in the European project, which is elected to carry on what Habermas has fittingly termed the “unfinished project” of the Enlightenment. Žižek, among others, also apparently concurs that “a unified

Europe . . . is the only feasible counterpoint to the U.S.A.”¹⁶⁵—though, of course, he would like Europe to “traverse the fantasy” toward (non-democratic) Socialism. Instead of discussing terrorism, we thus enter what is in the main a conversation about the desired process of European integration. Here are Habermas and Derrida, “lifting their voices together,” two years after Borradori’s interviews:

Today we know that many political traditions that command their authority through the illusions of “naturalness” have in fact been “invented.” By contrast, a European identity born in the daylight of the public sphere would have something constructed about it from the very beginning. But only what is constructed through an arbitrary choice carries the stigma of randomness. The political-ethical will that drives the hermeneutics of processes of self-understanding is not arbitrary. Distinguishing between the legacy we appropriate and the one we want to refuse demands just as much circumspection as the decision over the interpretation through which we appropriate it for ourselves. Historical experiences are only candidates for self-conscious appropriation; without such a self-conscious act they cannot attain the power to shape our identity.¹⁶⁶

This is indeed a remarkable statement. Unfortunately, it is also a statement that shows with painful clarity why the two philosophers’ vision—assuming for the moment that they indeed share one common vision, which can be doubted—is completely unworkable and vacuous in its absolute normativity. It begins with the peaceful and generally noncontroversial Hegelian–Marxist recognition that reality is not “natural” but “constructed” (notice, however, the pejorative use of the term “invented,” meaning “false”), then describes something which the authors hold does not yet exist, “the birth of a European public sphere”¹⁶⁷ led by “[t]he avant-gardist core of Europe,”¹⁶⁸ which would admittedly have to be constructed (or “invented”) from the ground up out of a process of selective “self-conscious appropriation,” but which

nonetheless would quite miraculously *not* be an arbitrary illusion. Extraordinary. However, such article of faith is in patent disregard of the fact that a European public sphere already exists, though it is one that does not leave much scope for utopian hopes of anti-illusionism. Quite on the contrary, it is most arguably nothing but *the* textbook example of an entirely, let us say “symbolically,” constructed polity, selectively led in a gradual “two-speed” process by the political (and economic, not so much ethical) will of an “avant-gardist core.” Moreover, few would doubt that this existing construction is, in Habermas and Derrida’s (or, rather, Habermas’s) own words, exactly “the wild cacophony of a multi-vocal public sphere.”⁶⁹ This is where we are starting from, and to believe that an intellectual plea for a “renewed” Union could change this decade-old state of affairs, which is grounded in complex historical and political reasons, is but an amiable exercise in wishful thinking.

Be that as it may, whatever they hope a renewed European public sphere would look like, Habermas and Derrida are adamant that it should ideally become the perfect local incarnation of the universal project of the Enlightenment, the first step on our way to a Kantian global confederation. For some, this latter global prospect may sound scary enough, and it surely does not sound like one for *this world*. Let us agree, however, that all this is good and well; we reach here the point where the two philosophers begin to part ways, for apart from these very general propositions the mechanisms that would allow for this new sphere of discourse remain rather distant. There is nevertheless one other basic common problem: no matter how hard they try, both Habermas and Derrida are at some pains to renounce an unfeasible idealism rooted in some kind of received wisdom or revealed Truth, a fatal complication that is also evident in Žižek and Baudrillard—indeed, in much of continental philosophy.

In this respect, Habermas is particularly problematic, especially if one considers the “pacemaking” role he assigns to Christianity in the

modern history and “normative self-understanding” of Europe. Apropos of this, Vincent Pecora observes that:

Habermas’s position, suspended as it is between a secular, or “enlightened,” history of Western political life and a recognition of the religious legacy underwriting that history, is exemplary for Western intellectuals today, who find themselves increasingly caught between the universal claims of secular political ideals and the undeniable, perhaps foundational, and in any case ambiguous role of a particular religious heritage behind those claims.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, Derrida’s view of the Enlightenment is decidedly less foundational. While for Habermas enlightened modernity is just a “project” to complete, something not significantly unlike Fukuyama’s end of history, to be interpreted through communicative activities at the seams of “system” and “lifeworld,” for Derrida it is only a departure point, and must be reread and broken down into its component parts in a constant and never-ending effort. What he looks for are the demystifying conditions of “impossibility” and *différance* of Enlightenment ideals. We thus encounter the long-simmering conflict between Habermas’s supposed pragmatism and Derrida’s epistemological critique.

Habermas’s famous criticisms of Derrida in his analysis of post-structuralism were sweeping, and centered essentially on a condemnation of Derrida’s revelry in blurring the line between logical philosophical argument and the stylistic “free play” of literary writing, which according to Habermas unduly relieves philosophy of the burden of producing workable solutions.¹⁷¹ Doubtless, these are criticisms that are also apt to describe the thinkers presented in the previous chapter, beginning from Adorno’s “negative dialectics,” and ending with all “idle postmodern talk.” Habermas’s critique has been often dismissed (among others, by Derrida himself) as “easy work” that oversimplifies or downright misreads Derrida, but I do not really see any convincing points in these very generous, themselves “undecidable” defenses, insofar as they

merely confirm Habermas's findings, only in a positive light which vaporously emphasizes that Derrida somehow "continues to engage with philosophical questions."¹⁷²

The controversy is not at all a minor one, and I am honestly amazed that it has been so lightheartedly sidestepped, for it cuts right to the heart of the matter. One should not forget that the mechanisms envisaged to govern the universal project that should start with Europe would still be those already proposed and opposed—communicative rationality for Habermas, and deconstruction for Derrida. In the light of the foregoing, it should be seriously doubted that they would yield to the same remedies. The starting point is of course that a new European public sphere could strengthen the role of international law, which U.S. unilateralism has undermined; but we do not know how to arrive neither at a new Europe, nor consequently at a new international legal order. Here is Derrida:

What would give me the most hope in the wake of all these upheavals is a potential difference between a new figure of Europe and the United States. I say this without any Eurocentrism. Which is why I am speaking of a *new* figure of Europe. Without forsaking its own memory, by drawing upon it, in fact, as an indispensable resource, Europe could make an essential contribution to the future of the international law we have been discussing. . . . [S]uch a philosophical "deconstruction" would have to operate not against something we would call the "United States" but against what today constitutes a certain American hegemony, one that actually dominates or marginalizes something in the U.S.'s own history, something that is also related to that strange "Europe" of the more or less incomplete Enlightenment I was talking about.¹⁷³

Without any Eurocentrism, he says. Yet while Derrida has no problem thinking that a "new Europe" is possible, not for a second does he think the same about a "new U.S." This is dumbfounding, for this cited passage quite clearly implies that "American hegemony" is not fixed but

could itself be “deconstructed” to recover what is now “dominated” and “marginalized” in America, not dissimilarly from the deconstruction that would be required on the “predominant reality” of Europe today in order to “reinvent” a “new Europe” tomorrow. It appears that Derrida has not done enough deconstructing on this point. But even granting that it is Europe that has to lead the world in the renewal of international law (and granting that such renewal is necessary), what would Europe and international law look like? Nothing useful will come from Derrida in this direction, except to say that Europe should have its own unified military for “interventions that would be motivated, calculated, discussed, and deliberated [no mention as to how—‘deconstruction,’ one is cyclically forced to guess] in Europe.”¹⁷⁴ Which obviously does not explain why this unified European military should defend “new concepts” instead of, more prosaically, European interests.

