

Occidentalism, the Very Idea

An Essay on the Enlightenment and Enchantment

The “Occident” and the “Orient” have been largely judged in juxtaposition with each other. The West has been admired and even emulated for the trajectory of its advancement, while the most “modern” notions of governance, understanding and civic living are seen as legacies of the Enlightenment. This article looks at two recent writings on how the Occident has been viewed and how in recent times, the “scientific rationality” that it espouses as the key to its overweening superiority over the Orient, has appeared “thin”. The reaction to this “disenchantment” with this superior yet hollow rationality appears to be a return to “older, primordial” emotions and values. For the West, as this article suggests, there is no more urgent intellectual and political task than to frame the possibilities for alternate, less confused, more secular forms of re-enchantment that might make possible a genuinely substantial notion of democracy, one that would truly integrate the world.

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I

It wouldn't be too lofty to describe the extensive debate in many related disciplines over the last few decades about the inherited ideas and ideologies of the “Enlightenment” as our intellectual efforts at self-understanding—in particular, our efforts to come to a more or less precise grip on the sense in which we belong to a period, properly describable as our “modernity”.

These ongoing efforts on our part, however, gain a specific interest when they surface in the context of a new form of cold war that has religious rather than communist ideals as its target. Since religion, at least on the surface, in some fairly obvious sense runs afoul of the demands of the Enlightenment, our modernity may seem to be much more at stake now than it was in the contestations of the original cold war, where the issues seemed to be more about a conflict *internal* to the ideals of the Enlightenment.¹ But in the passage of analysis in this essay, I will have hoped to raise one serious angle of doubt about this seeming difference.

A recurring complaint among critics of the Enlightenment is about a *complacency* in the rough and cumulative consensus that has emerged in modern “Western” thought of the last two centuries and a half. The complaint is misplaced. There has, in fact, always been a detectably edgy and brittle quality in the prideful use of omnibus terms such as “modernity” and “the Enlightenment” to self-describe the “West's” claim to being something more than a geographical location. One sign of this nervousness is a quickness to find a germ of *irrationality* in any source of radical criticism of the consensus. From quite early on, the strategy has been to tarnish the opposition as being poised in a perpetual ambiguity between radicalism and irrationalism (including sometimes an irrationalism that encourages a fascist, or incipiently fascist, authoritarianism.) Nietzsche was one of the

first to sense the theoretical tyranny in this and often responded with an edginess of his own by flamboyantly refusing to be made self-conscious and defensive by the strategy, and by explicitly embracing the ambiguity. More recently Foucault, among others, responded by pre-empting the strategy and declaring that the irrational was, in any case, the only defence of those who suffered under the comprehensive cognitive grip of the discursive power unleashed by modernity, in the name of “rationality”.²

I want to pursue some of the underlying issues of this confusing dialectic in such disputations regarding the modern. There is a great urgency to get some clarity on these issues. The stakes are high and they span a wide range of themes on the borderline of politics and culture. In fact, eventually, nothing short of the democratic ideal is at stake, though that particular theme is too far afield to be pursued in any detail in this essay.³

A familiar element in a cold war is that the warring sides are joined by academics and other writers, shaping attitudes and rationalising or domesticating the actions of states and the interests that drive them, in conceptual terms for a broader intellectual public.⁴ Some of this conceptual work is brazen and crass and is often reckoned to be so by the more alert among the broad public. But other writing is more sophisticated and has a more superior tone, making passing acknowledgements of the faults on the side to whom it gives intellectual support, and such work is often lionised by the intellectual elites as “fair-minded” and ‘objective’ and despite these marginal criticisms of the state in question, it is tolerated by the broad consensus of those in power. Ever since Samuel Huntington wrote his influential article ‘The Clash of Civilisations’,⁵ there was a danger that a new cold war would emerge, one between the “West” and “Islam” to use the vast, generalising terms of Huntington's own portentous claims. Sure enough since that time, and especially with two or three hot wars thrown in to spur the pundits on, an increasing

number of books with the more sophisticated aspirations have emerged to consolidate what Huntington had started.

To elaborate this essay's concerns, I will proceed a little obliquely by initially focusing closely and at some length on one such book and briefly invoking another as its foil, and then situate the concerns in a larger historical and conceptual framework. The focus is worth its while since the conclusions of the book I have primarily chosen, as well as the attitudes it expresses, are representative of a great deal of both lay and academic thinking on these themes.

The subtitle of Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's *Occidentalism*, elaborates its striking title as: *The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*.⁶ The book's aim is to provide an account of a certain conception of the West which is named in their title and which they find today in hostile Islamist reactions to the West, a conception which they claim is just as unfair to and dehumanising of the West as "Orientalism" was said to be of the Orient, in Edward Said's well known book bearing that name.⁷

The book is slight and haphazard in argument and my interest in it is not so much intrinsic as it is to use it instrumentally in the dialectic of this paper's analysis. It furnishes – in its way – some of the fundamental theoretical notions needed to present that analysis. Given their various, somewhat unsystematic, claims in the book, it is a little obscure, and perhaps even a little arbitrary, what they mean by the "West" and therefore what they have in mind by "Occidentalism". At times they write as if the term "the West" is to be defined by two basic ideals or principles, which had their origins in 17th century Europe and settled into what we have come to call "the Enlightenment", principles such as the tenets of scientific rationality and the formal aspects of democracy, including the commitment to basic liberal individual rights. The "Enemies of the West" are said to be opposed to these principles.

But for the most part, the book, in its successive chapters, identifies the targets of the "Enemies" opposition as much broader cultural phenomena than these principles, phenomena such as permissive and "sinful", metropolitan life in the West that has abandoned the organic links that individuals have to nature and community, such as commercial rather than heroic ideals, such as a mechanistic and materialistic outlook which stresses instrumental rationality and utilitarian values rather than the values of the various romantic and nationalistic and indigenist traditions, and finally, such as a stress on secular and humanistic values which entirely exclude religion from the public realm and therefore invite the "wrath of God" whose domain must be unrestricted.

It is never made clear what exactly the relation is between the defining principles of the West mentioned earlier and these broader cultural phenomena. Both are targets of the "Occidentalists", but what their relation is to one another as targets is never satisfactorily explained. The book's own response to the two targets is somewhat different. They have some sympathy for the opposition to some of the broader phenomena⁸ (as anyone might, however, much they are committed to the goodness of the West) but the final message of the book comes through as a firm defence of the scientific rationality and the political principles that the "West" is said to have ushered in as exemplary aspects of modernity, and upon which it has defined itself. This differential response on the authors' part makes it particularly important to sort out the question of the relationship between the defining principles and the broader phenomena.

The response leads one to think that the argument of the book is roughly this. The defining essence of "the West" lies in the

two basic principles I mentioned earlier but in the eyes of its enemies there is a conflation of these principles with these wider cultural phenomena. Perhaps the conflation occurs via some sort of illicit derivation of these cultural phenomena from those principles. Thus, in attacking the cultural phenomena, the West, as defined by these principles, is also attacked by "Occidentalism". (The authors quite clearly suggest such an interpretation of their argument in frequent remarks describing "Occidentalism" attitudes towards the West: "It was an arrogant mistake to think that all men should be free, since our supposed freedoms led only to inhumanity and sterile materialism", p 38.) The suspicion that anti-western thought among Muslims is guilty of such an illicit derivation of some of its conclusions from partially justified critical observations regarding the West, is quite widespread in western writing and thinking on this subject, and their book has the merit of articulating it very explicitly.

Towards the end of the book, they lightly rehearse the by now well known intellectual antecedents of the contemporary radical Islamist critique of the broader cultural phenomena in Wahabism as well as in the more recent writings of Maulana Maududi and Syed Qutb; but in earlier chapters there are much more intellectually ambitious efforts at finding prior locations for the critique (especially the aspect of the critique that stresses loss of romantic and nationalist and indigenist traditions for the pursuit of utilitarian values and a superficial cosmopolitanism) in certain intellectual traditions in Germany, Russia and Japan – which then presumably would also count as being anti-"West". The interest of these more ambitious diagnostic efforts are not pursued with any depth or rigour. By the end, one does not quite know what to make of these claims to antecedent "Enemies" since no convincing case is even attempted for a causal and historical influence of these intellectual and cultural movements on radical Islam (though see footnote 9), nor – and this is much worse – is there any effort to sort out what is implied by this recurring critique of "the West" and the principles that define it. One is, at best, left with the impression of an interesting parallel.⁹

I

The sophistication of the book, therefore, lies not at all in deeply exploring the implications of its own ambitious efforts to connect politics with broader cultural issues. Its sophistication lies entirely in the kind of thing I had mentioned earlier, the fact that its cold war voice comes with a veneer of balance: there are parenthetical and somewhat mildly registered remarks about how Islamist groups also target the long history of colonial subjugation as the enemy, including the West's, especially America's, continuing imperial presence in economic (and more recently political) terms in various Muslim nations, as well as its extensive support of either corrupt, brutal, or expansionist regimes over the years as in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Indonesia.... But no one should go away with the impression that any of this is more than a veneer. The authors are clear that these do not constitute the main issue. The main issue is that the "enemies of the West" have first of all confused what is the essence of the West – as I said, scientific rationality and liberal democracy – with the broader cultural phenomena discussed in the four main chapters and second, have again unfairly and illicitly extended their perhaps justified anger against western conquest and colonisation and corporate exploitation to a generalised opposition to the "West" as defined by those principles. The West is advised not to be made to feel so

guilty by these illicit extensions and derivations that it gives up on its essential commitments to its defining principles. Whether one may conclude that it is also advised to stop its unending misadventures in foreign lands over the centuries is not so obvious from the text, since its focus is primarily on characterising a confused and extrapolated state of mind called "Occidentalism".

