

# **REFLEXIVE MODERNIZATION AND THE THIRD WAY**

THE IMPASSES OF GIDDENS' SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC  
POLITICS

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## Introduction

Giddens' recent focus on issues of political and social reform has generated much heated debate among not only social scientists but also among lay persons interested in the present state and future prospects of the societies we live in. In fact, his last three books (Giddens 1994a, 1998, 2000) attempt, by linking social theory with the more concrete problems of political analysis and social policy, to transcend the impasses that both neo-liberalism and conventional social democracy are currently facing. What I find interesting and encouraging in Giddens' project is that, unlike most other "progressive" thinkers, it has squarely set aside the by now utopian problem of the transition (democratic or not) to socialism, and concentrates on the much more relevant (but for socialist critics "banal") problem of the humanization of capitalism.

This is very important because, whereas neo-liberalism engages the energies of many intellectually powerful thinkers, social democracy has failed to do so. The reason for this is that intellectuals who have abandoned Marxism have on the whole channeled their radicalism into forms of post-structuralist theorizing, which have very little to say on the present predicament and future prospects of our late-modern world (Mouzelis 1995: 41-68). Those, on the other hand, who have not abandoned the sinking ship of the traditional Left continue to view with disdain and suspicion attempts at the renewal of the social-democratic project. They continue to consider it a "reformist" discourse which, at best, provides superficial and ineffectual solutions to the capitalist ills, and at worst prevents the working classes from clearly seeing the true (i.e. evil) nature of capitalism and moving towards its overthrow<sup>1</sup>. Giddens – quite rightly, I think – gives short shrift to this type of Don Quixotism. He views the early post-war achievements of the western democracies as positive, and tries to see how we could move forward in a new social-democratic direction.

In this effort the author goes beyond the kind of mundane, commonsensical analysis that simply proposes an ad-hoc mixture of neo-liberal and social-democratic themes. The rich insights and theoretically informed analysis to be found in Giddens' *Beyond Left and Right* and, to a lesser extent, in his *The Third Way*, are indeed far removed from the banalities in the programmatic statements of Britain's New Labour and Germany's social-democratic New Centre.

But if Giddens is to be congratulated on opting for relevance and theoretical sophistication, his project nevertheless portrays serious weaknesses. In his *The Third Way* and its *Critics* he points out that his approach has been criticized as incoherent, conservative in the neo-liberal sense, Anglo-centric, vague in terms of concrete policies proposed, and unable to cope with ecological issues (Giddens 2000: 22-26). The thesis I would like to develop here is that the major weakness of his theory has less to do with the criticisms referred to (criticisms he has more or less effectively answered in the above-mentioned book) and more with a methodological shortcoming; the failure to view his conceptualization of modernity, his critique of the Right-Left distinction, and his new social-democratic proposals from a perspective of the broader macro-institutional structures of late modernity. It is, in other words, Giddens' failure to adopt a holistic, political-economy approach – such as would enable him to link the processes of reflexive modernization with the broader macro-historical transformations of late modern societies – that is at the root of the malaise underlying his recent writings.

For the sake of readers not well acquainted with Giddens' recent work on politics, I shall, before developing my critique, briefly outline the main themes of his "third-way" vision.

## I

### **Globalization, Detraditionalization, and Reflexive Modernization**

Giddens' view on the crucial issues that our societies are facing today have as a theoretical background a three-stage ideal typical model. This tries, in non-evolutionist and non-teleological manner, to explore how some aspects of social organization, culture, and personality change as societies move from a traditional to an early-modern and finally late-modern phase.

In traditional social orders, codes of "formulaic truth" delineate rigidly an individual's space of decision-making. From mundane decisions concerning marriage, family size and everyday conduct, to those concerning ultimate existential problems of life or death, tradition provides recipes for action that individuals adhere to as a matter of course. In early or simple modernity, on the other hand, traditional certainties are replaced by "collectivist" ones. Progressivism (the Enlightenment faith in the unlimited perfectability of human beings and of social orders based on science and technical rationality), the bureaucracies of the nation-state imposing "internal pacification" and exercising all – pervasive surveillance, collective class organization, universal welfare providing all with a minimum of security against "external" and non-manufactured risks - all these mechanisms operate in early modernity in a manner quite similar to tradition in pre-modern contexts. They provide social members with a meaning in life and with clear guidelines or rules that drastically reduce the social spaces where decisions have to be made.

With globalization, however, both traditional and collectivist certainties decline or disappear. Such basic developments as the globalization of financial markets and services, instant electronic communication and, more generally, the drastic "compression of time and space" have led to "detraditionalization". Via such processes as disembedding, increases in mediated experience, pluralization of the life-worlds, and the emergence of contingent knowledge, detraditionalization creates a situation where routines lose their meaningfulness and their unquestioned moral authority. It creates a situation where individuals can resort to neither traditional truths nor collectivist ideologies when taking decisions in their everyday lives. Deprived by detraditionalization of traditional or collectivist guidance, they must, in other words, deal with "empty spaces". From whether or not to marry and have children, to what life-style to adopt and what type of identity to form (even what type of physical make-up to aim for via dietary regimes, aesthetic surgery, etc.) - in all these areas the individual has to be highly reflexive, and must construct his/her own "biography". This means that the new individualism that is rapidly spreading today has less to do with egoism and more with reflexivity, with the fact that we have passed from "simple" to "reflexive" forms of modernization (Giddens 1994a and 1994b).