At bottom, one finds in Derrida another impracticable instance of Hegelian self-relating negativity of the kind found in Žižek’s opposition of ordinary and morally absolute meaning, which in Derridean-speak translates into a difference between the “conditional” and the “unconditional”: the former is the base for deconstruction, while the latter is the radical, absolute, and undecidable goal of the deconstructing process of unlimited semiosis. As everything human, including the new Europe and the new international law Derrida hopes for but never defines, is conditional, there will always be some undecided new object to deconstruct in an undecidable new manner in order to arrive at its unconditional equivalent, which obviously cannot be reached in *this world*. Here is what becomes of democracy:

“Democracy to come” does not mean a future democracy that will one day be “present.” Democracy will never exist in the present; it is not presentable, and it is not a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. But *there is the impossible*, whose promise democracy inscribes.¹⁷⁵

One can discover here but an optimistic paraphrase of Baudrillard's punning logic of negative utopianism (as in "the real itself is impossible") applied to democracy. Substitute "singularity" and "the Real" for "undecidable" and "unconditional," and you have once again Žižek's and Baudrillard's problem: crudely put, one must know what "the Real" is if one wants to go there.¹⁷⁶ Derrida, for his part, rightly admits that he is "not sure about anything."¹⁷⁷ As Nick Smith pertinently observes:

All of this dogmatically presumes . . . a form of transcendental justice predicated on an ethically charged notion of human alterity without engaging the debates over natural versus positive law. He also does not explain how something like Levinasian justice would translate into law except to note that any legalization of what he describes as "unconditional hospitality" would destroy it . . . Here Derrida preaches to the converted.¹⁷⁸

The utopian "preaching to the converted" one finds in Habermas is of a related sort, though unlike Derrida's it is supposed to produce valuable instructions for action. In the face of an "event" such as 9/11, he stoutly upholds his theories of communicative rationality and discourse ethics, which are in themselves problematical in that they do not quite succeed in their effort to give up Kant's metaphysical presuppositions.¹⁷⁹ Without doubt, they are even more problematical when applied not in the public space of functioning Western democracies, but between "cultures, ways of life, and nations [that] are at a greater distance from and, thus, are more foreign to one another."¹⁸⁰ Habermas rejects Kant's two-world hypothesis, and its distinction between noumenal and phenomenal agents, in favor of second-order principles based on universal interests that are supposed to mediate between the first-order particular interests of all those who partake in discourse; the intended result should be that of abandoning transcendental, and as such entirely deductive, justifications, while emphasizing instead an intersubjective paradigm of uncoerced discussion and debate where, under the condi-

tions of an “ideal speech situation,” unanimous agreement could ultimately be reached among all the opposing views held by rational agents. The categorical imperative is thus replaced by a historicized non-categorical process of argumentation.

The problem is, of course, that all of the foregoing does not describe any real-world phenomenon, and therefore has to be idealistically assumed: Habermas practically reproduces *in nuce* all the characteristics of a perfectly functioning democratic civil society, where “a solid base of common background convictions, self-evident cultural truths and reciprocal expectations”¹⁸¹ are in place, so that all grievances can be solved harmoniously. Regrettably, these conditions are nowhere to be found in *this world*, if not as regulatory ideals. All the relevant moral presuppositions are thus embedded from the outset, before being tested, as inescapable rules of rationality in discourse; any departure from them is seen as an irrational “distortion of communication.” Historicity has by now disappeared from view. As George Snedeker puts it: “Habermas comes full circle: reason is a product of history, but it has its own imperatives and a justification that is beyond history. . . . One question raised by this move is whether Habermas has succeeded in transforming Kant’s idealized abstract individual into something living, or has merely shifted the ground to equally idealized abstractions of intersubjectivity and dialogue.”¹⁸² One sees at a glance the repercussions that this contradictory conception of a “constructed” rationality to be realized in the public sphere has for the Europe envisaged by Habermas in the passage cited earlier, which Derrida only co-signed.

Joseph Margolis identifies the problem more at length:

[T]here is nothing Habermas provides that is adequate for securing any form of normative universality or pragmatic necessity [that has not already failed to be secured] by *a priori* means. . . . Think of the possibility (which Habermas does not attempt to disprove) that rationality is itself a social construction of some sort, hence hostage to the same normative quarrels Haber-

mas would have it judge. . . . What, for instance, of the possibility that relativism and epistemological incommensurabilism (regarding rationality in moral matters, or even truth and validity in science) might prove coherent and self-consistent and pertinent to particular quarrels, and viable and even helpful and instructive? You have only to think of the factions of Northern Ireland or in the Middle East or, indeed, the behavior of political parties anywhere in the world, to see the ideal's faulty charm. Habermas has no answer: he has effectively abandoned the pertinence of historicist and constructivist (that is, contexted) objections *by* insisting on universality and universalizability; for they bind him to a Kantian resolution even where he means to resist specifically transcendental fixities.¹⁸³

The first false presupposition in this respect, before universality is discussed, is that agents are always and necessarily involved in communicative strategies (language games) that aim to reconcile mutual divergences; once this is posited, it will be consequential to assume that they will be prone to obey any rules of discourse one wants to lay down, be they particularistic or universal, as they will have already agreed to reach an agreement from the very beginning of communicative action according to those same rules. In other words, as Professor Blackie would have put it, agents must be “willing to submit themselves to the constraints of reason and law” as a condition for action. One macroscopic difficulty, however, arises from the patent fact that nothing obliges agents who hold opposed ideals and interests to put these aside for the sake of reaching “rational” and “universalizable” agreement through dialog, if an instrumental option to defend their own views and interests—say, terrorism or preventive war—is available.¹⁸⁴ It was difficult enough for Blackie and Jones to entertain similar opinions about reason and God as equal citizens in a regulated and relatively homogeneous public arena; one does not have to stretch one's imagination to see how unattainable “communicative agreement” would be among parties that share even less “self-evident cultural truths and reciprocal expectations.”

[IV]

I can return now to the Schmittian opposition of friend and enemy, and its paramount importance in any form of political discourse. I take this opposition to represent a much-needed corrective to the largely unfeasible idealism to which most of the foregoing theories ultimately, if furtively, resort. We must here start from, and most likely also end with, basics. It is all too often forgotten, for instance, that Schmitt's dichotomy was formulated not only to describe political contrasts (in the extreme case, leading up to war) among opposing national entities, but was born first of all as a cautionary principle in the political climate of the Weimar years.¹⁸⁵ As such, it addresses the same dynamics that are variously described by Adorno and his followers as creating an internal, irrational crisis of the liberal democratic organism—what in Schmitt are called “neutralizations and depoliticizations.” Moreover, in light of Schmitt's later conceptualization of the partisan, his theory of the political also appears to be relevant to characterize the political nature of terrorism.¹⁸⁶ The lessons to be learned from Schmitt are here pivotal; of course, they are also easily misinterpreted in light of his later political affiliations, as if personal inclinations and vicissitudes could not be logically detachable from one's theoretical formulations. As Gopal Balakrishnan puts it: “[I]t is very easy to read his writings in a spirit of familiarity, coasting along until we come across something which fits our preconceived notions.”¹⁸⁷ One of the main obstacles one finds for a correct reading of Schmitt is his rejection of Kantian rational universalism in favor of the pragmatic and existential meaning of the friend/enemy dichotomy, which instantly ignites totalitarian fears. Habermas, for example, observes that:

The ontologization of the friend-foe relation suggests that attempts at a cosmopolitan juridification of the re-

lations between the belligerent subjects of international law are fated to serve the masking of particular interests in universalistic disguise. But how can one, holding this opinion, ignore the fact that the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, with their political mass crimes, have repudiated in an unprecedented way the assumption of innocence found in classical international law?¹⁸⁸