To now pursue something that this book leaves superficial and incomplete, it is useful to compare its argument with another recent book, Mahmoud Mamdani's, *Good Muslim/Bad Muslim*,¹⁰ because its emphasis is entirely elsewhere and it in fact provides something of a foil to Buruma and Margalit's understanding of some of these issues. Those they call the Islamist "enemies" of the West are the "Bad Muslims" of his title. Those that support American interests in the west Asia, central Asia and south Asia (the Chalabis, the Karzais, the Mubaraks, and the Musharaffs, to name only leaders) are the (ironically phrased) "Good Muslims". And he is highly critical of this dichotomy, as being both self-serving and ideological on the part of the West.

He stresses much more than they do the systematically imperialist nature of the US government's actions in these and other parts of the world. He gives a historical account, first of its many covert operations (described by him as "proxy wars") during the cold war period when it primarily invoked the threat of communism as a justification, and then of its more overt campaigns in the waging of real wars since September 11, 2001 when the justification shifted to combating Islamic terror (though, of course, as Mamdani realises, this justification did not have to wait till September 11, it was put into place immediately after the cold war ended, and the operations continued in covert form till the atrocities of September 11 gave the US the excuse for the more overt action in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹¹)

His analysis is familiar from a lot of writing over the years which has been critical of the US government, but there is a useful account of the covert operations in the African theatre that is usually ignored in this critique, which has mostly tended to focus on west Asia, Latin America, and Asia; and he is also courageous to put on centre-stage the question of Israeli occupation and expansion since 1967 and the successive US governments' support of it, as a central diagnosis of the legitimate source of anger against the West.

Apart from the sketches of America's corporate and geopolitically driven wrongdoings in different parts of the world, the book's intellectual burden is to repudiate those who are evasive about these wrongs by changing the subject to, as he puts it, "cultural talk" about civilisational conflicts or conflicts of broad principles. By his lights the main principles at issue are not those of scientific rationality or of democratic liberalism but rather the principles by which one does not occupy another's lands and brutalise the people there, the principles by which one does not support corrupt and authoritarian regimes, the principles by which one does not overthrow perfectly honourable leaders and governments such as those in Iran in the 1950s and in Chile in the 1970s and replace them with monstrous, tyrannical governments that serve one's economic and generally hegemonic political ends.... Everything else is secondary and a distraction from this main issue. By his lights, then, Buruma and Margalit's book will certainly count as typical of such "cultural talk", which he dismisses. To the question I put earlier, do Buruma and Margalit think that the West should be made to feel guilty over the litany of self-interested destructive interventions which Mamdani expounds, his own answer is bound to be that they not only do not think so, they want to distract us from thinking

so by putting into the air such trumped up culturalist notions as "Occidentalism".

If I am right in placing *Occidentalism* as a sophisticated cold war intervention, Mamdani would be quite right to have such suspicions of the book. But the issue of culture's relation to politics is a more general one and this tendency on Mamdani's part and on the part of much of the traditional Left to dismiss the cultural surround of political issues is a theme that is essential to the argument of this essay. As I said, it is his view that talk of "Occidentalism" and other such notions should be seen as a sleight of hand, a sly, though not necessarily always conscious, changing of the subject. What he fails to see is that the deepest analysis of what goes wrong in this sort of cold war writing will require not merely seeing them as changing the subject from politics to culture, but rather bringing to bear a critique of the *integrated* position that links their politics to their cultural and intellectual stances. This would require linking his own leftist political stances to an absolutely indispensable cultural and intellectual surround. Mamdani's failure to situate his subject in a larger set of intellectual and cultural issues reflects a limitation of his own book, one that prevents a proper analysis of the claims of a full and substantial democracy in the mix of Enlightenment ideas that are associated with our "modernity". The book's failing is the mirror image of the failings of *Occidentalism*. The latter understands that the politics of so-called anti-"western" thought must be connected with broader cultural phenomena, but its superficial analysis of these connections leaves it as just one more contribution to the new cold war. The former's politics honourably refuses to play into the cold war understanding of Islam, but its understanding of its own worthy politics remains superficial in that it precisely fails to make its analysis connect with the deeper cultural issues.

In order to reach towards the kind of analysis that both books in their contrasting ways fail to make, one needs to first take a critical (rather than dismissive) look at the eponymous "culturalist" idea of "Occidentalism" and to see what relation it bears to its obvious alter-referent, "Orientalism".

III

The argument of Said's celebrated book is now widely familiar, but it is still worth a brisk walk through its main causeway in order to set up a comparison with Buruma and Margalit's inversion of it. To put it in very rudimentary and schematic terms, it had, among other things, five broad points to make about western writing on the Orient which, as Said puts it, erected into the "Other", non-western cultures in various parts of the world. (His attention was, of course, chiefly on writing about countries and cultures of predominantly Arab and Muslim peoples, so in that limited sense, his title is a suitable one for Buruma and Margalit to mimic since that is their focus too.)

First, and most obviously, the material inequalities generated by colonisation gave rise to attitudes of civilisational condescension and the societies and peoples of the Orient were as a result presented as being inferior and undeveloped. Second, a related but quite different point, it stereotyped them and reduced their variety to monolithic caricatures. Third, even when it did not do either of the first two, even when it made the effort to find the Orient's civilisational glories, its attitude was that of wondrous awe, and so it once again reduced the power and living reality of those civilisations, only this time it reduced them to

an exotic rather than an inferior or monolithic object. And fourth, he argued, that all of these three features owed in more and less subtle ways to the proximity of such writing on the Orient to metropolitan sites of political and economic power. This fourth point is absolutely central to the critique and the tremendous interest it has generated. The critique's effectiveness lay in precisely refusing to see literary and scholarly productions about the Orient as self-standing, by linking seemingly learned and aesthetic efforts to (at their worst) mandarin-like self-interest and (at their best) to a blindness regarding their locational privilege. A scholar who can write a whole book on modern Turkey with just a few tentatively and grudgingly formulated sentences about the treatment of Armenians and pass off as a man of integrity and learning in metropolitan intellectual circles of the West is good and well known example of the worst, and Said is devastating about such shabby work. But he is in fact at his literary-critical best when he half-admiringly takes on the more subtle Orientalist writing, such as Kipling's, where nothing so shameless is going on. A fifth point that pervaded a great deal of Said's writing on the subject was that all of these four features held true not just of the ideas and works of fringe or extremist intellectuals and writers, but rather of the most canonical and mainstream tradition. The fifth and fourth points are closely connected. It is not surprising that the canonical works should have the first three features if those features flowed from the deep links that writing has to power. The canon, after all, is often constructed by the powerful, in some broad sense of that term.

It is hard to find anything like the same interest in Buruma and Margalit's claims for "Occidentalism" ideas. The first feature is not to be expected since, as they themselves say, Occidentalism ideas and hostility emerge in Muslim populations out of a sense of material inferiority and humiliation rather than out of a sense of economic superiority. The second feature is plausibly present.¹² The third feature, which is one of the more interesting in Said's critique, is altogether absent and they themselves don't make any claims to it. The subtitle of their book, as I said, is 'The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies'. Said's subtitle, for good reason, is the more general 'Western Conceptions of the Orient'. Indeed Said's ideas could be faithfully summed up in a subtitle, which read 'The Orient in the Eyes of Its Enemies *and its Friends*'.¹³ Then again, by the nature of the case, the fourth and absolutely pivotal feature in Said's critique is not present. That is, the "enemies" of the West who are presented in this book, far from being close to power, are motivated by their powerlessness and helplessness against western power and domination. Buruma and Margalit themselves point this out repeatedly. Finally, the fifth feature is also completely absent since it is the extremist, fundamentalist Islamic groups and their ideologues who are "The Enemies of the West" invoking the "wrath of God", and they are far removed from the great and canonical works of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and other writing, some of which (Iqbal, for instance) Buruma and Margalit mention in order to exclude from their critique.

So, such interest as there is in their argument and conclusions criticising so-called "Occidentalism" lies not in anything that parallels these five points and the rich integrating relations between them which constitutes the critique of Orientalism, but rather in a line of argument which goes something like this. Among a colonised and powerless Muslim population, where there is a longstanding feeling of humiliation and helplessness, a fringe of religious extremists has emerged, who out of a deep sense

of resentment against the colonisers are blinded to the diversity of the West, to its great achievements of the Enlightenment – the temper and ideals of scientific rationality and democratic pluralism – and so by distorted appeals to their religion they have instead focused on the worst aspects of western life – rampant materialism, shallow commercialism, alienating loss of values and morals – elevating these latter to a picture of a realm of hellish sinfulness ('jahiliya') to be combated by the "wrath of God". Perhaps readers will out of sheer topical interest be drawn to this analysis, but it seems to me to altogether lack the texture and depth and power of the critique of Orientalism.

This absence of the texture and depth in the position taken by the book that it mimics in its title, points in the end to a far more principled weakness in its own position, which needs to be exposed in some detail because it raises issues of a kind that go well beyond the interest in this particular book.