Moreover, the spaces of uncertainty in reflexive modernization have been further multiplied by the end of tradition being coupled with the "end of Nature". Nature as

“objects or processes given independently of human intervention” (Giddens, 1994a: 206) is also tending to disappear and no longer operates as a “horizon”, as an environment that delineates and so sets guidelines. With the various scientific breakthroughs of recent decades, such as for instance in genetic engineering, “Nature” tends to recede rapidly – and we now must decide how to deal with scientific developments relating to cloning or to the manipulation of our DNA codes for eugenic purposes.

Faced with the growing number of social spaces denuded of guidelines, the individual can either react compulsively (resorting to various addictions or clinging to by now meaningless, “dead” traditions), or try to construct from scratch, as it were, his/her own life project. In the latter case decisions are taken on the basis of enhanced reflexivity in contexts where “dialogue” prevails. Whether in the context of family or interpersonal relationships, or in the broader areas of politics and the public sphere, in late modernity tradition or collectivism are replaced by reflexivity and dialogue as means for conducting one’s life.

In nutshell, the late-modernity processes of globalization, detraditionalization, and growing reflexivity create the unprecedented situation where the values, concepts, and dilemmas of early or simple modernization are becoming increasingly irrelevant. This being so, radical policies will have to take the new realities into serious account, and provide new solutions to such key issues as unemployment, growing inequalities, ecological degradation, etc.

### **Beyond the Right-Left Divide**

For Giddens, the distinction between Left and Right operated as a key organizing principle in the politics of early or simple modernity. It needs critical reexamination, however, in the light of developments in the area of reflexive modernization. He starts his analysis by partly accepting Bobbio’s (1987) view that although the definition of Left and Right changes according to context (time and space wise), one theme that underlies all Right-Left cleavages is that of equality: the Left wants to promote equality, whereas the Right resists it. Giddens considers that Bobbio’s position, although basically correct, requires two modifications.

One, the basic aim of Left politics is not equality for its own sake. Equality is important because it is a necessary (although not sufficient) precondition for a variety of goals and values that the Left is aiming for - goals such as the elimination of poverty, societal cohesion, self-fulfillment, even economic growth. This being so, it is better to link the notion of the Left with emancipation rather than equality, with the emancipation of all citizens from poverty, political tyranny and social discrimination.

Two, and most important, the Left-Right distinction, even when expressed in terms of emancipation, is too restrictive. Its focus is on life-chances or, to use T.H. Marshall’s (1964) theory, it focuses on the struggle to spread civil, political, and social rights to the lower classes. In reflexive modernization, however, life-chances politics is gradually being replaced by life politics. Giddens sees life politics as focusing on issues that are less related to equality or emancipation, and more to how one should construct one’s life in a context of rapid detraditionalization. It has to do, in other words, with identity construction, with competing life styles, with whether or not work should

continue to be the basic organizing principle of our lives, with contested practices like abortion, in-vitro fertilization, genetic engineering, etc.

Given this shift from emancipatory to life politics, from a concern with issues of life-chances to a concern with issues of life style, the old cleavages (e.g. capitalists versus workers) are gradually being ousted by new ones (e.g. authoritarians versus libertarians). This in turn creates the possibility of forging new alliances, new social pacts that cut across conventional class divisions.

If the above is taken into serious consideration, going beyond the Left-Right divide does not lead to the post-modernist position which argues that these terms are meaningless. The “beyond” simply means that the terms no longer apply to the emerging new politics that have to do more with life styles than with distributional issues. This brings us to the notion of the “third way”, the major theme of Giddens’ two recent books on the renewal of social-democratic politics.

### **The Renewal of Social Democracy**

In the light of the increasingly central role of life politics today, how should one reformulate the conventional concerns of social democracy? What Giddens calls the third way is an attempt to adapt social-democratic analyses and policy-making to the new realities of reflexive modernization. It is a third way in the sense that it tries to “transcend both old-style social democracy and neo-liberalism” (Giddens 1998: 26).

#### *Unemployment*

Consider for instance the key issue of unemployment. In the context of globalization and taking into account the new technologies, conventional Keynesian strategies have ceased to apply. Although we do not know yet whether, in the long term, the new technologies destroy more jobs than they create, it is quite certain that the problem of full employment can no longer be solved by means of conventional social-democratic remedies such as state-spending on public works, promoting entrepreneurial initiatives, re-training schemes, etc. Moreover, from the perspective of reflexive modernization, Keynesianism is inadequate because it does not take into account the new reflexivity of individuals and their questioning of notions such as jobs for life or the breadwinner family.

In simple modernity, work meant primarily a man’s job for life, remunerated via the labour market. Any other type of activity, from domestic labour to part-time work, or voluntary work for the community, was considered decorative or superfluous, not a “real” job. In the era of reflexive modernization the solution of unemployment via the creation of “real” jobs for everybody is an impossibility. This being the case, a fundamental precondition for tackling the unemployment issue is to broaden or change our notion of the meaning of work. It has to be realized, for instance, that domestic labour, as well as what is dismissively labelled as voluntary work, can be as valuable and useful as “real” labour-market jobs. This fundamental change in our work culture would fit quite well with the growing demand of many individuals for greater flexibility of their work activities, and greater adaptability to the reflexively constructed new life styles.

“As diverse studies across Europe show, more and more people are looking for both meaningful work and opportunities for commitment outside work. If society can

upgrade and reward such commitment and put it on a level with gainful employment, it can create both individual identity and social cohesion” (Giddens 1998: 128).

### *Welfare*

The problem of unemployment is closely linked with that of welfare. The welfare state as developed in the early post-war era is better suited to simple rather than reflexive modernization. Leaving aside its fiscal crisis, the welfare state as it operates today is overbureaucratic, unjust (the middle classes rather than the needy take the lion’s share of welfare resources), and enhances apathy and dependence (Giddens 1994: 74 ff).