In truth, no need to ignore this fact arises, since no direct connection exists between a rejection of “post-national” cosmopolitanism and a repudiation of classical international law. On the contrary, international law, for all its evolutions, is not really cosmopolitan in character, but continues to necessitate the existence of separate political entities willing to regulate reciprocal behavior, whenever possible, in an overall reciprocally satisfying manner. This is why it is called international. It is again Hobsbawm who reminds us that:

Liberal democracy, like any other form of political regime, requires a political unit within which it can be exercised, normally the kind of state usually known as a “nation-state.” It is not applicable to fields where no such unit exists, or looks like coming into existence, notably, to global affairs, however urgently these may concern us. Whatever they may be described as, the politics of the United Nations cannot be fitted into the framework of liberal democracy, except as a figure of speech. Whether those of the European Union as a whole can, remains to be seen. This is a fairly substantial reservation.¹⁸⁹

Similarly, on the other hand, no need arises to ignore that particular interests are, and have been, defended by appealing to universalistic principles such as freedom and democracy, either—at least, neither Habermas nor Derrida seem to have nagging doubts that this was part of the American response to 9/11. Habermas’s and Derrida’s cardinal mistake is that they are convinced that major reforms in a multilateral or cosmopolitan direction will be necessary to stop U.S. unilateralism. New legal foundations and the creation of a new “public sphere,” they

would have us believe, are needed. But what they so catastrophically fail to see is that the absence of a new “post-national” order has nothing to do with what are in effect mere breaches of the international legal order that is already enshrined in the UN Charter and various international conventions.¹⁹⁰ If one wants to stop U.S. unilateralism, one need not at all “deconstruct” or reform the current legal order—one should simply apply it. I may once again cite Chomsky, who comments on Gramsci’s appeal “to develop alternative interpretations of reality”: “I think it’s possible to paraphrase that comment—namely, just tell the truth. Instead of repeating ideological fanaticism, dismantle it, try to find out the truth, and tell the truth.”¹⁹¹ Which obviously puts us back in the difficult position of having to decide what the relevant truth is. (Notice, however, that by now the capital T is gone, which is no small change.)

Here, of course, complications intrude, predominantly in the form of interests and relationships of force. All relatively straightforward empirical matters, it turns out. As a matter of fact, the salient point is that the concept of the political presupposes the management of a public space where final decisions about collective action must be taken. What is crucial here is that the relevant decisions—such as decisions whether or not to go to war—can only be adopted for the entire collectivity (whatever this collectivity be—usually, for reasons suggested above, a state, or group of states), and yet cannot realistically ignore the particular interests at play (say, the diverging interests of the citizenship of the states in question). The repercussions of this basic pragmatic point of departure on Habermas’s theory of communicative action are dramatic, for although this skimmed version of Schmitt’s argument may sound very similar to it, it actually is not—first of all, because it is not based on the idea of a language game, and does not therefore involve the necessary network of speech acts and their requirements.

Any kind of settlement of political disputes must start from the opposed vested positions of those who are called to take such collective decisions when dealing with concrete situations. Political conflicts, that

is, are always rooted in the existence of real competing positions and interests in the face of specific and identifiable problems of collective action, potentially (*and only potentially*) up to a state of war, whether this be a civil war or revolution or a war against a foreign entity. Habermas, by contrast, holds that only universalizable interests (whatever they are) are capable of being rationally justified through discourse, while particular interests are not amenable to rationally motivated agreement. What he thinks is needed, put differently, is universal assent. On the contrary, what is here made clear at a stroke is that the resolution of moral and political disputes cannot but derive from the particular interests implicated, not necessarily from universalizable ones. In other words, there is no need for a common interest (e.g., a defense of democracy and freedom) to be involved in the settlement of a dispute: all that is needed are compatible agent-relative interests that lead to the same, or sufficiently similar, conclusions. As a consequence, no common rules regarding what is to count as rational in a dispute are required, for every single agent will have her own stakes (that is, her own rationale) in the matter. This is how, no matter what solemn declarations of principles are adopted, international conventions and agreements are signed.

This, I submit, is the crux of Schmitt's assertion that in war "[t]here exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality."¹⁹² No rational purpose, that is, if not an existentially—and not universally—defined one. Put differently, the content of what is rational in each individual circumstance will depend upon what each agent, "regardless of the sources from which [she] derives [her] last psychic motives,"¹⁹³ thinks is right to do in her particular situation. Call it, if you will, "self-conscious appropriation."

I must stress with some force that while this conception of rationality may be described as realist (or else simply realistic), in no way does it imply a pure form of power politics. Interests are here understood

largely to include any elements that motivate the behavior of political communities to the end of securing their own welfare and existence. These may even include altruistic elements, such as humanitarian ones, if these are judged positively in the society under consideration. A recognition of the fact that disputes are settled with a view to the relative, constructed interests of the parties involved, thus construed, rather than on universalistic grounds, does not mean that these interests are merely arbitrary; nor does it exclude that some of these interests can be very widespread, or possibly universal, among human societies. What it excludes is first that their universal validity can be postulated, and second that it should be a necessary requirement for the settlement of disputes. This is perhaps best reflected in Schmitt's approving quotation of Wilhelm Dilthey apropos of Machiavelli: "Man according to Machiavelli is not by nature evil. . . . What Machiavelli wants to express everywhere is that man, if not checked, has an irresistible inclination to slide from passion to evil."¹⁹⁴ As a consequence, *contra* Habermas, individual interests and value preferences are precisely what must be dealt with, and checked.

Schmitt explains that we can only think "in terms of concrete political existence. Just as every nation has its own concept of nation and finds the constitutive characteristics of nationality within itself, so every culture and cultural epoch has its own concept of culture. All essential concepts are not normative but existential."¹⁹⁵ This much should be evident to whomever considers countries as different as Sweden and Pakistan (or even Canada and the U.S., or Germany and Italy—or, as for other "political traditions," the EU and ASEAN), and is but a reinstatement of the basic Hegelian lesson, one that is lost as soon as *a priori* normative considerations are smuggled in as supposedly universal rules of discourse. What is confessedly constructed by history, in other words, cannot miraculously stop being so just by intellectual fiat.

I would like to observe that the notion of an ideal speech situation vaguely calls to mind the hypothetical perfect market situation, which is

quite curious, considering that one of the objectives of a perfectly functioning speech situation should be that of preserving the “lifeworld,” the civil society where communication takes place, from the negative influence of the “system” (that is, state and market). The chief difference is that the former’s universal goals are thought to regulate *collective* action, whilst the latter *individual* action. The parallel may seem to be strained, but I take it to be somewhat implicit in many left-wing criticisms of Habermas’s idea of a “post-national constellation,” according to which it conceals a strictly liberal conception of politics.¹⁹⁶

In perfectly functioning market conditions (themselves never found in the real world), the laws of supply and demand are sufficient elements for individual preferences to reach an optimum, “rational” equilibrium without the need for collective decisions; as any student of economic policy will know, however, a collective decision will be necessary if and only if what are known as “market failures” (the equivalents of Habermas’s “distortions of communication”) are present—that is, only in those instances when the market cannot autonomously produce the most efficient economic outcome because one or more conditions of equilibrium are violated, for example, because of the presence of transaction costs, imperfect information, social customs, public goods, or other legal and informal restrictions. This is the point where politics must decide what the economy has failed to determine in the dialectical interaction of supply and demand, so as to rebalance the final outcomes in the desired manner. Public action, of course, is always needed as perfect market conditions are not naturally found in nature—the legal rights of individuals, for instance, will always need to be protected by a public authority in order to ensure the stability of personal positions and thus make the private exchange of contracts feasible—but the amount of public action will depend on how severe the market failures are in each particular situation. Habermas, by contrast, posits that the impossible rules of perfect communication that are supposed to regulate the “lifeworld” (the equivalent of the market) need no external authority

to rebalance their failures—quite the opposite, they should be protected from it.