As I said, some interest certainly does lie in the book's comparisons and analogies with elements of what they call "Occidentalism" or "anti-western" thought in other intellectual movements, such as the German Romantic tradition and the Slavophile and Japanese intellectual traditions. To take the first of these, Buruma and Margalit contrast the ideal of a certain kind of cultural unity which went deep in some of the German Romantics and led to nationalist casts of thought, with the ideal of political pluralism in Enlightenment thought. There is truth in this contrast but even here the contrast actually integrates more ideas than they notice. Even in an early work of Nietzsche's such as *The Birth of Tragedy*, the romantic ideal of a mystical unity of experience is traced by him to the undifferentiated quality of the effect of the chorus on the audience in Attic tragedy, and the "Dionysian" possibilities of this in music and dance are invoked with a view to providing a critique of the Apollonian ideal as it is found in the representational and intellectualising arts of the late classical tradition. This is then deployed to assert the special status of a non-representational form such as music among the arts, and then German culture is singled out in Europe as the one culture to which music is absolutely central, and from this a broad philosophical argument emerges for a more public and modern revival of such a Dionysian unity in a single German nation, undiluted by the civilities and diversities owing to the shallow cosmopolitanism and pluralism of the French Enlightenment. These heady connections make for fascinating intellectual history, though of course one should "handle with care" when such seemingly diverse regions of human thought and culture and politics are being brought together in an argument.

Buruma and Margalit make the less complex, less philosophical, and more routine point that ideas of racial purity in Nazism grew out of quasi-metaphysical arguments for nationalism of this kind and there very likely is scope for such further intellectual integration of racialist attitudes and metaphysics. But it is equally true that Hitler himself invoked with great admiration the system and efficiency of the extermination of the American Indians by the colonists, and historians such as Richard Drinnon have convincingly elaborated the remarkable metaphysics underlying the racial hatred in that particular holocaust as well.¹⁴

It might be said that it is not quite keeping faith with their argument to invoke the case of these colonists in the West because they are pre-Enlightenment examples of "ethnic cleansing" and ideas of racial purity, and the authors are defining the West in post-Enlightenment terms. In fact, of course, the "cleansing" went on well into the high Enlightenment period and after, but still

they may excuse themselves from a consideration of it on grounds that it was relatively distant from the prime location of the high European Enlightenment, which is their subject.

Even if we do allow them to excuse themselves from considering it, and even if we allow the focus to be exclusively on the period of high European Enlightenment, there are very obvious signs of how uncritical they are of their own basic notions. There is a bounty of extremely familiar evidence of European colonial racism based on similar philosophical rationales, in the heyday of the Enlightenment. It is hard to believe that the authors of *Occidentalism* are not aware of it. Why, then, do they ignore it? Presumably because to invoke it would be to depart from their focus, which is on anti-Enlightenment ideas. That is why the example they cite of German Romantic roots of German nationalism and eventually racism depends on an anti-rationalist critique of the Enlightenment, whereas colonial racism, they would claim, grew (at least partly) out of a desire to actually spread rationality to non-western lands. This is fair enough: writers can focus on whichever theme they wish.¹⁵ But there are theoretical consequences of such a claim that are destructive of their own book's main argument. Let me explain.

If one accepts this understanding of colonialism as being (at least partly) motivated by the desire to make the rest of the world more rational, it has to then be granted that that, in turn, presupposes a moral-psychological picture in which there is a notion of rationality that colonial peoples did not possess, a sort of basic moral and mental lack. If so, a distinction of profound analytical significance in the very idea of rationality is generated by this. By the nature of the case, the lack cannot, therefore, be of a "thin" notion of rationality, one that is uncontroversially possessed by all (undamaged, adult, human minds); rather, it would have to be the lack of a "thick" notion of rationality, a notion that owes to specific historical developments in outlook around the time of the rise of science and its implications for how to think ("rationally") about culture and politics and society. But this has the effect of logically undermining the central argument of the book because there is now a real question as to whether there is not a much tighter and perfectly licit derivational connection between such a commitment to rationality which the authors admire, and the harms that western colonial rule perpetrated in its name, which the Occidentalists with some justification (even according to the authors) resent. Yet this is exactly the derivational connection which, as I pointed out in the exposition of their argument, they find to be illicit and a fallacy. The book's own implicit assumptions are, therefore, devastating to its main line of thought.

It is really hereabouts, that we can find the more obvious sources for a critique of the Enlightenment that no cold war sensibility such as theirs could possibly acknowledge. I say it is obvious but the exact structure of the critique and its long-standing historical underpinnings are not always made explicit. Let me begin with a locus of this critique at some distance from the West and then present very early antecedents to it in the dissenting traditions of the West, itself.

IV

The anti-western figure who comes closest to the form of intellectual critique that Buruma and Margalit elaborate in their various chapters under the label "Occidentalism", is Gandhi. He wrote and spoke with passion against the sinful city that took us away from organic village communities; he was a bitter

opponent of the desacralising of nature by science and the scientific outlook; he urged the Indian freedom fighters not to inherit from the British the political apparatus of formal democracy and liberal institutions because it was a cognitive enslavement to "western" ideas unsuited for indigenous political life in India; and he did all this in the name of traditional religious purity which would be corrupted by modern ideals of the Enlightenment. And to add to all this there is one last point of particularly illuminating fit between Gandhi and their "Occidentalists". If they were looking for someone who took the view that there was indeed a more or less strict derivation from the ideals of Enlightenment rationality and political liberal institutions to the shallow and harmful cultural aspects of modernity (a derivation which, as I said, they are bound to describe as illicit and a fallacy), it is Gandhi rather than Muslim intellectuals and writers, where they will most clearly find it. It is he (much more than the German, Slavophile, and Japanese traditions that they invoke) who echoes in detail the Islamic Occidentalists' critique of the broader cultural phenomena that Buruma and Margalit expound; and (much more explicitly than they can be said to), he would absolutely resist the charge that it is a conflation or illicit extrapolation to link the ideals of scientific rationality and modern forms of democratic politics with that broader cultural phenomena – of materialism, uncontrolled technology, the alienating, sinful city, etc. He insisted and argued at length that the notion of rationality, which was first formulated in the name of science in the 17th century and developed and modified to practical and public domains with the philosophers of the Enlightenment, had within it the predisposition to give rise to the horrors of modern industrial life, to destructive technological frames of mind, to rank commercialism, to the surrender of spiritual casts of mind, and to the destruction of the genuine pluralism of traditional life before modernity visited its many tribulations upon India. As he often claimed, it is precisely because this more authentic pluralism was destroyed by modernity, that modernity had to impose a quite unsatisfactory form of secularist pluralism in a world that it had itself "disenchanted", to use the Weberian rhetoric. Before this disenchantment, which for Gandhi has its origins in the very scientific rationality that Buruma and Margalit applaud, there was no need for such artificial forms of secularised pluralism in Indian society. The pluralism was native, unselfconscious, and rooted.

Even those who do not agree with every detail of Gandhi's criticisms (and there are many details that I would certainly resist¹⁶) could not help but notice that, given this almost perfect fit with the subject their title announces, Gandhi is not so much as mentioned in this book. No doubt this is because Gandhi was the great spokesman of non-violence and one of the book's recurring objections is to the dehumanising violence of the 'jihadi' Occidentalists. (So also, their German, Japanese, and Slavophile intellectual antecedents, discussed in the book, are described as having laid seed for eventually, well known violent descendants.) But if their ideas and arguments overlap so closely with Gandhi's¹⁷ and it is only the objectionable commitment to violence and the dehumanisation of those whom one opposes violently that makes the Occidentalists they are most interested in different from Gandhi, then those ideas and arguments are only contingently related to what is objectionable about Occidentalism. There is therefore no interesting integrity in the doctrine, something one cannot say of the deep integrating links between power, violence, literature, and learning, claimed for the doctrine of "Orientalism" which I briefly tried to convey earlier.

The primary aim of *Occidentalism* (to quote my own words when I first introduced the book in this essay) is to “provide an account of a certain conception of the West which is named in their title and which, they find today in hostile Islamist reactions to the West, a conception which they claim is just as unfair to and dehumanising of the West as “Orientalism” was said to be of the Orient, in Edward Said’s well known book bearing that name.” I am stressing the term “conception” in my own words quite deliberately. It is essential to how the book’s aim is formulated. So, if I am right and the book’s characterisation of the “Occidentalism” conception of the West is echoed almost perfectly in Gandhi’s critique of the West, and if the crucial mark of difference is that the Islamists have brought to this critique’s conception a contingent element of violence, which Gandhi would deplore, then it is not the conception that they have established to be dehumanising. The parallel with Gandhi shows, therefore, that they have not met their aim at all.

The subject is deepened and complicated if we notice that Gandhi’s criticisms have antecedents in a tradition of thought that goes all the way back to the 17th century in England and elsewhere in Europe, simultaneous with the great scientific achievements of that time. It goes back, that is, to just the time and the place when the outlook of scientific “rationality” that Buruma and Margalit place at the defining centre of what they call the “West”, was being formed, and it is that very outlook with its threatening cultural and political consequences that is the target of the critique.

It should be emphasised right at the outset that the achievements of the “new science” of the 17th century were neither denied nor opposed by the critique I have in mind, and so the critique cannot be dismissed as Luddite reaction to the new science.¹⁸ What it opposed was a development in *outlook* that emerged in the *philosophical surround* of the scientific achievements. In other words, what it opposed was just the notion of “thick” rationality that Buruma and Margalit describe in glowing terms as “scientific rationality”.