In order for the welfare state to become compatible with the realities of reflexive modernization requires a move from the welfare state to the welfare society: welfare should be integrated with wider life concerns, particularly with the ideas of generative equality or generative politics. The latter notions imply that welfare services, whether run by the state or by voluntary/civil associations, should aim not at simply dispensing material benefits, but at empowering people - generating active trust and enabling them to participate in a non-dependent manner in various life projects.

It is in this way, according to Giddens, that we can achieve positive welfare (Giddens 1998: 117 ff) - a system based on the “twin concerns of life politics and generative politics”. The former stress the need for taking into account the multiplicity of life worlds, of reflexively constituted life styles; and the latter stress the need to pass from a welfare system where money is thrown at the poor, to a system where one “makes things happen” (Giddens 1994a: 15).

### *Dialogic democracy*

Another basic prerequisite for providing new and radical solutions to the problems of unemployment and welfare is the “democratization of democracy” - the deepening of democratic, representative institutions by the development of “dialogic” forms of democracy. Dialogic democracy goes beyond the concerns of representative democracy (which corresponds to the phase of simple modernity) and its issues of interest representation and the spread of rights. It is more concerned with the establishment of dialogic forms of communication/decision-making in all social areas where the decline of tradition and collectivist ideologies has created “empty spaces” : in interpersonal relations, the family, formal organizations, and more global arenas. If one is to enhance self-actualization and the development of the “autotelic self” (Giddens 1994a: 192), then the development of dialogic democracy is a fundamental precondition.

For instance in the kinship sphere - an area where the traditional breadwinner’s androcentric nuclear family is rapidly receding - dialogic democracy means a new system that emphasizes emotional and sexual equality between partners, co-parenting, “negotiated authority” over children, and life-long parental contracts for both married and unmarried couples. Beyond the sphere of personal relations and family life, dialogic democracy entails the renewal/activation of the public sphere, the strengthening of civil associations and self-help groups, the democratization of the state apparatuses, and the development of global spaces where dialogue rather than Realpolitik or violence settles disputes (Giddens 1998: 69-98).

### *Globalization*

Globalization, which is at the root of the transition from simple to reflexive modernization, is in its basic features irreversible. There is no possibility of turning back the clock of history as far as the compression of time and space or the globalization of services and financial markets are concerned. But the neo-liberal market fundamentalism that reigns on the global level (the major source of growing inequalities and capitalist anarchy) can and should be challenged.

Contrary to the theories of the “overglobalizers”, globalization does not entail the decline or disappearance of the nation-state. National governments do change functions but, in terms of their size and their capacities to extract resources via taxation, they tend to grow rather than diminish. In these circumstances, global governance (entailing both nation-states and other global organizations) should try to achieve a more social-democratic regulation of global systems. Measures, for instance, to discourage the volume and extraordinary mobility of speculative capital (like the famous Tobin tax) could provide greater stability and predictability of the global order (Giddens 1998: 150).

As to world poverty, the situation could be improved by overall social pacts between the “global consumer class” (which consists of one-fifth of the world’s population) and the poor, by promoting a type of aid that focuses on life-political and “generative” solutions to the issues of underdevelopment. Such alternative developmental solutions exist already in rudimentary form in the “informal” sectors of both rich and poor countries.

To conclude, the shift from emancipatory to life politics and the formulation of new, radical policies on the issues of work, welfare, democracy, and global governance do constitute for Giddens a “third way” quite distinct from both conventional social democracy and neo-liberalism. For the author of *The Third Way* some of the radical measures he proposes are recognized as utopian, but they derive from a perspective of utopian realism - a perspective that strives to systematically link proposed reforms with the new conditions and potentialities that are generated by reflexive modernization.

## II

### **The Left-Right Divide: Transcendence or Continuity?**

In *Beyond Right and Left* and, in slightly modified form, in *The Third Way*, Giddens (as already mentioned) establishes a clear distinction between life-chances politics, linked to the Left's goals of equality and emancipation, and life politics, which cannot be understood in terms of the conventional Left-Right divide. I think that if the notion of life politics is reformulated in much the same way as Giddens does with Bobbio's notion of the Left, then the marked discontinuity that Giddens sees between emancipatory and life politics disappears.

From this perspective I shall argue that issues of identity, of the multiplicity of the life worlds, of ecology etc. are not beyond but part and parcel of emancipatory politics. If I am correct in this, in the era that Giddens calls high or reflexive modernization, the Left-Right divide (although of course constantly changing form) is as relevant as in the era of simple or early modernity.

### *Mass inclusion and thorough differentiation*

I shall start by elaborating a somewhat different (although not incompatible with Giddens') notion of modernity, my focus being less on traditional/collectivistic versus individualistic forms of organizing one's life world, and more on such macro-structural features of modernity as social differentiation and social mobilization/inclusion.

Following a more macro-comparative, historical approach, it may be argued that modernity is marked by two "unique" features (unique in the sense that they do not exist in "traditional" social orders). The first is a process of unprecedented social mobilization (generated mainly by industrial capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state), which peripheralized or destroyed segmental localism (economic, political, social, cultural), and forced individuals to shift their orientations and alliances from their traditional community, from the "periphery" to the national centre.<sup>2</sup> This massive process of inclusion, i.e. of "bringing-in" people into the "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) of the nation-state can take both autonomous and heteronomous forms. In the case of relatively autonomous inclusion (to use T.H. Marshall's theory), civil, political, and social rights, which in pre-modern contexts were confined to elite groups, spread "downwards".