One can discern here that the opposition of perfect market and public action is in significant accord with Schmitt's polemic against liberalism, and is itself reflective of a quantity–quality transition: as soon as market failures reach a certain intensity, private economic efficiency turns into a problem of public policy. I shall reformulate this transition quite plainly to mean that the political only arises when the private sphere is deemed inadequate for action, and collective decisions are thus called for. What is crucial at this point is that public priorities will have to be established in order to know what the desired final decisions will be:

Words such as state, republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty, constitutional state, absolutism, dictatorship, economic planning, neutral or total state, and so on, are incomprehensible if one does not know exactly who is to be affected, combated, refuted, or negated by such term.¹⁹⁷

Only now do moral considerations enter the picture. Alternatively put, it is now that each collective group will have to decide what it regards the truth to be. Americans, for example, will have to decide concretely what it is they want to fight, if they want to fight it, and consequently what the best way to fight it is.

[V]

What I have arrived at is a pragmatic form of social constructivism, which I take to be the only honest, realistic, and possible solution to anything human at large. Something similar, if not identical, to the conclusions that can be drawn from my discussion thus far has been offered by Joseph Margolis, whose rebuttal of Habermas I have already cited. In his book on 9/11, Margolis has attempted, I think successfully, a concep-

tualization of moral philosophy that eschews both the danger of normativity and that of postmodernist excess—two dangers which, as I have argued, largely intersect.¹⁹⁸ It is possible, following Margolis, to reconcile Schmitt’s existential vision with a more robust process of dialectical transformation. It is a valid account—in fact, I hold it to be the only account realistically defensible at present—of how collective decisions in cultural matters—and politics certainly is a culturally constructed phenomenon, but not for this reason an arbitrary one—can be rationally reached and reformed.

As a point of departure, he recognizes that we are in the face of differing, or even incommensurable moral and political positions regarding the “event.”¹⁹⁹ In light of my discussion of terrorism in the first chapter, it will be evident that such positions must be present, and that any depiction of terrorism as “irrational” (that is, lacking discernible political goals) must be firmly rejected. One must start from the incontrovertible—if not resorting to some form of “preaching to the converted”—fact that “[r]eason and objectivity are contingent constructs. They take different forms in the lives of different societies, all within the evolving space of historical inquiry.”²⁰⁰ As a consequence, “a serious review of moral reflection cannot rightly free itself from a sustained philosophical analysis of the nature of human culture and that of the human itself.”²⁰¹ I have already given warning that this much does not at all imply some strong form of relativism to the effect that these contingent constructs are in any way “invented” or “false,” nor that they cannot be very widespread, or even universally shared. Moreover, in our case at hand, I submit that no principled distinction is possible a priori between political demands put forth by states and those put forth by non-state groups, be they terrorists or NGOs—that is, terrorist demands cannot be discarded simply on the grounds that terrorists do not exercise publicly sanctioned authority. As Tarik Kochi observes in a contemporary reading of Schmitt’s theory of the partisan:

All war involves terror; the war of the state is no less terrible than the terrorist's use of a car bomb or airplane as a missile. Each involves the politically motivated killing of another people designated as an enemy. What renders the act legal or illegal, legitimate, or illegitimate, depends upon nothing particular about the act itself. Rather, the question of legitimacy is one of legal and political judgement. This does not occur within a vacuum but occurs within a global legal and political context.²⁰²

My entire discussion in the first chapter was meant to secure this point, that is, that a global moral evaluation of a specific act of terrorism can logically be made only *a posteriori*, in that it will depend not exclusively on characteristics inherent to the act itself, but most crucially on the politico-moral position taken in regard to the terrorists' political goals. Whether, in other words, one regards a specific act of terrorism as morally reprehensible or laudable will depend mainly on one's moral and political position about what is under attack. This is why, by way of example, terrorist attacks on military bases, conducted in the same fashion, can be judged in opposite ways when they target a Nazi unit in Poland or a U.S. patrol in Afghanistan. This, of course, implies that the very same terrorist strategy can be both condemned and defended, depending chiefly—if not, sometimes, entirely—on whose side one is on. The terrorist/freedom fighter couple is nothing but a reinstatement of this rather obvious fact. As Margolis puts it, it is essential to see that “pertinent disputes are practical, not theoretical, and partisan commitment is the rule rather than the exception. It's not partisanship that threatens the prospects of moral objectivity; it's the collision between revealed and second-best moral intuitions.”²⁰³ Only once the existence of opposed political objectives is understood in these terms can the question be posed as to what “the truth” is. “The truth,” that is, cannot be decided if each party does not decide for itself what resolutions it regards as friendly or hostile.

What is “true” in this account cannot be distinctly separated from what is “right” for each party. I use both, therefore, only in the weakest sense. A constructivist account of human agents and human interests cannot elude us here, for no norms taken at face value to be universally valid will be of any help in empirical disputes if no concrete agreement on them is at hand. In this respect, we can only proceed according to second-best concerns, as no cognitive and rational access to first, noumenal norms is possible:

If we agree that selves are partisans, agents committed *prima facie* to the norms and values of their home society or to whatever modification they favor in accord with their *prudentialiae*—or, indeed, by way of any departure from their *Sitten* [i.e., customs and practices] by cognitive or “rational” privilege or revelation—then every would-be *legitimation* of their norms counts for no more than an *ideology*, that is, an effectively enabling, second-order, normative construction of practical life adopted as rightly governing the moral/political interests of the members of the society affected, yet (withal) incapable of being objectively validated on grounds independent of those same *Sitten*.²⁰⁴

Otherwise stated, human agents (single or collective) will tend to protect their prudential interests (*prudentialiae*) and to dialectically modify their decisions in ways they see fit to particular situations: “The point is that these are not intrinsically legitimating norms but only the salient data that, cast prudentially, are collected in our *Sitten* and serve as the ground on which our corrective moral visions build.”²⁰⁵ As should be expected, in contrast with Habermas, no procedural or substantive norms to conduct action and dialogue can be derived from this, as prudential interests will vary from place to place and from time to time.

It is the “constructed” prudential interests of partisan agents that guide concrete political decisions, and provide the only kind of “rationality” we can come to know in *this world*. Which, of course, applies to all sides involved. Whether, in fact, “the truth” of America’s prudential in-

terests has been effectively protected in the response to 9/11 is a question I leave to Americans to answer. Arguably, they have already answered it.

Conclusion

The three chapters comprising this work have dealt with quite varied forms of philosophical reflection on 9/11. I have struggled to provide as coherent as possible an account of rather diverse theories and thinkers. My argument, which has emerged more clearly in the last chapter, has therefore appeared somewhat in fits and starts.

The first chapter has analyzed terrorism in search for a neutral, tactical definition; this definition has then been contrasted with Walter Laqueur's description of what he and others have called the "new terrorism," in order to show how this latter concept, on which the U.S. need for a "War on Terror" was largely based, fails to prove 9/11-type terrorism significantly different and new. The existence of loosely political goals has been established as essential for an activity to be considered terroristic.

The second chapter has explored terrorism from the standpoint of cultural criticism, and has focused on the influential, and no less debatable, theses of philosophers Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek, whose respective inadequacies as instruments of political critique have been fully and painstakingly exposed. A discussion of modernity and democracy has been introduced.