To put a range of complex, interweaving themes in the crudest summary, the dispute was about the very nature of nature and matter and, relatedly therefore, about the role of the deity, and of the broad cultural and political implications of the different views on these metaphysical and religious concerns. The metaphysical picture that was promoted by Newton (the official Newton of the Royal Society, not the neo-Platonist of his private study) and Boyle, among others, viewed matter and nature as *brute* and *inert*. On this view, since the material universe was brute, God was *externally* conceived with all the familiar metaphors of the “clock winder” giving the universe a push from the *outside* to get it in motion. In the dissenting tradition – which was a *scientific* tradition, for there was in fact no disagreement between it and Newton/Boyle on any serious detail of the scientific laws, and all the fundamental notions such as gravity, for instance, were perfectly in place, though given a somewhat different metaphysical interpretation – matter was *not* brute and inert, but rather was shot through with an *inner* source of dynamism that was itself divine. God and nature were not separable as in the official metaphysical picture that was growing around the new science, and John Toland, for instance, to take just one example among the active dissenting voices, openly wrote in terms he proclaimed to be “pantheistic”.¹⁹

The link with Gandhi in all this is vivid and explicit in the dissenting voices. One absolutely central claim of the freethinkers

of this period in the 17th century was about the political and cultural significance of their disagreements with the fast developing metaphysical orthodoxy of the “Newtonians”. Just as Gandhi did, they argued that it is only because one takes matter to be “brute” and “stupid”, to use Newton’s own terms, that one would find it appropriate to conquer it with the most destructive of technologies with nothing but profit and material wealth as ends, and thereby destroy it both as a natural and a humanitarian environment for one’s habitation. In today’s terms, one might think that this point was a 17th century predecessor to our ecological concerns but though there certainly was an early instinct of that kind, it was embedded in a much more general point (as it was with Gandhi too), a point really about how nature in an ancient and spiritually flourishing sense was being threatened. Today, the most thoroughly and self-consciously secular sensibilities may recoil from the term “spiritually”, though I must confess to finding myself feeling no such self-consciousness despite being a secularist, indeed an atheist. The real point has nothing to do with these rhetorical niceties. If one had no use for the word, if one insisted on having the point made with words that we today can summon with confidence and accept without qualm, it would do no great violence to the core of their thinking to say this: the dissenters thought of the *world* not as brute but as *suffused with value*. That they happened to think the source of such value was divine ought not to be the deepest point of interest for us. The point rather is that if it were laden with *value*, it would make *normative* (ethical and social) demands on one, whether one was religious or not, normative demands therefore that did not come merely from our own instrumentalities and subjective utilities. And it is this sense of forming commitments by taking in, in our perceptions, an evaluatively “enchanted” world which – being enchanted in this way – therefore *moved* us to normatively constrained engagement with it, that the dissenters contrasted with the outlook that was being offered by the ideologues of the new science.²⁰ I say “engagement”, and mean it. A brute and disenchanting world could not move us to any such engagement since any perception of it, given the sort of thing it was, would necessarily be a detached form of observation; and if one ever came out of this detachment, if there was ever any engagement with a world so distantly conceived, so external to our own sensibility, it could only take the form of mastery and control of something alien, with a view to satisfying the only source of value allowed by this outlook – our own utilities and gain.

V

We are much used to the lament that we have long been living in a world governed by overwhelmingly commercial motives. What I have been trying to do is to trace this to its deepest conceptual sources and that is why the 17th century is so central to a proper understanding of this world. Familiarly drawn connections, like “Religion and the Rise of Capitalism”, are only the beginning of such a tracing. In his probing book, *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke says that

the experience of an impersonal outlook was empirically intensified in proportion as the rationale of the monetary motive gained greater authority...²¹

This gives us a glimpse of the sources. As he says, one had to have an impersonal angle on the world to see it as the source of profit and gain, and vice versa. But I have claimed that the

sources go deeper. It is only when we see the world as Boyle and Newton did, as against the freethinkers and dissenters, that we understand further why there was no option but this impersonality in our angle on the world. A desecralised world, to put it in the dissenting terms of that period, left us no other angle from which to view it, but an impersonal one. There could be no normative constraint coming upon us from a world that was brute. It could not move us to engagement with it on its terms. All the term-making came from us. We could bring whatever terms we wished to such a world; and since we could only regard it impersonally, the terms we brought in our actions upon it were just the terms that Burke describes as accompanying such impersonality, the terms of “the monetary” motives for our actions. Thus, it is that the metaphysical issues regarding the world and nature, as they were debated around the new science, provide the deepest conceptual sources. It is not without reason, then, that Buruma and Margalit, speak of a “scientific rationality” as defining “the West”.

The conceptual sources that we have traced are various but they were *not* miscellaneous. Religion, capital, nature, metaphysics, rationality, science, are diverse conceptual elements but they were *tied together* in a highly deliberate integration, that is to say in deliberately accruing worldly *alliances*. Newton’s and Boyle’s metaphysical view of the new science won out over the freethinkers and became official only because it was sold not only to the Anglican establishment but, in an alliance with that establishment, to the powerful mercantile and incipient industrial interests of the period in precisely these terms, terms which stressed a future of endlessly profitable consequences that would accrue if one embraced this particular conception of the new science and build, in the name of a notion of rationality around it, the institutions of an increasingly centralised political oligarchy (an early version of a certain form of centralised state) to help promote these interests. These were the very terms that the freethinkers found alarming for politics and culture, alarming for the local and egalitarian ways of life, which the radical elements in the English Revolution such as the Levellers, Diggers, Quakers, and other groups had articulated and fought for.

It is a travesty of the historical complexity built into the thick notion of scientific rationality we are discussing, to think – as is so often done – that it emerged triumphant in the face of centuries of *clerical* reaction only. That is the sort of simplification of intellectual history which leads one to oppose scientific rationality with religion, (the “Occident” and its “Enemies”) without any regard to the highly significant historical fact that it was the Anglican establishment that lined up with this thick notion of rationality in an alliance with commercial interests and it was the dissenting, egalitarian, radicals who opposed such “rationality”. It was this scientific rationality, seized upon by just these established religious and economic alliances, that was later central to the colonising mentality that justified the rapacious conquest of distant lands. It may seem that it is a conceptual leap to go from the 17th century conceptions of scientific rationality to the liberal justifications of colonial conquest. But if one accepts the initial conceptual connection between views of nature, god, and commerce that were instantiated in these social and political alliances between specific groups and interests of the earlier period, there can be no reason to withhold acceptance from the perfectly plausible hypothesis (indeed merely an extension of the connections that have been accepted) that the colonised lands too were to be viewed as brute nature that was available for

conquest and control. This hypothesis is wholly plausible so long as one was able to portray the inhabitants of the colonised lands in infantilised terms, as a people who were as yet unprepared – by precisely a mental lack of such a notion of scientific rationality – to have the right attitudes towards nature and commerce and the statecraft that allows nature to be pursued for commercial gain. And such an historically infantilising portrayal of the inhabitants was explicit in the writings of John Stuart Mill, and even Marx.

There is a fair amount of historical literature by now on this last point about the intellectual rationalisations of colonialism, but I have introduced the salient points of an earlier pre-colonial period’s critique here in order to point out that Gandhi’s and apparently the “Occidentalists’” social and political attack on the “scientific rationality” that is elevated as a defining principle of the “West”, has had a very long and recognisable tradition going back to the 17th century in the heart of the West, and it is this tradition of dissent that seems to keep resurfacing in different forms throughout the intellectual history of the West and elsewhere since the 17th century. Buruma and Margalit, as I said, cite later Slavophile, Japanese, and German romantic and nationalist writing as being critical of this notion of rationality, but my point is that it is the writing and thought at the very site and the very time of the scientific discoveries themselves, which anticipate in detail and with thoroughly honourable intent, those later developments.

Once that point is brought on to centre stage, a standard strategy of the orthodox Enlightenment against fundamental criticisms raised against it is exposed as defensive posturing. It would be quite wrong and anachronistic to dismiss this initial and early intellectual and perfectly scientific source of critique, from which later critiques of the Enlightenment derived, as being irrational, unless one is a cold warrior waiting to tarnish all criticism of the “West” along these lines. It is essential to the argument of this paper that far from being anti-West, Gandhi’s early antecedents in the West, going back to the 17th century and in recurring heterodox traditions in the West since then, constitute what is, and rightly has been, called “the Radical Enlightenment”.²² To dismiss its pantheistic tendencies that I cited, as being unscientific and in violation of norms of rationality, would be to run together in a blatant slippage the general and “thin” use of terms like “scientific” and “rationalist” with just this “thick” notion of scientific rationality that we had identified above, which had the kind of politically and culturally disastrous consequences that the early dissenters were so prescient and jittery about. Buruma and Margalit’s appeal to scientific rationality as a defining feature of the West trades constantly on just such a slippage, subtly appealing to the hurrah element of the general and “thin” terms “rational” and “scientific” to tarnish the critics of the West, while actually having the work in their argument done by the thicker notion of scientific rationality, which the “Occidentalists’” tradition and the “Enemies of the West” oppose.

As far as the thin conception of “scientific” and “rationality” is concerned, the plain fact is that nobody in that period was, in any case, getting prizes for leaving god out of the world-view of science. That one should think of god as voluntaristically affecting nature from the outside (as the Newtonians did) rather than sacralising it from within (as the freethinkers insisted), was not in any way to improve on the *science* involved. Both views were therefore just as “unscientific”, just as much in violation of scientific rationality, in the “thin” sense of that term that we

would now take for granted. What was in dispute had nothing to do with science or rationality in that attenuated sense at all. What the early dissenting tradition (and its many successors, whether in German, Japanese or Slavophile traditions or in Gandhi) was opposed to is the *metaphysical* orthodoxy that grew around Newtonian science and its implications for broader issues of *culture* and *politics*. This orthodoxy with all of its implications is what has now come to be called “scientific rationality” in the “thick” sense of that term and in the cold war intellectual’s cheerleading about “the West”, it has been elevated into a defining ideal, dismissing all opposition as irrationalist, with the hope that accusations of irrationality, because of the general stigma that the term imparts in its “thin” usage, will disguise the very specific and “thick” sense of rationality and irrationality that are actually being deployed by them. Such (thick) irrationalism is precisely what the dissenters yearned for; and hindsight shows just how honourable a yearning it was.