In the case of heteronomous modernization, people were both "brought in" and "left out". They were "brought in" in the sense that they were irreversibly drawn into the centralized mechanisms of the state, the national market, and national education systems; they were left out as far as the spread of rights is concerned, this exclusion being more or less comprehensive. For instance, in Bismarck's Germany the citizens, via universal conscription, were definitely brought into the military and surveillance apparatuses of the nation-state. They were also partly brought in as far as the spread of social rights was concerned. But in terms of political rights they were definitely left out.

Giddens' conceptualization of modernity, although not evolutionist in any strict sense of the term,<sup>3</sup> pays no heed to the different types of modernity (early or late) in terms of the spread of rights. It is not surprising, therefore, that in rather misleading manner he links the Right with those who resist modernity during the phase of simple modernization, and the Left with those who promote it.<sup>4</sup> It is true, of course, that right-wing conservatism often took the form of resistance to the advent of modernity (e.g. the aristocratic reaction to industrial capitalism). But once modernity became irreversible, and much before the advent of reflexive modernization, conservatism tended to opt for heteronomous forms of bringing people into the national centre, and for what is often called authoritarian or reactionary modernization.<sup>5</sup>

A second unique feature of modernity can be identified by shifting our attention from actors and their rights (i.e. what Lockwood has called a social-integration perspective),<sup>6</sup> to systems and their balanced or unbalanced institutional differentiation (in Lockwood's terminology, a system-integration perspective). From the latter point of view, modernity entails the emergence of highly differentiated institutional spheres, each portraying its own logic and dynamic. Of course, there were instances of advanced social differentiation in complex pre-industrial societies (e.g. empires). But in pre-modern social formations, differentiation was restricted to the top, whereas segmental, non-differentiated forms of social organization dominated at the periphery or the base of the social order.<sup>7</sup> It is only with the advent of the nation-state and the dominance of industrial capitalism that segmentalism recedes dramatically both at the centre and the periphery.



Concerning now different forms of modernity, if from a social-integration perspective we can distinguish autonomous from heteronomous trajectories, from a system-integration perspective we can clearly identify balanced and unbalanced differentiation, or rather different types of institutional imbalances created by the dominance of one institutional order over the others. Contrary to Parsons (the major theorist linking modernization to institutional differentiation), modernization leads not to balanced but to unbalanced forms of institutional differentiation. An obvious example of this type of imbalance is the case of Soviet modernization, where the State penetrated and completely dominated all other institutional orders; whereas the market dominance of Anglo-Saxon modernization although quite real is much less pervasive (Mouzelis 1999).

### *Life politics and cultural emancipation*

Going back to Giddens now, from a social-integration point of view (i.e. from the point of view of actors and their rights), life politics is emancipatory politics. To start with issues that are central to life politics like the construction of identity, life styles, “biographies” - such issues entail struggles for cultural emancipation; or, to put it differently, for the spread not so much of civil, political, social, but rather cultural rights downwards. From such a perspective, in the area of life politics, T.H. Marshall’s conceptualization needs to be extended rather than dismissed as irrelevant.

More concretely: if political emancipation refers to the citizens’ right to be free from the tyranny that a highly unequal distribution of political power entails; and if socio-economic emancipation means to be free from the debilitating poverty that a highly unequal distribution of wealth usually entails, then cultural emancipation promotes the citizens’ right to be free from what may be called “manipulative socializations” (primary and secondary), or free from what Bourdieu (1991) calls symbolic violence. This is the kind of violence or manipulation that is generated by the highly unequal distribution of “influence” between socializers and socialized, between those who control and those who are controlled by the material and symbolic means for shaping identities and life styles.

If life politics is linked with cultural/symbolic emancipation, it becomes clear why the former tend to play an important role in late or reflexive modernity. In traditional contexts, where there are few “empty spaces”, the potential for symbolic/cultural manipulation from above is reduced. When tradition is not questioned, it operates as a protective device minimizing attempts at symbolic/cultural engineering from the top. When this protection disappears, when detraditionalization reigns, then the risks of what is commonly called brainwashing increase.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that any mechanisms that undermine the individual’s capacity for constructing autonomously his/her own biography are resented today, just as mechanisms leading to the restriction of civil or political rights were resented in simple modernity. It is not, that is to say, surprising that struggles against cultural/symbolic tyranny today tend to become as important as political and economic struggles were in early modernity (which does not mean, of course, that the latter struggles have disappeared or have been peripheralized).<sup>8</sup>

Let me make this key point more concrete by giving an example. The feminist movement in its earlier period focused on greater equality between men and women in the spheres of law, work, and politics. In this sense early feminism was more related to life-

chances politics, i.e. to politics aimed at spreading civil, political, and social rights to the female population as a whole. Second-wave feminism, on the other hand, has shifted the focus from issues of socio-economic and political emancipation to that of symbolic or cultural emancipation. Second-wave feminism struggles against all those symbolically oppressive mechanisms (“socializing mechanisms” occurring in the family, school, church, media, etc) that lead to the construction of subservient and obedient female identities - which lead, in other words, to an internalized, phallographic tyranny.

Moreover, life politics entails not only struggles against symbolic manipulation but also against cultural/symbolic exclusion. For the right to construct your own biography in autonomous fashion, i.e. in a way that ensures self-realization, is inextricably linked with what Charles Taylor (1992) calls rights of recognition. These, when they do not transgress the limits imposed by universal human rights, are related to the demand or expectation that one’s choice of life style (based on whatever religious, sexual, ethnic, racial, etc. premises) should not only be tolerated but also respected.

For Taylor, given the “dialogic” nature of modern identities, the demand for respect/recognition becomes central. To put it differently, given that self-respect and therefore self-realization are inextricably linked up with the positive acceptance of one’s life project by significant or powerful others, rights of recognition are directly related to dialogic democracy. They are a fundamental prerequisite for the development of what Giddens calls the “autotelic self”.