Finally, the third chapter has grappled directly with the issues of modern liberal democracy and political discourse, taking into account predominantly the contributions of Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, and has ventured a pragmatic explanation of how political action and change are concretely possible, based essentially on a moderate constructivist reading of Carl Schmitt's theory of the political.

Allow me briefly to recapitulate my whole argument, and to make a few concluding remarks. I have looked for internal explanations, for the obvious reason that 9/11 was undoubtedly a frontal attack on the U.S.,

and as such has needed, and needs, an American response; at the same time, I have resisted intrinsic readings of September 11 because, as I hope the second chapter has made clear, they are easily proved unproductive, if not outright nonsensical.

What I have found is that the attacks themselves, and the American response to them, have all too often been interpreted according to pre-existing moral and political visions that have variously led to depictions of 9/11 as a historical, or even apocalyptic turning point that calls for some immediate and drastic action. Something to this effect can be found in Laqueur's "new terrorism," in Baudrillard's and Žižek's "Act," or in Habermas's and Derrida's universalistic "European promise." From this vantage point, it makes little difference whether one particular vision supports or opposes the "War on Terror," inasmuch as the real political goals behind the terrorism of 9/11 are obfuscated in one way or another, for one reason or another.

I have argued, in contrast, that any explanation of, and response to, 9/11 must start from a realistic assessment of the opposing political interests at play, including therefore those reflected in the terrorist strategy. The endpoint of this assessment, of course, cannot be that of succumbing to the terrorists' demands—which, of course, would be contrary to U.S. interests. The point, rather, is that conceptualizing 9/11 in this way allows for a better understanding of America's own real interests.

The interests I have described are not at all to be intended in a strongly realist sense. They can be called, in the way favored by Joseph Margolis, "prudential," in that they merely aim to preserve and improve each agent's respective existential position, to be approached in a broadly constructivist fashion. This, in brief, is the narrow sense in which I advocate Schmitt's friend/enemy dichotomy. There are no rational, universal interests that can be expected to guide political action, if the policies implied are not already embedded in the concrete situation and priorities of a particular political unit.

A recent poll shows that, notwithstanding the current state of the economy, 72 per cent of Americans still believe, if only in theory, in some version of the American dream.²⁰⁶ Another recent international poll shows that only a minority of those living in modern Western democracies, including the U.S., are worried about a state of war. About half of the people polled, however, seem to be worried about internal problems such as keeping their job, having access to pensions and healthcare (and the quality thereof), and being able to pay their bills.²⁰⁷ As should be clear by now, it must be doubted that the “War on Terror” is in any meaningful way working to help them.

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Notes

¹ Chris Patten, then EU External Relations Commissioner, quoted in “World shock over U.S. attacks,” CNN.com, September 11, 2001, <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/09/11/trade.centre.reaction/>>

² “Determination of the December 2007 Peak in Economic Activity,” Business Cycle Dating Committee, National Bureau of Economic Research, December 11, 2008, <<http://www.nber.org/cycles/dec2008.pdf>>

³ Quoted in Dan Slater, “Berkshire’s Munger: Subprime Makes ‘Enron Look Like A Tea Party,’” *The Wall Street Journal Law Blog*, May 5, 2008, <<http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2008/05/05/berkshires-munger-subprime-makes-enron-look-like-a-tea-party/>>

⁴ Quoted in “Advantage 2008: Current economic crisis worse than impact of 9/11,” *Travel Weekly*, September 28, 2008, <<http://www.travelweekly.co.uk/Articles/2008/09/28/28991/advantage-2008-current-economic-crisis-worse-than-impact-of.html>>

⁵ I take my line of thought here to have something in common with Robert Shiller’s financial analysis. He finds a parallel between the subprime mortgage crisis and the housing crisis of 1925–33, and suggests that similar solutions are applicable. See Robert J. Shiller, *The Subprime Solution: How Today’s Global Financial Crisis Happened, and What to Do About It* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶ Extensive quotations can be found in Marilyn B. Young, “Ground Zero: Enduring War,” in Mary L. Dudziak (ed.), *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 10–11.

⁷ See Marc A. Celmer, *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1987), p. 113.

⁸ This episode is recounted by Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin in the introduction to their edited volume, trans. by Edward Schneider, Kathryn Pulver and Jesse Browner, *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 1–2.

⁹ Robert W. McChesney, “September 11 and the structural limitations of US journalism,” in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (eds.), *Journalism After September 11* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 93.

¹⁰ It should be remarked that in order to justify its use of force against the Sandinista Government, the U.S. alleged that Nicaragua was in violation of human rights. The Court stated that “where human rights are protected by international conventions, the protection takes the form of such arrangements for monitoring respect for human rights as one provided for in the conventions themselves . . . the use of force could not be the appropriate method to monitor or ensure such respect. With regard to the steps actually taken, the protection of human rights, a strictly humanitarian objective, cannot be compatible with the mining of ports, the destruction of oil installations, or again, with the training, arming and equipping of the *contras*.” See *Nicaragua (Merits)* (1986) ICJ Rep. 14, 134–5, paras. 267–8.

¹¹ For the quotation and additional commentary, see the note from Frank Lentricchia in the collection of essays he coedited with Stanley Hauerwas, *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays After September 11* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 3–4.

¹² Bill Carter and Felicity Barringer offer other examples of remarks that were highly criticized for being unpatriotic in the weeks following the attacks. Among these was one by comedian Bill Maher, who “said that the hijackers were not cowards but that it was cowardly for the United States to launch cruise missiles on targets thousands of miles away.” See their article, “In Patriotic Times, Dissent Is Muted,” *New York Times*, September 28, 2001.

¹³ Both quotations, plus commentary, can be found in Jay Rosen, “September 11 in the mind of American Journalism,” in Zelizer and Allan, *Journalism After September 11*, pp. 33–4.

¹⁴ This phrasing is part of very similar definitions that are contained, for example, in both the U.S. Code and the PATRIOT Act.

¹⁵ See Noam Chomsky, *Power and Terror: Post-9/11 Talks and Interviews* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), pp. 28–9.

¹⁶ Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁸ In fact, opinions about America’s essence have fluctuated remarkably over time. See especially Barry M. Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, *Hating America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2004).

¹⁹ See Sergio Fabbrini, *America and Its Critics: Virtues and Vices of the Democratic Hyperpower* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2008), p. 17.

²⁰ Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p. 176.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²² For an overview of the just war tradition, see for example Mohammad Taghi Karoubi, *Just Or Unjust War?: International Law and Unilateral Use of Armed Force by States at the Turn of the 20th Century* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), ch. 3.

²³ See Mark R. Amstutz, *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 110–2.

²⁴ See Lorraine Besser-Jones, “Just War Theory, Legitimate Authority, and the ‘War’ on Terror,” in Timothy Shanahan (ed.), *Philosophy 9/11: Thinking About the War on Terrorism* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2005), ch. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 8. Further references to this essay will be given parenthetically in the text.

²⁶ It should be noted that this essentially utilitarian consideration of the principles of last resort, probability of success, and proportionality, appears to be at odds with Kessler’s initial universalistic assumptions.

²⁷ See Karoubi, *Just Or Unjust War?*, pp. 75–6.

²⁸ See Nick Fotion, “Applying Just War Theories to Wars Involving Terrorism,” in Wim Smit (ed.), *Just War and Terrorism: The End of the Just War Concept?* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005), pp. 34–5.