The point here is so critical that I will risk taxing the reader’s endurance and repeat it. Buruma and Margalit mention only the later Slavophile and German and other “Occidentalism” criticisms of such a notion of the “West”. But if I am right that all of these, including Gandhi’s criticisms which they conveniently do not mention, are continuous with this much earlier critique in the very heart of the West and its scientific developments, then the terms in which Buruma and Margalit dismiss those criticisms must apply to the antecedent critique as well. It is precisely the point, however, that to say that these early dissenters were unleashing an irrationalist and unscientific critique of the “West” as they define the “West”, is to confuse and conflate science and its ideals of rationality with a notion of rationality defined upon a very specific metaphysical outlook that started at a very specific historical moment and place and grew to be a presiding orthodoxy as a result of alliances that were formed by the scientific and clerical and commercial establishment in England and the Netherlands and then spreading to other parts of Europe. It is this outlook and its large consequences for history and culture and political economy, which made Gandhi and his many conceptual predecessors in the West anxious in a long tradition of dissenting thought. What this helps to reveal is that while one works with a “thin” notion of rationality and an innocuous notion of the “West”, it is absurd to call these freethinkers, either “irrational” or “unscientific”, or “enemies of the West”. But if one works openly and without disguise (in a way that Buruma and Margalit do not) with a thick notion of rationality, understood now as shaped by this very specific intellectual, political and cultural history, it is quite right to call them “irrationalist” and “enemies of the West” – for those terms, so understood, reveal only the perfectly serious, legitimate and, as I said, highly prescient anxieties of the dissenters. It is only when we make plain that these thick meanings are being passed off in disguise as the thin ones, that one can expose the codes by which an edgy and defensive cold war intellectual rhetoric tries to tarnish an entire tradition of serious and fundamental dissent.

Sometimes this tradition has surfaced in violent activism, at other times in critiques that have stressed more pacifist, religious, and contemplative ways of life. Since colonialism and the West’s reach into distant lands which persists after formal decolonisation in revised forms today, this very same dissenting tradition has quite naturally surfaced in those distant lands as well, again both in non-violent forms such as Gandhi’s, and in the violent forms which Buruma and Margalit characterise as

coming from the Occidentalism “enemies of the West” among a fringe of Islamist extremists.

VI

The unpardonable atrocities committed recently by some of the latter in acts of violent terror are in no way absolved by the analysis I am offering. All the analysis does is to show that when the cold warriors of the West try and elevate one’s understanding of these atrocities as deriving from a politics that owes to a certain culturalist conception of the West that they call “Occidentalism”, they have it only partly right. A full understanding of that conception requires seeing “Occidentalism” as continuous with a long-standing and deep-going dissenting tradition in the West itself. That tradition was clear-eyed about what was implied by the “disenchantment” of the world, to stay with the Weberian term. It is a tradition consisting not just of Gandhi and the early 17th century freethinkers, whom I have already mentioned, not just the Slavophile, Japanese and German critics that are mentioned in their book, but a number of remarkable literary and philosophical voices in between that they don’t discuss: Blake, Shelley, William Morris, Whitman, Thoreau, and countless anonymous voices of the non-traditional Left, the Left of the “radical” Enlightenment, from the freemasons of the early period down to the heterodox Left in our own time, voices such as those of Noam Chomsky and Edward Thompson, and the vast army of heroic but anonymous organisers of popular grassroots movements – in a word, the West as conceived by the “radical” Enlightenment which has refused to be complacent about the orthodox Enlightenment’s legacy of the “thick” rationality that the early 17th century dissenters had warned against.²³ This is the tradition of “Enlightenment” that Buruma and Margalit show little understanding of, though “Enlightenment” is the avowed subject of their book. That should occasion no surprise at all since it is impossible to come to any deep understanding of their own subject while they succumb to the temptations that cold war intellectuals are prone to.

The freethinkers of the 17th century, even though they were remarkably prophetic about its consequences, could not, of course, foresee the details of the trajectory of the notion of “scientific rationality” whose early signs they had dissented from, that is to say, the entire destructive colonial and corporate legacy of the alliance of concepts and institutions and material interests, they were warning against. But their successors over the last three hundred or more years, some of whom I have named, have been articulating and responding to these details in their own times.

It goes without saying that not all of these responses are based on a clearly articulated sense of these conceptual, institutional, and material alliances that have developed over the centuries. They are often much more instinctive. And it is undeniable that there are sometimes monstrously violent manifestations in these responses among a terrorist fringe in, among others, Muslim populations (including the Muslim youth in the metropolitan West) who, as Buruma and Margalit acknowledge, feel a sense of powerlessness in the face of an imperial past (and present) in different parts of the world. That some of the political rhetoric of these terrorists appeals confusedly to distortions of their religion, much as talk of “Armageddon” in the heartland of the US does, is also undeniable. But if Buruma and Margalit are right that their religious politics and rhetoric is not separable from a

cultural understanding of their past and of a certain cultural understanding of the West which has intruded into their past and their present, and if I am right that that cultural understanding has deep affinities with a dissenting *Western* tradition's understanding of "the West" and its own past, then we are required to take very seriously, the words of terrorists and of the many, many more ordinary Muslim people who will not always publicly oppose these terrorists despite the fact that they share no "fundamentalist" ideology with them and in fact detest them for the violent disruption of their lives that they have wrought. By "take the words seriously", I mean take the words to be saying just what they are saying and not self-servingly view them as a fake political front for a runaway religious fanaticism.

We will have to take their words much more seriously than Buruma and Margalit do in their passing, lightly formulated acknowledgements of the wrongs committed by the West. The words have been spoken again and again. They are not just on the recordings of Osama bin Laden's voice and image, they are constantly on the lips of ordinary Muslims on the street. And they are clear and perfectly precise about what they claim and want: that they are fighting back against centuries of colonial subjugation, that they want the military and the corporate presence of the West (primarily the US) which continues that subjugation in new and more subtle forms, out of their lands, that they want a just solution for the colonised, brutalised Palestinian people, that they want an end to the cynical support by the West (primarily by America) of corrupt regimes in their midst to serve the West's (primarily America's) geo-political and corporate interests, that they will retaliate (or not speak out against those who retaliate) with an endless cycle of violence unless there is an end to the endless state-terrorist actions both violent (in the bombings and in the bulldozing of their cities and their occupied lands, killing or displacing thousands of civilians) and non-violent (the sanctions and embargoes that cause untold suffering to ordinary, innocent people).²⁴ To not take these words seriously and see them as genuinely motivating for those who speak them, is as morally cretinous as it is to absolve the terrorist actions that a fringe of those who speak these words, commit.²⁵

The two books I have discussed, as I said, provide an interesting contrast on just this point. Mamdani, who rightly takes these words seriously but (unlike Buruma and Margalit) is suspicious of "culture talk", quite fails to locate the words in the historical and conceptual framework of a cultural and political critique within the West itself of a very specific notion of rationality that we have been discussing; Buruma and Margalit, who rightly see the need to connect issues of politics with cultural critique therefore correctly situate these words in the broader reaction to such a notion of rationality, yet nevertheless (unlike Mamdani) fail to take the words seriously because they are wholly uncritical of the brutal and inegalitarian political and cultural implications of such a notion of scientific rationality that the "radical" Enlightenment warned against.

But, having said this, it would be wrong of me to rest with the criticism that the two books are symmetrically unsatisfactory in this way. Since we are undoubtedly in a cold war, Mamdani's is the book that will be unpopular in "the West", not only with those in power but also with the large class of intellectuals and writers and journalists who keep a cold war going and who, as I said at the outset, even when they are often critical of those

in power, will not disturb a broad consensus within which those in power can get away with what they have done over the years. Buruma's and Margalit's is the book which may, in some passing detail or other, not entirely please those in power, but it will on the whole be warmly received by this intellectual surround.²⁶ Even if it conveys something about the moral courage of the respective authors, there is nothing surprising in any of this. If you spend your time writing a book criticising those in and around power and control, you will get a quite different reaction than if you spend your time writing a book criticising those who are a fringe among the powerless.

VII

The analysis so far has refused to treat the cultural critique of the West (whether accompanied by violence or not) as being wholly unconnected (or fallaciously and illicitly connected) to the dissent from the thick notion of scientific rationality that developed in the "West" and mobilised itself into one underlying justificatory source of the West's colonising of other lands. It has, on the contrary, tried to show the connecting threads between them in historical and conceptual terms. It has also acknowledged that sometimes the cultural critique comes with a layer of religious rhetoric and commitment, of a conservative and "fundamentalist" or (a better term) "absolutist" variety. It is often true that those commitments and that rhetoric are the things to which an alienated and powerless people in previously (and presently) colonised lands will turn, and Buruma and Margalit don't particularly wish to deny this. Like most intellectual cold warriors, their focus is on the religious commitment and rhetoric of the immediate cold war target, Muslims who are the "enemies of the West". However, if there really are conspicuous intellectual and critical affinities between the "Occidental Enemies of the West" and Gandhi on the one hand and a long-standing and continuous dissenting tradition within the West itself on the other, then we ought to pay some attention to religiosity in the West too, a religiosity which is often (especially in America) a response to the more local rather than imperial consequences of "scientific rationality", in the thick sense of that term.