If we pass now from the type of life politics that has less to do with identity and life style and more with risks related to robotization, the total annihilation of individual autonomy via, for instance, the growing manipulation of the human genetic code - here too rights are relevant. These are the rights against mechanisms which, in the medium or long term, endanger not so much the political, economic, or social but the existential autonomy of present and future generations. This is to say that when we leave more external or obvious forms of oppression (such as political dictatorship or unfettered capitalist exploitation) for subtler, more symbolic/cultural forms entailing the manipulation of not merely our psyche but even of our genetic make-up, then the notions of rights and of emancipation are not only relevant but absolutely crucial.

#### *Life politics and the environment*

Coming finally to environmental issues, another major dimension of Giddens’ life politics, here the connections with the Right-Left divide are much more obvious. Given that these connections have been extensively discussed in the relevant literature, I shall select just a few here for brief mention.

- What is known as “environmental dumping” is directly related to the present dominance of what Giddens calls market fundamentalism on a global scale. Given the poor countries’ desperate need for foreign investments, they are forced to weaken or completely abolish not only regulations about minimum wages and humane work conditions, but also all measures for the protection of the environment (Lafontaine and Muller 1998: 101).

- The struggle for the protection of the environment, if it is to have a satisfactory outcome, presupposes a regulative framework within which what Giddens calls productivism declines. This is a framework where the requirement for further economic growth ceases to be dominant, and co-exists in balanced manner with the requirement for

respect of the environment in the ecological sphere, for solidarity in the social, for democracy in the political, and for self-realization in the cultural sphere. Needless to say, the neo-liberal Right supports the present dominance of the productivist logic, whereas the Left struggles for a shift from the present gross imbalance to a balanced co-existence of the above values/rationalities.

In conclusion, contrary to what Giddens thinks, the Left's concern with rights and emancipation remains central in the era of reflexive modernization. Even if Giddens' rather problematic thesis is accepted that life-chances politics is less central than life politics in late modernity, even then this shift in emphasis can be expressed in terms of rights: it is a shift of focus from civil, political, and social/economic to cultural rights. Whether one looks at the situation of women, homosexuals, lesbians, ethnic and cultural minorities etc., the Left remains the champion of the spread of rights (cultural and non-cultural) downwards, whereas the Right is against such spread.

If this is so, then life politics is a form of emancipatory politics; a form which has become more prominent today because of detraditionalization and the growth of individual and social reflexivity. Let me repeat that struggles for and against cultural/symbolic emancipation are as much linked with the Left-Right divide as were struggles for and against political and economic emancipation.

### **Cultural Rights and the Regime of Media Control**

If Giddens underemphasizes the obvious connections between left-wing/emancipatory and what he calls life politics, he also falls short of explaining successfully the broader contexts from within which life politics emerges. One cannot but agree with him that the growth of reflexivity and the development of the new individualism give greater centrality to what he dubs life politics and what I would prefer to call cultural-emancipatory politics. For all that, he fails to see the "new" politics in relation to the broader institutional macro-structures of late modernity. The type of political-economy, holistic approach that is so helpful in explaining how and why rights were distributed between dominant and dominated or between exploiting and exploited groups is absent from Giddens' late work.

Because of this marked lack of a holistic framework, Giddens fails to analyze what I consider to be the major contradiction of late-modern societies in the area of cultural emancipation. On the one hand, as he rightly points out, reflexive modernization brings to the fore demands for the spread of cultural identity related rights downwards. On the other hand, these demands are thwarted by the fact that the cultural sphere is, to use Habermas' terminology, "colonized" by the economic sphere. This was indeed the case in early modernity; in late modernity, however, the "colonizing" process has reached unprecedented dimensions.

Due to the new communication technologies and to the institutional breakthroughs that globalization entails, the media in general and television in particular constitute a force that contributes more to the shaping of values and the construction of identities and life styles than all the other socializing agencies (family, school, neighbourhood, church, etc.) put together. At the same time control of these formidable cultural technologies is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few economically

powerful but democratically unaccountable individuals, whose policies follow more an economic/market logic and less a cultural-emancipatory logic.

It suffices to consider the Murdoch phenomenon, the fact that a large part of the world's media is controlled by a single individual, in order to realize to what extent the conditions are missing at present for self-realization or for the development of dialogic forms of democracy. To speak, as Giddens does, of "new" politics that focus on respect for differences and on the need for individual autonomy and self-actualization, without taking the Murdoch syndrome into serious account, is like considering to swim in an empty pool. In other words: dialogic democracy and the spread of cultural rights downwards are simply not possible under the present regime of media control.

A necessary (but not in itself sufficient) precondition for the advance of the type of cultural emancipation that Giddens' life politics entails is a profound restructuring, a profound democratization of the "means of cultural production".<sup>9</sup> It requires designing and implementing a regulative framework for reversing the growing imbalance seen in late modernity between the economic and the cultural spheres. It requires mechanisms that will make it difficult, to use Bourdieu's terminology, for economic capital to buy more or less automatically cultural capital. It requires mechanisms that will shift the control of cultural technologies from media moguls, not necessarily to the state, but to those who actually produce culture (artists, writers, intellectuals, philosophers), as well as those who are entitled to transmit it to the new generations (teachers, parents, priests). It requires, that is to say, mechanisms that will reverse the present drift from market economy to market society.