²⁹ The only justification he gives is that “the structure of our international arena is such that crimes, acts of war, acts of terrorism, and any violations of international law, for that matter, are difficult if not impossible to enforce without the use of the armed force of one country or another” (p. 170). Which, in his own terms and by his own admission (“for that matter”), does not distinguish the proposed reaction to terrorism, which he deems to be violence of a *particular* kind, from what would apply in case of *any* other violation of international law.

³⁰ See his *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

³¹ On this, and on Walzer’s universalism, see also Rainer Forst, trans. by John M. M. Farrell, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 167–72.

³² See especially the introduction.

³³ Michael Walzer, “The Right Way,” *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50, No. 4, March 13, 2003.

³⁴ See also Peter Steinfels, “The Just-War Tradition, Its Last-Resort Criterion and the Debate on an Invasion of Iraq,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2003.

³⁵ Michael Walzer, “Terrorism: A Critique of Excuses,” in Steven Luper-Foy (ed.), *Problems of International Justice: Philosophical Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 239.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁷ See his *Arguing About War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 45–6; and *Just and Unjust Wars*, p. 260.

³⁸ For these criticisms see Daniel Warner, *An Ethic of Responsibility in International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), pp. 39–41; and Daniel Warner,

“Searching for Responsibility/Community in International Relations,” in David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.), *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 8–10. Walzer responds to similar criticisms, although focusing almost exclusively on non-intervention, in “The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics,” in his *Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 219–36.

³⁹ C. A. J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 299–300.

⁴⁰ Ch. 1. References will follow parenthetically in the text.

⁴¹ See ch. 7, by Guy Van Damme and Nick Fotion, in Bruno Coppieters and Nick Fotion (eds.), *Moral Constraints on War: Principles and Cases* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), pp. 136–7.

⁴² Among others, it is bin Laden himself who makes reference to the atomic bombs on Japan to justify al-Qaeda’s targeting of innocents: “American history does not distinguish between civilians and military, and not even women and children. Americans are the ones who used the bombs against Nagasaki. Can these bombs distinguish between infants and military? . . . We believe the Americans are the biggest thieves and terrorists in the world. We do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they are all targets in this fatwa.” In an interview with John Miller of ABC News, reprinted in Usama bin Ladin, “American Soldiers Are Paper Tigers.” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, December 1998.

⁴³ See Andrew Fiala’s essay in Shanahan’s collection, “Defusing Fear: A Critical Response to the War on Terrorism,” p. 94.

⁴⁴ One among many famous examples during World War II would be the Fosse Ardeatine massacre in Rome, in which the Germans took a reprisal against 335 civilians in response to a partisan attack that had killed 33 Nazi policemen.

⁴⁵ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 5.

⁴⁶ I take up here the challenge raised by Mark F. Gilbert, “Contested But Indispensable: The Missing Point of European Discontent,” in Sergio Fabbrini (ed.), *The United States Contested: American Unilateralism and European Discontent* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 217–20.

⁴⁷ Cited in Jeffrey F. Addicott, *Terrorism Law: The Rule of Law and the War on Terror* (Tucson, AZ: Lawyers & Judges Publishing Company, 2004), p. 384.

⁴⁸ See Fabbrini, *America and Its Critics*, pp. 148–65.

⁴⁹ In the interview cited in note 42, bin Laden says that: “After the Americans entered the holy land [i.e., Saudi Arabia in 1990], many emotions were roused in the Muslim world, more than we have seen before. . . . From this effort, the International Islamic Front for the Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders was formed, which we are a member of along with other groups. It has a Higher Council to coordinate rousing the Muslim nation to carry out jihad against Jews and Crusaders.”

⁵⁰ See Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), ch. 7.

⁵¹ Ian O. Lesser, “Countering the New Terrorism: Implications for Strategy,” in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Michele Zanini (eds.), *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1999), p. 87.

⁵² See Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2000).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵⁵ See Eric Lichtblau and Nicholas Wade, “F.B.I. Details Anthrax Case, but Doubts Remain,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2008.

⁵⁶ Laqueur, *No End to War*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ See Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 106.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁶⁰ On the impact of 9/11 on popular culture, see in particular the essays collected in Andrew Martin and Patrice Petro (eds.), *Rethinking Global Security: Media, Popular Culture, and the “War on Terror”* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Wheeler W. Dixon (ed.), *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); and Daniel Dayan (ed.), *La terreur spectacle: terrorisme et télévision* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 2006).

⁶¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Biological Warfare and the ‘Buffy Paradigm’” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 29, 2001), p. 4.

⁶² See Doug Davis, “Future-War Storytelling: National Security and Popular Film,” in Martin and Petro, *Rethinking Global Security*, pp. 13–44.

⁶³ See Doug Davis, “Science Fiction Narratives of Mass Destruction and the Politics of National Security,” in Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox (eds.), *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 146.

⁶⁴ See Liam Harte, “A Taxonomy of Terrorism,” in Shanahan, *Philosophy 9/11*, pp. 28–37.

⁶⁵ Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 83.

⁶⁶ Harte, “A Taxonomy of Terrorism,” pp. 35–6.

⁶⁷ In the interview cited in note 42.

⁶⁸ Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 4. Assaf Moghadam (“Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of *Dying to Win*.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 8 [December 2006]: 707–29) provides some valid criticisms. However, I do not see how he can disprove the bulk of Pape’s findings.

⁶⁹ See Pape, *Dying to Win*, ch. 9.

⁷⁰ See Carl Schmitt, trans. by George Schwab, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ See Heinrich Meier, trans. by Marcus Brainard, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction Between Political Theology and Political Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), ch. 2.

⁷² Theodor W. Adorno, “The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column,” in Theodor W. Adorno, ed. by Stephen Crook, *Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 46–7.

⁷³ Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1992), p. 128.

⁷⁴ See Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Jean Baudrillard, “Requiem per le Twin Towers,” in *Power Inferno* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2003), pp. 20–1. The translation is mine. The English version of this essay is significantly shorter than the Italian one, and does not include this passage. See “Requiem for the Twin Towers,” in Jean Baudrillard, trans. by Chris Turner, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 37–48.

⁷⁶ See Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 177, n. 32.

⁷⁷ Jean Baudrillard, trans. by Chris Turner, *Impossible Exchange* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 151.

⁷⁸ See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 47–8.

⁷⁹ David Bordwell (“Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory,” in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll [eds.], *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996], pp. 14–5) highlights that the category of the subject is often conflated with that of the individual: “[T]he subject is a category that enables knowledge, experience, and identity to occur within signifying practices—even if that knowledge is duplicitous and that experience rests upon repression or regression. The subject is the ground which renders meaning, difference, and pleasure possible. By contrast, the individual or person is an entity capable of entering the condition of subjecthood. . . . [However] throughout the corpus of subject-position

theory one can find an equivocation between the subject conceived as the philosophical/psychoanalytic/ideological *ground* of knowledge or experience and the subject conceived as *the one who* knows and experiences—author, character, analyst, theorist, or any other personified agent.” As I will tackle Žižek, who often relies on such equivocation, I will willfully be engaged in it, too.

⁸⁰ Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 147.

⁸¹ “Introduction,” in Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), p. 11.

⁸² See Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Twin Towers.”

⁸³ See *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁴ Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 82.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁸⁶ Jean Baudrillard, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 2.

⁸⁷ Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” p. 59.

⁸⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 22.

⁸⁹ Baudrillard, “The Violence of the Global,” in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 92.