Earlier I had followed Weber, in describing the cultural consequences of the thick notion of scientific rationality, as a "disenchantment" of the world. The term captures some of what the early dissenters had in mind, as well as what Gandhi much later feared when he saw all around him the eagerness of the elites of the colonised lands to embrace for their formally decolonised nations, the models of liberal democracy with its deep links to a corporate and commercial culture of the West. When he famously quipped, "It would be a good idea" to the question, "What do you think of western civilisation?" he was not expressing something very distant in basic respects from what Buruma and Margalit describe with the Islamic notion of 'jahiliya'.²⁷ But quite apart from this distant and outsider's perspective of a Gandhi or the absolutist Muslim in Arabian and colonised regions of the world, the local experience in the West of the disenchanting consequences of "scientific rationality" in the thick sense, are bound to be very different from what is experienced by the colonised lands. The conquest and the extracting of surpluses from colonised regions of the world may have created feelings of powerlessness and humiliation there, but what "scientific rationality" (in the thick sense) created in the West's own midst was a quite different form of alienation.

Moreover, it is a form of alienation that is not dismissable as jahiliya by its own inhabitants. That may be a perspective of the outsider, but in the local habitus of the West itself, ordinary people have to live in and cope with the disenchantment of their world, seeking whatever forms of re-enchantment that are available to them.

In a certain social climate, with either a faded or non-existent labour movement and with no serious tradition of social democracy, the rhetoric and offerings of a conservative religiosity may have just as much confused appeal in coping with such alienation from a disenchanted world as it does (in a quite different and sometimes more violent form) to people who are powerless and humiliated in the colonised lands. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mass of ordinary people living in what has come to be called “red state” America.

It is sometimes said today, as if it is some sort of a peculiarity, that the *majorities* in the red states present themselves as having the mentality of victims. When one compares their condition to those in sub-Saharan Africa or even to the impoverished inner cities of America’s metropolises, there is certainly something peculiarly ignorant and impervious about it. But if it is analysed as an almost unconscious grasp of the condition of living in a pervasive and long-standing disenchantment of their world, it is not peculiar at all.

The most sophisticated cold warriors, often voicing elite, Left liberal opinion, who write and applaud books like *Occidentalism*, would no doubt be prepared to be consistent and despise the electorate of the red (Republican) states as an anti-Enlightenment anomaly within the West itself. It too is “Occidentalism”, they will admit. After all the large majority of the ordinary people of these conservative regions of the country have also explicitly repudiated “scientific rationality”. I have heard the conservative Christian, Republican-voting electorate described as “vile and stupid” by liberal, Left opinion in the days immediately after the recent elections, without a hint of awareness of the deeply anti-democratic nature of such a remark. The curiosity of this, coming as it does from those who uphold liberal democracy as one of the ideals that define “the West”, needs an elaborate diagnosis, but I will not be able to provide it in detail in this essay,²⁸ which I must now bring to a close. However, I will say just this to link it with what has already been said here.

The diagnosis turns on the *integral relations* between the first of the defining ideals of the West that we have been primarily discussing, “scientific rationality” (which we have exposed as having a very specific culturally and politically “thick” sense), and the second defining ideal, that of a very specific notion of “liberal democracy” that Buruma and Margalit identify. A proper analysis of how the political, economic, and cultural consequences of the former ideal have *determined* and *circumscribed* the latter is essential to understanding the insufficiencies and the incompleteness of the liberal democratic ideal as the cold warriors have viewed it, creating “Occidentalists” in their own midst, whom they would consistently (as I said) dismiss as unworthy of the West’s democratic ideals, a whole electorate unworthy of the high and hard-won commitments of the “West”, which it inhabits only in geographical terms but not in the values by which it votes. The diagnosis would show just how incomplete this conception of democracy is, how little understanding it has of the yearnings of ordinary people for “enchantment”, for belonging, for the solidarities of community, for some control at a local level over the decisions by which their qualitative

and material lives are shaped, in short, for the kind of substantial democracy that the seemingly irreversible consequences of “scientific rationality” (in the thick sense) have made impossible to fulfil. It would show too why in a scenario where these consequences are perceived as simply given and irreversible, these yearnings manifest themselves in muddled articulations of and affiliations to a conservative Christianity that is paradoxically in a masked alliance with the very agencies of the thicker “scientific rationality” to which these yearnings are a reaction.²⁹

VIII

It would be a mistake to ignore the fact that I am putting so much weight on – that it is a reaction to the cultural consequences of the thick notion of “scientific rationality” – and instead rest in one’s diagnosis with the idea that the scenario to which these articulations are a response is merely the desolation brought about by a “market society”. To rest with that diagnosis and to fail to go on to subsume the point about market society in these broader and more long-standing cultural, political and even philosophical alliances, is part of the shallowness of the Left diagnosis I am protesting. It is beginning to be widely understood that the Republican party’s changing of the political agenda in the minds of ordinary people in the red states from issues in political economy to cultural issues surrounding religion, is what has made it possible for them to be so resoundingly victorious in those states. If my account is right, then no matter how repugnant one finds their political stances, one has to acknowledge that the Republicans have, in their perverse way, been less shallow than their opposition (at any rate, one kind of Left opposition) which merely registers, and then rests with, the idea that it is the consequences of the market that are responsible for the cultural and political desolation of the society in which these citizens find themselves. If my account is right, it shows why these conservative religious articulations of the electorate, which the Republicans have so cynically encouraged – even engineered – and tapped for some 40 years, are “the roots that clutch, the branches that grow/out of this stony rubbish”, out of this cumulative effect of something with a much wider and longer reach than market society, something which subsumes market society, viz, the phenomenon we have identified as the thick ideal of “scientific rationality”; and the account demands that we ask a large and pressing question: how might we think about alternative and more secular, articulations.

T S Eliot, who is recognisable in the quoted words of my last sentence,³⁰ of course, articulated thoroughly non-secular alternatives. Indeed it is a measure of how little he understood of the early and absolutely central role of the Anglican establishment in the trajectory that led to the disenchantment he was lamenting in those cited words, that it was Anglicanism he turned to for re-enchantment.

Since Eliot, there have been proposals of other quite inadequate alternatives. Thoreau, says in his section on “Economy” in *Walden*: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. ...A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.” Writing as if these words were never written, American social scientists have offered many an apolitical vision of “bowling alleys” and the like, enchanting the lives of ordinary Americans.³¹ Apart from failing to perceive

what Thoreau did (suggesting as a cure for the malaise what he rightly saw was one of its symptoms), it is a measure of how little American social science understands of what is needed to politically withstand the cultural and political fallout today of the alliances formed in the late 17th century under the brave, new, thick, “scientific rationality”.

By this I don’t mean at all that the ideal of secular forms of re-enchantment to cope with the “stony rubbish” of which Eliot writes, has to be understood in terms of the replacement of religion by politics. Such talk of “replacement” is glib and silly, as unsatisfactory as the oft-heard aestheticist slogan: “Art and literature must have the function that religion once had”. All I mean is that merely proposing recreational forms of association as providing such alternative and secular forms of enchantment misses out on the fact that it is values to live by that are being sought by the vast mass of ordinary people, even if sometimes confusedly in rigidly religious terms (a confusion, which I have been saying, is to some extent quite understandable in the context of the impoverished options they have been allowed); and, therefore, a great deal of moral-psychological resources will have to be summoned in the public realm so that they can get some sense that they are participating in the decisions which affect their material and spiritual lives. The aesthete who stresses art and literature does at least get something about these normative and evaluative necessities right, but proposes something that shares too much with the “bowling alley” paradigm, where the sites of participation could not possibly be host to the kind of public deliberation and organisation that is needed to withstand the *political* culture of isolation and destruction of solidarities that the long era of “scientific rationality” (in the thick sense) has wrought, and which Weber was bemoaning. It is not that politics must replace religiosity, but rather that an appreciation of the underlying political ground which prompts the religiosity requires that other more secular sources of enchantment than religion will have to emerge out of an alternative configuration of the underlying political ground. Dewey, who was temperamentally shy of the Weberian rhetoric of “enchantment”, which I have been wielding with such unblushing relish, and who preferred the more purely psychological vocabulary of “consciousness”, was hinting at the point that I have made more explicitly, in his marvellously cryptic remark: “Psychology is the democratic movement come to consciousness”.³²

Once we have acknowledged the great and primary claims of global justice, there remains no more urgent intellectual and political task in the West for our times than to frame the possibilities of such alternative, less confused, and more secular forms of re-enchantment that might make for a genuinely substantial notion of democracy, freed from the cold warrior’s self-congratulatory ideals or, if not freed from them, connecting them to the lives and yearnings of ordinary people in the way that the “Occidentalists” dissenters in the West demanded no less than, indeed somewhat more than, three centuries ago. **EDW**

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Notes

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1 It would, I suppose, be an atrocious crudeness and also thoroughly misleading to put the internal tension of the previous cold war as being

between the Enlightenment values of liberty and equality. Certainly anti-communist cold warriors would not describe the tension along these lines and would insist on describing it as a tension between the values of liberty and authoritarianism. Even so, their own support of manifestly authoritarian regimes and of their governments’ role in the overthrow of democratically elected regimes with egalitarian aspirations, such as in Iran in the 1950s and Chile in the 1970s (to name just two) shows that insistence to be mendacious. One can be wholly critical of the authoritarianism of communist regimes and still point this out. On the other hand, there is a parallel mendacity, given how things turned out, in the communist self-description of being committed to egalitarian values. But if the idea here is one of getting right some balance of rhetoric and motives in that cold war, then from the point of view of the rhetoric, liberty and equality were certainly the values that were respectively stressed by each side; and, moreover, there can be little doubt that no matter what their rhetoric explicitly said about being opposed to authoritarianism, the anti-communism was really primarily motivated by an opposition to the egalitarian ideals that might, if pursued and if they gained a wider allegiance than they did behind the iron curtain (where they were getting no serious allegiance at all), they would undermine the corporate interests of western nations.