The elaboration and implementation of such mechanisms for attenuating or reversing the colonization of the cultural by the economic within capitalism sound quite utopian. They become less so if one remembers that in several western European polities the plutocratic tendencies of capitalist democracy have been checked to an admittedly small but significant degree by such measures as the payment of reasonable salaries to MPs (which allows people with few economic means to compete in the political arena), obliging political parties to submit their finances to public scrutiny, restricting the amount of money that candidates may spend in electoral campaigns, etc. These measures have not, of course, eliminated the imbalance that still prevails between the economic and the political sphere, nor have they eliminated the strong plutocratic tendencies of late-modern capitalist democracies. They do, however, clearly indicate that something can be done within capitalism to attenuate the situation where economic capital automatically buys political capital.

There is no reason now why similar types of control mechanisms cannot be devised and implemented for the relationship between the economic and cultural spheres. Such measures need not even entail greater state-control of the media. Forms of operation and control could be devised that are based neither on the profit nor on the party/state logic. It is here that civil society associations and groups can play a crucial role. Giddens (1998: 80) stresses the necessity of the state financially helping and supporting various self-help groups and civil associations without integrating them into the state or party system - without, that is, reducing their capacity for operating outside both the profit and party logic. It is precisely in the media sphere that such state support to groups genuinely representing the consumers, producers, and legitimate purveyors of culture is absolutely crucial.

It is true of course that modern media technologies, particularly cable-television and the internet, have made impossible the type of “content control” that various official bodies could exercise in the past. But what matters most is not to control the “message” by bureaucratic or other means; what matters is to enhance the control over the media by consumers and direct producers of culture (as well as “legitimate socializers”: parents, teachers, etc.). The problem, in fact, is one of the democratization of media control. This means that the media must cease to be considered as another branch of the service industry where profit-maximization rules apply. It means that, in Bourdieu’s terminology, the owners of economic as well as political capital will have to be subordinated to the owners of cultural and social capital as far as the control of media technologies is concerned.

The above ideas may seem highly unrealizable in practice, but I think they are less so than Giddens’ notion that a dialogic form of democracy and self-actualizing life styles can be achieved without radical change in the present regime of media control. The feasibility of radical reforms in the media sphere becomes more plausible when it is understood that changes in the mode of media control can be implemented quite gradually - just as gradually in fact as the implementation of anti-plutocratic rules in the sphere of party politics.

Moreover, given the relatively limited scope of the above reforms (they do not entail changing the “relations of production” in other service industries), they would not undermine the dynamism of the overall capitalist economy. Unlike for instance radical-democratic industrial schemes such as Sweden’s famous Meidner Plan (which, as Giddens has rightly pointed out, undermine “the Key institutions of market capitalism”),<sup>10</sup> changes in media control are perfectly compatible with a market economy - they are incompatible only with a market society. All they imply is passing from a situation where the economic colonizes the cultural, to a situation of balanced interdependence between the logic of profit and productivity in the economic sphere, and the logic of individual autonomy and self-realization in the cultural sphere.

### **Work, Welfare, and Global Competition**

Let us now see what Giddens proposes in the two areas where, at present, neither neo-liberalism nor conventional social democracy offer viable solutions.

Concerning unemployment Giddens believes, as already noted, that in the era of reflexive modernization a satisfactory solution requires social upgrading of work outside the labour market (e.g. “voluntary” work) and its adequate remuneration. It also requires the institutionalization of flexible working-hours, so that one can reflexively decide how to allocate time between labour-market work and other life activities in the family or community.

There is no doubt that, if implemented, this type of radical redefinition and restructuring of what we mean by work could not only solve the unemployment problem, but would also provide work arrangements that would be highly compatible with the new individualism that stresses self-actualization and the reflexive construction of one’s biography. Yet although the proposed work-changes are compatible with certain aspects of reflexive modernization, they are also highly incompatible with other aspects of late modernity. These are, of course, related to the present character of globalization, which

drastically reduces how much room for maneuvering single nation-states have so as to bring about radical reforms in the sphere of work arrangements.

Directly or indirectly, such reforms entail an increase in labour costs and, therefore, undermine a country's competitive position in the world economy. In other words, present trends in the global economy not only forbid the type of reforms that is advocated by the author of *The Third Way*; they also create a climate of permanent job insecurity by the "down-sizing" of firms in the rich countries and the activation of social and environmental dumping in the poor ones (Lafontaine and Muller 1998: 105ff).

The growing contradiction between the requirements of the new individualism, and those of a national economy increasingly open to anarchic global competition, becomes even more obvious in the light of Giddens' notion of positive welfare.

In contrast to the logic of the present welfare system, positive welfare is based on the ideas of generative politics and generative equality. As mentioned earlier, Giddens argues that in the era of reflexive modernization welfare agencies should not "throw money" at the poor and excluded, but create conditions of active trust and enablement. However, as has become obvious by pilot schemes operated in the U.K. and elsewhere, positive welfare, although highly desirable, is even more expensive than the more conventional "negative" welfare. If, therefore, it were to become generalized, it would dramatically aggravate the present fiscal crisis of the welfare system. It would also further intensify the contradiction between "expensive" welfare and the imperative of remaining competitive in the global arena.

Giddens' enablement proposals could, of course, become generalized without an increase in the resources already allocated to welfare if, for instance, there were an internal redistribution of these resources from the middle classes (which, as Giddens correctly points out, at present receive the lion's share of services and benefits) to those who really do need them. However, Giddens rejects "internal" redistribution. He argues that one should maintain the present quasi-universalistic character of welfare arrangements, because keeping the middle classes happy is the only way of ensuring durable social cohesion (Giddens 1994a: 108, 146ff).

But if internal redistribution is ruled out and positive welfare is more expensive than the existent kind, how can the restrictions imposed by global capitalism be dealt with? How can one meet the objection that radical restructuring of work arrangements as well as the transformation of welfare along "generative" lines fatally undermines a country's global economic competitiveness?