⁹⁰ See Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” pp. 70–7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ In what I shall call a tautological game at salvaging the undecidable, Kellner (“Introduction,” in Kellner, *Baudrillard*, p. 17) champions the Frenchman thus: “It is often simply amusing to read Baudrillard. Baudrillard—pataphysician at twenty—remains so and perhaps one should not take him all that seriously. Or, rather, while one can read him as deadly serious, one can also read him ironically, as a grand joke on social theory and cultural criticism. One can thus either read Baudrillard as a form of science fiction and pataphysics or a form of serious social theory and cultural metaphysics. It is undecidable what Baudrillard’s texts really are and it is sometimes useful to read him as making genuine and important contributions to social theory, while at other times one can enjoy the irony, cynicism, humor, and pataphysical metaphysics.” Readers can decide for themselves if they find odes to “symbolic challenge and death” amusing.

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism,” in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 19. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 134.

⁹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ See Vartan P. Messier, “Baudrillard in *The Matrix*: the Hyperreal, Hollywood, and a Case for Misused References,” *The Film Journal*, Issue 13, January 2006, <<http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue13/thematrix.html>>.

⁹⁹ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” p. 77.

¹⁰² Slavoj Žižek, “The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion,” in William Irwin (ed.), *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2002), p. 240.

¹⁰³ See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989). Notice the contrast with Kant: “Hegel . . . retains the basic dialectical moment of the Sublime, the notion that the Idea is reached through purely negative presentation—that the very inadequacy of the phenomenality to the Thing is the only appropriate way to present it. The real problem lies elsewhere: Kant still presupposes that the Thing-in-itself exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation, of phenomenality . . . Hegel’s position is, by contrast, that there is nothing beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation. . . . In Kant, the feeling of the Sublime is evoked by some boundless, terrifying imposing phenomenon (raging nature, and so on), while in Hegel

we are dealing with a miserable ‘little piece of the Real’ . . . this very negativity, to attain its ‘being-for-itself, must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporal leftover” (pp. 205–7).

¹⁰⁴ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Twin Towers,” p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” p. 68.

¹⁰⁸ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹¹¹ See Žižek, “The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion,” pp. 244–6.

¹¹² See Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, pp. 70–1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77–9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2002), p. xxxii.

¹¹⁸ See Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, pp. 14–5.

¹¹⁹ Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, p. xiv.

¹²⁰ The point is made as a critique of Habermas: “So when Habermas advocates constraints on biogenetic manipulation with reference to the threat it poses to human autonomy, freedom and dignity, he is philosophically ‘cheating,’ concealing the true reason why his line of argument appears to be convincing: what he is really referring to is not autonomy and freedom, but happiness” (Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 63), and happiness “relies on the subject’s inability or readiness fully to confront the consequences of its desire” (*ibid.*, p. 59).

¹²¹ Žižek, “The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion,” p. 244.

¹²² Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 96.

¹²³ As Richard Allen (*Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* [Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997], pp. 33–4) points out, “from a developmental perspective, the capacity of adult mental life to regress to more primitive forms of mental functioning does not entail that adult mental life is strictly governed by those forms. It is as unwarranted to conclude from the existence of unconscious mental processes that the development of cognitive faculties [is] determined by them as it would be to conclude that cognitive powers remain unaffected by them.”

¹²⁴ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 54.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹²⁶ See *ibid.*, 126–32.

¹²⁷ Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, p. lii.

¹²⁸ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, pp. 81–2.

¹²⁹ See *ibid.*, ch. 3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹³¹ For a similar reconstruction, and other related criticisms, see Walter Davis, *Death’s Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche Since 9-11* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), ch. 6.

¹³² Robert Paul Resch, “What If God Was One of Us— Žižek’s Ontology,” in Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (eds.), *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), p. 93. Yannis Stavrakakis (*The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* [Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2007], p. 110) also makes this point: “Žižek’s politics of the act seems to be overstressing the unlimited (real) positivity of human action beyond any serious registering of lack and finitude. It privileges the moment of a political praxis, which transcends altogether the discursive (spatial) limits of the symbolic and, operating as a cataclysmic real creation, opens itself onto the void of eternity. Thus it entails a very clear danger of ultimately disavowing the dialectics between positive and nega-

tive central to Lacanian theory, replacing it with a positive politics of the event/act as miracle.”

¹³³ Resch (“What If God Was One of Us,” p. 98) goes on to explain that for Žižek “[t]he Truth is grasped through some undecidable intuition, yet somehow it turns out to be objectively correct—the one and only objective truth of a previously unknowable state of affairs. The Truth makes visible the Situation of its origin, but only retrospectively, only by filling in a meaningless, chaotic Void with an ‘interpretative intervention’ that renders any objective historical understanding, any objective recovery of the past, impossible. A cognitive incommensurability separates those inside Truth from all outsiders—excepting, of course, Žižek himself. Moreover, the one and only Truth is not the Whole truth—to name the Whole truth is to invite totalitarian *désastre*—therefore the unconditional fidelity of the Disciple must be, somehow, not really so.”

¹³⁴ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 59.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left*, pp. 2–3.

¹³⁶ Baudrillard, “Hypotheses on Terrorism,” p. 79.

¹³⁷ Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, p. xxxvii.

¹³⁸ See his “Introduction: Adorno and Authoritarian Irrationalism,” in Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth*.

¹³⁹ Adorno himself (“The Stars Down to Earth,” pp. 53–4) warns that “the concept of the unconscious cannot be posited dogmatically in any study concerning the border area of psychological determinants and social attitudes. In the whole field of mass communications, the ‘hidden meaning’ is not truly unconscious at all, but represents a layer which is neither quite admitted nor quite repressed.” Notwithstanding such important admonition, he later on finds no problem in postulating that “[i]t goes without saying that the ultimate basis . . . has to be sought in the truly unconscious.”

¹⁴⁰ I should perhaps observe that Žižek is less dependent on this idea of a totally new phenomenon, in that for him 9/11 is essentially one among many “sublime objects,” however powerful, that cyclically resurface in the symbolic order of ideology. Even so, he clearly holds the view that 9/11 could have been an ideal—maybe, today, *the* ideal?—opportunity for us to “traverse the fantasy.”

¹⁴¹ Adorno, “The Stars Down to Earth,” p. 50.

¹⁴² Stanley B. Cunningham, “The Ethics of Political Advertising,” in Walter I. Romanow (ed.), *Television Advertising in Canadian Elections: The Attack Mode, 1993* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), p. 189.

¹⁴³ See, respectively, John Stuart Blackie, “On Democracy,” A Lecture Delivered to the Working Men’s Institute, Edinburgh, January 3, 1867, <http://gerald-massey.org.uk/jones/b_blackie_democracy.htm>, and Ernest Jones, “Democracy Vindicated,” A Lecture Delivered to the Edinburgh Working Men’s Institute, January 4, 1867, <http://gerald-massey.org.uk/jones/b_jones_democracy.htm>.

¹⁴⁴ The reference, of course, is to Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). I mention it, as I have in the first chapter, only in the weakest sense, and have no intention of sharing the substance of Huntington’s view.

¹⁴⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* (London: Little, Brown, 2007), p. 99.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁷ Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), pp. 5–6.

¹⁴⁸ “This is a view that goes back hundreds of years. It’s also a typical Leninist view. In fact, it has very close resemblance to the Leninist conception that a vanguard of revolutionary intellectuals take state power, using popular revolutions as the force that brings them to state power, and then drive the stupid masses toward a future that they’re too dumb and incompetent to envision for themselves. The liberal democratic theory and Marxism–Leninism are very close in their common ideological assumptions. I think that’s one reason why people have found it so easy over the years to drift

from one position to another without any particular sense of change. It's just a matter of assessing where power is." *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Noam Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations on the Post-9/11 World* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 18–9. Contrast this with Derrida: "I am speaking here of the *discourse* that comes to be, in a pervasive and overwhelming, hegemonic fashion, accredited in the world's public space. What is legitimated by the prevailing system (a combination of public opinion, the media, the rhetoric of politicians and the presumed authority of all those who, through various mechanisms, speak or are allowed to speak in the public space) are thus the norms inscribed in every apparently meaningful phrase that can be constructed with the lexicon of violence, aggression, crime, war, and terrorism, with the supposed differences between war and terrorism, with the respect for sovereignty, territory, and so on." Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁰ Chomsky, *Power and Terror*, pp. 40–1.