- 2 Foucault’s specific response is a much more politically focused and historically diagnostic and, it has to be said, stylistically charmless, variation on a response first formulated in the Surrealist aesthetic, whose targets were presented in slightly different, though by no means unrelated, rhetoric – instead of “the Enlightenment”, the target was termed as “bourgeois” modernity with its “legitimising” representational and narrative modes and verisimilitudes.
- 3 This paper is one of a pair. Its sequel ‘Democracy and Disenchantment’ focuses on the more purely local manifestations in the West of the themes of this paper.
- 4 If one is to be scrupulous, one should register a caveat. The concept of a “cold war”, though it has had its early versions ever since 1917, really only came to be conventionally deployed in the way we are now used to, after second world war. And in this period, most of the academic and “independent” writers and journalists that I refer to, were on the side of the West, for obvious reasons. In the Soviet Union, defenders of their governments’ actions could not be accurately described as “independent writers” or “academics”. And in the West, though there were some who took the Soviet side, they were, except in France, rather peripheral in their weight and influence. In the current cold war too, a similar caveat holds and that is why I will speak only about the writing on one side of the cold war.
- 5 First published in *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 72, Summer 1993.
- 6 Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, Penguin Press, 2004.
- 7 Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Press, revised edition, 1995.
- 8 “And they were not entirely wrong”, say the authors (see p 112), after a summary description of the condition of the world wrought by a corporate driven western society.
- 9 I am merely recording that they do not attempt to provide any evidence of causal influences, but, to be fair to them, causal influences are not required for the parallels they draw to be interesting. That there is only an interesting parallel and not a causal influence would not matter, if the implications of the parallel were pursued in some depth, which they are not by Buruma and Margalit. This essay will try and draw a further parallel from an earlier period with a view to pursuing those deeper implications, but with no particular claim to causal influence. Traditions of thought in politics and culture can emerge without causal links so long as the affinities in intellectual and political responses, even among responses in far-flung regions and times, reflect a deep, common understanding of what they are responding to. Thus, my claims in this essay will be something that Buruma and Margalit could also make for the parallels they cite: that the parallels are interesting, without causal influence, so long as one can see in them a pattern that speaks to a deeper historically recurring phenomenon which has common underlying sources. This essay is motivated by the need for an analysis of the underlying sources of the critique of the “West” that Buruma and Margalit find in contemporary Islamism and in some European and Japanese traditions of thought; and its claim will be that the sources, in order to be properly identified, must go back to a certain metaphysical disputation in the Early Modern “West” itself.
- 10 Pantheon Books, 2004.
- 11 To say that such justifications were put into place soon after the initial

cold war ended is also too late, actually. One heard these justifications as early as 1981, when the Reagan administration talked first of a “war on terror” – Libyan and Palestinians were particularly targeted, and disgraceful stereotyping generalisations and racial attitudes towards Arabs began to be expressed, even among academics and the metropolitan intelligentsia, who had for some years now not dared to say similar things about African-Americans and Jews.

- 12 However, in my own view, this second feature lacks the interest or the conviction of the rest because it is not obvious that its presence is always a sign of reducing one’s subject of study to the “Other”. There is a real question whether one can make any interesting claims or generalisations about a subject without abstracting, and sometimes abstracting considerably, from the diversity and detail of the subject. A great deal of explanation depends on such abstraction. We do after all ignore the diversity of the West, when we talk of its colonising mentality or its corporate-driven policies, and it would be absurd to stop talking in this way in fear that one is abstracting away from other aspects of the West which stood in opposition to this mentality and these policies. And if it would be absurd to stop talking in these broadly truthful ways about the West, consistency demands that we should not always react critically or defensively to generalisations made about Islam, despite the fact of diverse elements in nations with Islamic populations. See my ‘Rushdie and the Reform of Islam’, *Grand Street* (1989), ‘What Is a Muslim?’, *Critical Inquiry*, (Summer 1992) and ‘Fifteen Years of Controversy’ in *Encounters with Salman Rushdie: History, Literature, Homeland*, edited by Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney (University of Michigan Press, 2005) for more on these themes.
- 13 This third feature, though commonly found in much writing, should be deployed more restrictively than Said did. Not to do so would be to miss the remarkable modesty of outlook in some of the most interesting aspects of Romanticism, especially German Romantic interest in the Orient, which was not by any means guilty of always merely exoticising its subjects. Some of the interest was motivated by the view that the West did not know it all and that one might, in one’s absorption in the Orient, even lose one’s identity and, with luck, acquire new knowledges and identities. In the sequel to this paper, ‘Democracy and Disenchantment’ I will look at the Romantics’ (both German and British) understanding of nature and show how it was very much and very deliberately of a piece with the 17th century dissenters’ anti-Newtonian conception of matter that is discussed further below in the present paper. (Blake, for instance, was as explicit and clear-headed and passionate about these philosophical and historical connections as anyone could be.) Through such an understanding, they explicitly raised the whole metaphysical and political aspect of the notion of “enchantment” (as Weber would later describe it) which I refer to briefly at the end of this paper, and of which Said himself did not have much awareness because of his keenness to convict them of “othering” their subject. M H Abrams’s book *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (W W Norton, 1973) is more knowing and insightful on this aspect of Romanticism, though there too the focus is more purely on the metaphysical themes, and the political issues at stake are not explored in the detail they deserve. It is the large theme of ‘Democracy and Disenchantment’.
- 14 Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Shoken 1980).
- 15 I assume that the authors will admit that, just as with European colonialism, which they don’t write of, the Nazis, imperial Japan, and Stalin, who were the statist inheritors of the early Occidentalists conceptions they do write of, also gave lofty rationales for their racial attitudes. Even so, I am accepting some of these grounds they might give for focusing on the latter and not the former. After all the author of *Orientalism* had his own focus, so why shouldn’t they? But still it would have been good to hear just a little bit more from the authors of *Occidentalism*, about what their view is of the racial attitudes shown since European colonialism. For example, even Israeli historians acknowledge their governments’ acts of “ethnic purification”, “redeeming the land”, and so on. Are the attitudes expressed towards the Palestinians in these actions continuous with the German, Japanese, Slavophile antecedents of the contemporary Occidentalists, of which they write, or are they more akin to the colonial forms of racialism? Has anyone ever rationalised this Israeli action in terms of spreading “rationality”? Or does it owe much more to the romantic German or Slavophile argument they discuss, invoking notions of land and ancient religious roots as the basis of its nationalism? If it does, should the Israelis be counted among the Occidentalists?
- 16 See my ‘Gandhi’s Integrity’ in *The Raritan Quarterly*, XXI.2 Fall, 2001
- 17 If any one is sceptical of this link I am drawing between the Islamic “Occidentalists” conception of “the West” and what Gandhi has to say about the Enlightenment, all they have to do is compare the four central chapters of *Occidentalism* where that conception is described and the pages of Gandhi’s text *Hind Swaraj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) to notice the remarkable overlap of responses and opinions to Western culture and imperial attitudes. I have only summarised Buruma and Margalit’s description of Occidentalism and Gandhi’s views at two different points in this essay. The details of the overlap far outrun my brief summaries. I write at greater length of reading Gandhi along these lines and its implications for the methodology of the social sciences in my Sukhamoy Chakravarty Memorial Lecture, ‘Gandhi, Newton and the Enlightenment’ forthcoming in *Social Scientist* in 2006.
- 18 As Gandhi’s critique is bound to seem, coming centuries later, when the science is no longer “new” and its effects on our lives, which the earlier critique was warning against, seem like a fait accompli.
- 19 In a series of works, starting with *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696, more explicitly pantheistic in statement in the discussion of Spinoza in *Letters to Serena* (1704) and then in the late work *Pantheisticon* (1724). These writings are extensively discussed in Margaret Jacob’s extremely useful treatment of the subject mentioned in Footnote 22. She also discusses a vast range of other figures among the dissenting voices of that period, not just in England but in the Netherlands, France, and elsewhere in Europe. Two important points should be added here. First, though the dissenting response I am invoking which explicitly addressed the new science appeared late in the 17th century, the basic metaphysical picture of matter and nature that it was presenting (in more explicitly scientific terms) and the social, egalitarian attitudes it was claiming to be linked with this metaphysical picture, was already firmly being asserted by the politically radical groups of the English Revolution five decades earlier. These are the radical sectaries whose views and writings were memorably traversed by Christopher Hill in his extraordinary book, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin 1975). Winstanley, to pick only the most well known of the revolutionary figures of the time, put it in terms that quit explicitly anticipated Toland and others: “God is still in motion” and the “truth is hid in every body” (cited by Hill on p 293, from *The Works of Gerard Winstanley*, edited by G H Sabine (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1941). What makes the dissenting scientific position of some decades later so poignant and so richly interesting because much more than merely scientific and metaphysical, is precisely the fact that it was a despairing response to what it perceived to be a betrayal in the name of “scientific rationality” of the egalitarian ideals that held promise during the earlier revolutionary period. The second point that should be stressed is that this metaphysical and scientific debate about the nature of matter and nature should not be confused with another debate of that time, perhaps a more widely discussed one, regarding the “general concourse”, which had to do with whether or not the deity was needed after the first formation of the universe, to keep it from falling apart. In that debate, Boyle, in fact, wrote against the Deists, arguing in favour of the “general concourse”, of a continually active God. But both sides of that dispute take God to be external to a brute nature, which was mechanically conceived, unlike Toland and his “Socratic Brotherhood” and the dissenting tradition I am focusing on, who denied it was brute and denied that God stood apart from nature, making only external interventions. The dispute about “general concourse” was only about whether, the interventions from the outside of an externally conceived God were or were not needed after the original creative intervention.
- 20 I have written at greater length about this conception of the world as providing normative constraints upon us and the essential links that such a conception of the world has with our capacities for free agency and self-knowledge, thereby making both freedom and self-knowledge thoroughly normative notions, in my book *Self-Knowledge and Resentment*, chapters 4 and 5 (in press, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press). For the idea that values are perceptible external qualities, see John McDowell’s pioneering essay, ‘Values and Secondary Qualities’ in *Morality and Objectivity*, edited by Ted Honderich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1985).
- 21 University of California Press, 1969.
- 22 See especially, Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*, George, Allen and Unwin, 1981, which traces some of the trajectory that gave rise to the Radical Enlightenment from the dissenters in late 17th century England that I have been discussing. She is good too on the alliances I have been discussing between the Newtonian ideologues and the Anglicans speaking towards the commercial interests of the time, especially the conceptual basis for these alliances as they were spelt out by the Newtonian ideologues who were carefully