A possible answer to this dilemma is a restructuring of the global economy. So Giddens does in fact argue for a shift from the type of global market fundamentalism that at present reigns supreme, to a tighter system of global regulation which, among other things, would discourage the extraordinary and unprecedented mobility of speculative capital. However, Giddens' handling of the globalization issue is inadequate in two respects.

- First, his radical reform proposals for the spheres of work and welfare take no systematic account of the severe restrictions that recent globalizing trends impose on such reforms. His discussion of life politics, self-actualization, and dialogic democracy ignores the limits imposed by the regime of media control.

- Second, given the crucial importance of present global restrictions for understanding the feasibility of third-way reforms, Giddens says very little about how the

global market fundamentalism could be changed. Aside from the necessity of discouraging speculative capital, there is also the more basic issue of whether or not a restructuring of the world economy is possible at all in a situation where the hegemonic global power (i.e. the USA) seems unwilling to change a system that so admirably suits what she considers to be in her best economic and strategic interests. How can the USA be pressured to consent to a radical regulation of the global system?

To answer such a question, and leaving aside the rising power of China, requires dealing seriously with the issue of European integration. At present, under the pressure of global competition, European nation-states are forced to move in a direction which, sooner or later, will lead to the dismantling of the welfare arrangements they have established in the early post-war period. They therefore have a vested interest in challenging the present dominance of neo-liberal capitalism in the global arena. In order to be effective, such a challenge presupposes a European economic unification not along neo-liberal but along social democratic lines. It also presupposes a political and military unification. Is such an ambitious project possible?

According to Habermas (1999), in the same way that the emergent nation-states in early European modernity managed to overcome fragmentation and create unified economic, political, and cultural arenas on the national level, so something similar could be achieved today on the level of Europe as a whole. The German philosopher sees such a unification, while very difficult indeed, as a necessary precondition for the creation of a third way that is not a meek, passive adaptation to the requirements of global neo-liberal capitalism. It would be a third way that sets about aggressively to change the global system, so that it will become possible not only to maintain but to improve the social advances achieved by the European social democracies a few decades ago.

Finally, there is a similar lack of realism, or rather a similar imbalance between the realistic and the utopian in favor of the latter, in Giddens' discussion of "alternative development". It is all very well to advocate forms of aid to the poor countries that encourage the local and small-scale rather than the national and grand-scale, the "generative" rather than the bureaucratic, the informal rather than the formal etc. Equally admirable is the idea of social pacts between the global consumer class (constituting one-fifth of humanity) and the rest. But all these fine ideas seem sadly inadequate when seen in the light of a global system whose overall dynamic works in the diametrically opposite direction - towards rapidly increasing inequalities within and among nation-states, peripheralizing the poor countries, and creating unprecedented forms of poverty and environmental degradation.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

In the preceding pages I have argued that :

(a) Life politics is not as discontinuous from life-chance politics as Giddens implies, since life politics has to do with cultural emancipation, with a shift from concern of the spread of civil, political, and socio-economic to the spread of what may be called cultural or identity rights downwards. As such, life politics can and should be conceptualized in terms of the Left-Right dichotomy - a dichotomy that is as relevant in late as in early modernity.

(b) It is at least partly because Giddens underemphasizes the continuity between emancipatory and life politics that his radical proposals seem to be formulated in a way that takes little cognizance of the broader institutional structures of late-modern societies, and the political economy of global neo-liberal capitalism. It is not surprising, therefore, that Giddens' radical proposals concerning life-style pluralism, self-actualization, dialogic forms of communication, etc. - proposals in tune with the reflexive nature of present-day modernization - are examined in a one-sided, non-holistic manner. They do not take into consideration other and equally important features of late modernity (such as the centrality of the media as socializing agencies and their undemocratic control), and this in turn renders the implementation of his proposals impossible.

(c) The same one-sidedness and/or lack of a holistic approach flaws Giddens' prescriptions for tackling the unemployment and welfare issues. On the one hand, the idea of positive welfare and a fundamental restructuring of work arrangements and of notions of what work means do point in the right direction. But on the other hand, these fruitful ideas are not systematically related to the core institutional features of late-modern societies. Does all this mean that a third way is impossible, that measures aimed at transcending the impasses of both neo-liberalism and conventional social democracy are doomed to failure? Does it mean that the renewal of social democracy is merely a utopian dream? Does it mean that present day capitalism is beyond reform? I do not think so. I share Giddens' optimism that the humanization of capitalism under the late-modern globalizing conditions of detraditionalization and growing reflexivity is possible. But I disagree with the non-holistic, "loose" method of his analysis. This method has led to the formulation of proposals that hang in the air, so to speak. It has led to a situation where the balance that Giddens wanted to achieve between realism and utopianism is weighted in favor of the latter.

Now in formulating an alternative third way one should weight the balance in the opposite direction, and move from Giddens' realistic utopianism to realistic utopianism. A fundamental prerequisite for this is to broaden his perspective considerably in a political-economy direction.<sup>11</sup> It means focusing not merely on the reflexive aspects of present modernization but also on the overall institutional macro-structures of late modernity. It means examining particularly the way globalization (and the technological revolutions that made its present forms possible) has produced a shift from the institutional imbalances that characterized early post-war social democracies, to new imbalances and contradictions (discussed in Part II) between the requirements of the new individualism and the regime of media control; or the contradiction between anti-productivistic work arrangements and the opening-up of national economies to unregulated economic competition.

What is needed, in other words, is a more holistic framework, a new non-essentialist, non-economistic political economy<sup>12</sup> for making it possible to integrate Giddens' analysis of reflexive modernization with the broader power structures and institutional contradictions generated by the struggles between elites; as well as between those who control and those who do not control the means of not only economic production but also the means of political and cultural production. It is only this kind of renewed non reductive political-economy approach, applied to both the national and global level, that can give us a more realistic picture of what is going on in the world today, and what should be done about transforming it in an emancipatory manner.