¹⁵¹ Chomsky, *Media Control*, p. 57.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁵³ Chomsky, *9-11*, pp. 68–9.

¹⁵⁴ Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions*, p. 177.

¹⁵⁵ Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 113–4.

¹⁵⁶ See Graham Coulter-Smith, "Between Marx and Derrida: Baudrillard, Art and Technology," in Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact* (London: SAGE, 1997), ch. 8.

¹⁵⁷ See Jürgen Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World," in *Time of Transitions* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2006), ch. 12.

¹⁵⁸ It must be noted that, notwithstanding his prudence, Habermas too speaks of a "new quality" of terrorism in relation to the "intangibility" of global terrorist networks. The point, however, does not seem to me to be particularly germane to his overall argument. See Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 28–30.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34. He continues more steadfastly: "The difference between political terror and ordinary crime becomes clear during the change of regimes, in which former terrorists come to power and become well-regarded representatives of their country. Certainly, such a political transition can be hoped for only by terrorists who pursue political goals in a realistic manner; who are able to draw, at least retrospectively, a certain legitimation for their criminal actions, undertaken to overcome a manifestly unjust situation. However, today I cannot imagine a context that would some day, in some manner, make the monstrous crime of September 11 an understandable or comprehensible political act." Yet, only one page earlier, he held that "[n]o doubt today's Islamic fundamentalism is also a cover for political motifs. Indeed, we should not overlook the political motifs we encounter in forms of religious fanaticism. This explains the fact that some of those drawn into the 'holy war' had been secular nationalists only a few years before. If one looks at the biographies of these people, remarkable continuities are revealed. Disappointment over nationalistic authoritarian regimes may have contributed to the fact that today religion offers a new and subjectively more convincing language for old political orientations" (p. 33). No reason whatsoever is developed as to why these "old political orientations," which highlight "remarkable continuities," should only be considered secondarily as just "also a cover" that "may have contributed" and cannot instead provide a "context" that would make 9/11 "an understandable or comprehensible political act."

¹⁶¹ "September 11' is still part of the archaic theater of violence aimed at striking the imagination. One will be able to do even worse tomorrow, invisibly, in silence, more quickly and without bloodshed, by attacking the computer and informational networks on which the entire life (social, economic, military, and so on) of a 'great nation,' of the greatest power on earth, depends. . . . If this violence is not a 'war' between states, it is not a 'civil war' either, or a 'partisan war,' in Schmitt's sense, insofar as it

does not involve, like most such wars, a national insurrection or liberation movement aimed at taking power on the ground of a nation-state (even if one of the aims, whether secondary or primary, of the ‘bin Laden’ network is to destabilize Saudi Arabia, an ambiguous ally of the United States, and put a new state power in place). Even if one were to insist on speaking here of ‘terrorism,’ this appellation now covers a new concept and new distinctions.” *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2. One is left to wonder on what basis—other than his personal taste for “deconstruction”—Derrida can dismiss, in favor of merely *potential* and rather foggy “new concept[s] and new distinctions,” what he himself cannot exclude to be a *primary* aim of 9/11 terrorism, itself described as taking place in an “archaic [therefore, all but unknown] theater of violence.”

¹⁶² See *ibid.*, pp. 94–100.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁶⁴ Chomsky, *9-11*, pp. 77–8.

¹⁶⁵ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 145.

¹⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, “February 15, or, What Binds Europeans Together: Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in Core Europe,” in Daniel Lévy, Max Pensky and John C. Torpey (eds.), *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After the Iraq War* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁰ Vincent P. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 49.

¹⁷¹ See the “Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature,” in Jürgen Habermas, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 185–210.

¹⁷² See, for example, Christopher Norris, “Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy: Habermas on Derrida,” in Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (eds.), *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1997), ch. 3, and Colin Davis, “Enlightenment/Poststructuralism,” in his *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2004), ch. 2.

¹⁷³ Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 116–7.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁷⁶ On the normativity problem in general, and for critical theory in particular, see James Gordon Finlayson, “Morality and Critical Theory: On the Normative Problem of Frankfurt School Social Criticism.” *Telos* 146 (Spring 2009): 7–41.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁸ See his review of Borradori’s book in *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (July 2003), p. 342.

¹⁷⁹ See James Gordon Finlayson, “Hegel’s Critique of Kant’s Moral Theory and Habermas’ Discourse Ethics,” Unpublished paper.

¹⁸⁰ Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 35.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² George Snedeker, “Defending the Enlightenment: Jürgen Habermas and the Theory of Communicative Reason.” *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 25, No. 3–4 (September 2000), pp. 247–8.

¹⁸³ Joseph Margolis, “Vicissitudes of Transcendental Reason,” in Mitchell Aboulafia, Myra Bookman and Catherine Kemp (eds.), *Habermas and Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 42.

¹⁸⁴ See Jari Ilmari Niemi, “The Foundations of Jürgen Habermas’s Discourse Ethics.” *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 42 (June 2008): 255–68.

¹⁸⁵ See George Schwab’s Introduction to Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.

¹⁸⁶ See Carl Schmitt, trans. by G. L. Ulmen, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007).

¹⁸⁷ Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 38. The use of the term “foe” (a *personal* enemy) in lieu of the more correct “enemy” (meaning a *public* enemy) is probably due to a slip in translation from the German *Feind*.

¹⁸⁹ Hobsbawm, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*, p. 98.

¹⁹⁰ The point is also made forcefully by Chomsky in a discussion of Rawls’s “Law of Peoples.” See Chomsky, *Failed States*, pp. 39–40.

¹⁹¹ Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions*, p. 63.

¹⁹² Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 49.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.

¹⁹⁴ Cited *ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁵ Carl Schmitt, “The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations,” in *The Concept of the Political*, p. 85.

¹⁹⁶ For an overview of these criticisms, see Klaus-Gerd Giesen, “The Post-National Constellation: Habermas and ‘the Second Modernity.’” *Res Publica*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2004): 1–13.

¹⁹⁷ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 30–1.

¹⁹⁸ See Joseph Margolis, *Moral Philosophy After 9/11* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

¹⁹⁹ More precisely, “the pertinent moral categories are themselves of a deeply incommensurabilist sort, in that we lack any inclusive *prima facie* practice or accepted explanatory theory in accord with which we may rank the moral priorities of revealed and natural norms *by the same metric*. We can indeed understand all this, and we can compare the differences (in prudential terms) between bin Laden’s defense and, say, the American condemnation of 9/11. But we cannot, as things now stand, commensurate the two assessments in terms of any *sittlich* [i.e., customary] form of moral legitimation. That is the point, in moral contexts, of distinguishing carefully between the practical and the theoretical, between a *modus vivendi* and a verdict, between a revealed and a second-best form of legitimation.” *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁰² Tarik Kochi, “The Partisan: Carl Schmitt and Terrorism.” *Law Critique*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (November 2006), p. 292.

²⁰³ Margolis, *Moral Philosophy After 9/11*, p. 52.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁰⁶ See Katharine Q. Seelye, “What Happens to the American Dream in a Recession?” *New York Times*, May 7, 2009.

²⁰⁷ See John C. Freed, “Economic Crisis Raises Fears of Extremism in Western Countries,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2009.