- chosen to give the highly influential Boyle lectures when they were first set up (see especially chapter 3.)
- 23 There is, in the sense of the term that I have been presenting, a strikingly “radical” side to Burke too. There are eloquent criticisms of something like the outlook that I have described as forming around the official ideology of the “new science”, which can be found in Burke’s diagnosis of what he saw as the massive impertinence of British colonial actions in India. I have no scholarly sense of Burke’s grasp of his intellectual antecedents, but there is much in his writing to suggest that he would be sympathetic to the political and cultural outlook of the earlier dissenting tradition I have been discussing, even perhaps to their metaphysics, though that is not obviously discernable in the texts.
- 24 I don’t want to give the impression that these political responses on the lips of Muslims is all that is on their lips. This is not the place to look at all the diverse and complex things that a fundamental commitment to Islam amounts to among Muslim populations in west Asia and south Asia. I have written about that subject in a number of essays. See for example, ‘What is a Muslim: Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity’, *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 1992 and ‘Secularism, Nationalism, and Modernity’ in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed, Rajeev Bhargava (Oxford University Press, 1997). What I do want to stress in the context of a cold war climate today is that writers and intellectuals are prone to think that all the rest that is on their lips somehow discounts the importance of what I am calling attention to as being on their lips in this essay (see the next footnote, 25, for a little more on this.) In the other essays by me, which I have just cited, I have been highly critical of Islamist attitudes, though since late 2001, I find it more and more natural and fruitful to save these criticisms for when I am visiting countries with large Muslim populations in south Asia and west Asia, rather than speak them constantly in a region of the world where they would only feed into cold war attitudes. There is another point regarding this that is worth making quickly. Though, as I have acknowledged, there are obviously other more intrinsically Islamic commitments that Muslims have over and above their political objections to western governments’ actions, it is very easy to overinterpret the effect and influence of the intrinsically Islamic voices when one is at a distance from them. There is no doubt, as I have already said in this essay, that ordinary Muslims are not overtly critical of the absolutist voices in their midst. This gives the impression that those voices are in some sense a representative voice. But the reason for this lack of criticism on the part of ordinary Muslims has much more to do with a defensive psychology against the West, much more to do with the feeling that one would be letting the side down to be critical of one’s people in the context of a colonial past and present, rather than any intrinsic commitment to Islamic absolutism. Just to give one example, anyone reading American newspapers is quite likely to think (as I have discovered in innumerable conversations) that the popularity of Hamas has to do with its Islamism, thus giving the impression that Islamism is widespread among the Palestinian people. But anybody who is at all close to the scene and is aware of the facts on the ground (that are seldom reported in American newspapers in the routine way that spectacular terrorist acts and flamboyantly fanatical sounding sayings are reported) knows that the popularity of Hamas has much less to do with its Islamism than it does with the fact that it is one of the few groups who provide basic medical and other services and who keep alive the most basic functions of civil society among one of the most brutalised populations in the world.
- 25 “I don’t accept they really care about these causes, the perpetrators of this ideology”. So says Tony Blair in one of his many incoherent speeches about Islamism, and this quote is a gorgeously explicit example of the “not taking seriously” I am referring to. For a devastating analysis of this speech, see Geoffrey Wheatcroft’s piece ‘Blair’s Dubious Logic on Islamism and Ireland’, *Financial Times*, Friday, August 28, 2005, in which he exposes the inconsistency in his positions on the terror associated with the two issues mentioned in his title. The real difference between the two, of course, is that only one of them is a cold war target at the moment. That quite nicely accounts for the inconsistency. It is only to be expected, I suppose, that the leader of a government which has played so central a role in a war against terror based on a sustained deceit of its people, should proclaim such a thing as I have quoted. What shall we say of the intellectuals and journalists who proclaim it? Wheatcroft’s excellent article would have been even more effective if he had exposed some of them too.
- 26 I mean this to be a general but obviously not an exceptionless claim. No doubt some books that one would expect to be unpopular with the mainstream of opinion in a cold war climate, might get some good notices from friends and carefully cultivated writers for the press, and other books that one would expect to be warmly received by the generality of conventional opinion, will occasionally be seen through as being the cold war interventions they are.
- 27 See footnote 17 for my firm conviction in this similarity.
- 28 It is the subject of the sequel essay mentioned in Footnote 3.
- 29 Let me briefly give some more detailed indication of the sort of diagnosis and analysis that is needed here. When I say that the electorate in question is paradoxically avowing something which is in a masked alliance with the very thing that it more deeply opposes, I am frankly admitting that the voting citizens do avow commitments and values that seem to be at odds with some of their own deeper yearnings. And so, there may seem to be a whiff of the idea of “false consciousness” in my description of the religiosity and the conservatism of the “red state” electorate as being a confused manifestation and articulation of these yearnings. In the sequel to this paper, mentioned in footnote 3. I explain the reasons why such a conviction in the moral strengths of ordinary people, essential to any belief in democracy no matter what the deliverance of their electoral choices, cannot be dismissed as depending on any implausible ideas of “false consciousness”. To establish this, one would have to look at evidence of internal conflict in the behaviour and values of the electorate, as it may be found not only in their behaviour in diversely framed contexts but in their responses to polls in diversely framed questions. These conflicting responses and behaviour would reflect both the religious articulations and the deeper yearnings that conflict with them but because they occur in different frames, they are not acknowledged as conflicting. This hypothesis that at bottom there is a problem of “framing” (a central notion in psychology) that hides an internal conflict felt by political citizens from themselves, is absolutely vital to understanding why there is no need to attribute any dramatically implausible notion of false consciousness to the citizens. It is vital too in interpreting the electoral behaviour itself as to a considerable extent issuing from an epistemic weakness engendered by a combination of media distortion and educational indoctrination rather than the moral weakness that the liberal, Left contemptuously attributes to them. This diagnosis would allow us to see our way towards a solution as one of primarily allowing ordinary people to acquire the requisite epistemic strength by making the connections that distinct frames keeps them from making, and thereby to see the hitherto unacknowledged conflict in their own behaviour and responses and to resolve these conflicts by internal deliberation. It is my own view that the sites where such a gaining of epistemic strength is possible and where such internal public deliberation might take place cannot any longer be in the arena of conventional political institutions, but is rather the sites of popular movements. All this analysis requires a very careful elaboration, as I said. But, the point for now is that it is precisely this kind of analysis that is not undertaken by the callow dismissals of the elite, liberal opinion I am inveighing against. In fact instead of undertaking an analysis of this sort, the liberal, Left has consistently defended itself against the charge that its attitudes towards the electorate is incompatible with a belief in democracy, with a whole repertory of sleazy intellectual manoeuvres that run counter to any such analysis. These manoeuvres invoke notions of autonomy that would justify the ideal of democracy even when the electorate’s moral and political judgments are supposed to be unworthy of it, they cite the Churchillian cliché that despite unworthy electorates, democracy is still better than other bad forms of government, they refuse the partially exculpating explanation of electoral support of war mongering abroad in terms of a supine press that fails to inform them in detail of their government’s actions abroad, saying (a numbing non-sequiter) that “people deserve the press they get”. I respond in some detail to all these disreputable manoeuvres in the sequel essay mentioned in Footnote 3 and try to provide the more demanding analysis.
- 30 TSEliot, ‘The Wasteland’, *Collected Poems* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1963).
- 31 The particular suggestion of bowling alleys, of course owes to *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* by Robert D Putnam (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
- 32 See p 23, John Dewey, *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, volume 5, ed, Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969). Dewey was stressing “movement”, as much as he was stressing the other word “democracy” in this remark, and I believe it is movements alone that can be the sites of the sort of public deliberation that I mentioned as what was needed earlier in the paragraph to which this footnote is attached. “Democratic”, the other word in Dewey’s phrase is, of course, a description, not a proper name. Heaven knows it is not the proper name of the party, whose learning curve has consistently proved to be flat, and which has long lost the nerve and the will to be such a site, or even to pay heed to the opinions that emerge as the deliverances of the public deliberation carried out at the site of popular movements.