On a more concrete level of analysis, it is also necessary to put back into the centre of the enquiry what is another “unfashionable notion” : that of the Left-Right divide. Dismissal of this notion has consequences as serious as the dismissal of the holistic political-economy framework. It leads to analysis that tends to ignore that, as in early so in late modernity, there are forces for and against the deepening of democratization - understood here as both the further spread of rights downwards, and as the progressive decolonization of the social and cultural spheres by the economic one. To go a step further still : in order to understand why the Left-Right distinction remains relevant today, one has to revert to a conceptualization of modernity which, by stressing the unbroken continuity between early and late modern emancipatory struggles, gives us some hints of how to achieve the renewal of social democracy - how to construct a new social-democratic project transcending the impasses of both neo-liberalism and conventional Keynesianism.

Such a conceptualization, as I pointed out at the beginning of this essay, views modernity as an unprecedented process of social mobilization/inclusion, which destroys or peripheralizes segmental localisms and irreversibly draws people into the broader economic, political, social, and cultural arenas of the nation-state - this drawing-in process taking both autonomous and heteronomous forms. Modernity, according to this view, also refers to an equally unprecedented process of social differentiation that creates (from the top to the bottom of society) distinct institutional spheres having their own logic and historical dynamic, these spheres portraying different degrees of imbalance/dominance in their interrelationships.

From the above it becomes clear that the conceptualization of modernity proposed here is constructed in such a way that it refers directly both to actors and their rights (i.e. to the problem of spreading rights downwards), and to institutional spheres or subsystems and their imbalances (i.e. the problem of decolonizing the life world). It suggests the lines along which a social-democratic project should proceed at the present. From an actors' perspective it points to the need to combine the old but unfinished emancipatory economic and political struggles with the new ones that focus on the spread of cultural rights downwards. From a more systemic point of view it points also to the need to reduce the marked new imbalances between the major institutional spheres of late-modern societies. This entails efforts at achieving a balance between the logic of productivity/competition in the economic sphere, the logic of democracy in the political, the logic of solidarity in the social, the logic of self-actualization in the cultural, and the logic of respect for nature in the ecological sphere. Never has a balance been achieved between the values of these five spheres, not in early nor in late modernity. However, a project aimed at reducing the imbalances between them is not entirely utopian. The reason for this is two-fold.

(i) The utopian vision of balancing these rationalities is not based on mere wishful thinking. It is derived - less from an analysis of the structure of human language and discourse (as in Habermas 1984 and 1987); and more from an analysis of the type of mass inclusion and differentiation that modernity entails.

(ii) The early post-war western European social democracies showed both a marked spread of rights (particularly socio-economic rights) downwards, and a reduction of institutional imbalances, as the development of the welfare state and other policies attenuated the colonizing tendencies of the capitalist economy. There is no reason why,

by adopting different strategies, one could not reach or even surpass the social-democratic achievements of the 1950s and 1960s.

Let me close by stressing once more that it is possible to formulate a third way that is different both from the ad hoc mixture of neo-liberal and conventional social-democratic recipes found in the Blair/Schroder type of discourse, as well as from Giddens' utopianism that is blind to political-economy realities.

This alternative version of the third way, guided by a non-economistic holistic framework, should stress the continuous relevance of the Left-Right divide, i.e. the continuities between early and late modernity and between the old and new emancipatory struggles against tyranny, exploitation, and cultural/symbolic manipulation. It should also attempt to elaborate new reform proposals (in the area of work, welfare, democracy, the life world) that take seriously into account the contradictions and present distribution of economic, political, and cultural power, both on the national and the global level.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For such a critique of Giddens' politics see Callinicos, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For an early formulation of this notion of modernization/modernity see Bendix 1969, 1778.

<sup>3</sup> There are no teleological implications in Giddens' tradition → simple modernization → reflexive modernization scheme. If anything, Giddens (as well as U. Beck) argue that at present we are living in a run-away world that is moving with great speed into the unknown. See Beck, Lash, Giddens (1994).

<sup>4</sup> "Crudely put, the left - and most liberals - were for modernization, a break with the past, promising a more equal and humane social order - and the right was against it, harking back to earlier regimes" (Giddens 1994a: 49).

<sup>5</sup> For the notion of right-wing or reactionary modernization from "above" see B. Moore (1967).

<sup>6</sup> Lockwood, who uses the terms social and system integration in a different way from Giddens (see Mouzelis 1997), views the social-integration perspective as focusing on actors and their conflictual or co-operative relations. The system-integration perspective, on the other hand, focuses on institutionalized parts and their compatibilities/incompatibilities (Lockwood 1964).

<sup>7</sup> As Marx (1964) and many others have pointed out, in the oriental-despotic type of society, social differentiation or an advanced division of labour was limited to the centre-top; the base or periphery consisted of highly self-contained segmentally organized communities.

<sup>8</sup> As far as I am concerned, life politics is becoming increasingly relevant today but, even in developed western societies, it has by no means displaced in importance life-chance, distributive politics. This is quite obvious if we look at the growing inequalities that the present neo-liberal type of globalization creates among and within states.

<sup>9</sup> For the broadening of the concept of means of production in non-economic spheres see Mouzelis 1992: 43 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See on this point Giddens 1994a: 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> For ways of overcoming Marxist and neo-Marxist economistic reductionism see Mouzelis 1992: 43-92. For the argument that a holistic framework need not lead to essentialism see Mouzelis 1995: 55 ff.

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