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Russian Political Liberalism and Western Political Theory

Axel Kaehne

*Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

University of Wales Swansea

2002

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Summary

The thesis attempts to reinvigorate the universalist credentials of Western liberal political theory by (1) illustrating the centrality of the concept of human agency for universal political liberalism, (2) arguing for the significance of the concept of agency for understanding the Russian societal transformation, and (3) suggesting that political theory may most usefully be conceived as a universal discourse which is in constant need of appropriating and constructively integrating different accounts and conceptualisations of political liberalism.

In order to accomplish this it will be argued that Western political theorists have to take seriously the ways in which Russian scholars think about political liberalism and, to this end, the thesis will present an overview of the Russian debate on political liberalism during the first post-communist decade.

Declarations and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by references (Harvard system) giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|----|----------------------|
| AT | A-cultural Theory |
| CT | Cultural Theory |
| HR | Heuristic Radicalism |
| UC | Universality Claim |

Tables

Table 1. Categories of the Russian debate

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Part I
Western Political Theory,
Universalism and Agency

1. Introduction

'Politics' Michael Oakeshott once wrote, 'is the art of knowing where to go next in the exploration of an already existing traditional kind of society' (Oakeshott, 1991, p.406). Trying to rebut the 'ideologically oriented' re-crafting of social affairs, he emphasised the relevance of existing social structures and norms from which the citizens of the polity would glean some intimations as to where to go and how to proceed. Although such a moderate conservatism might reverberate increasingly well in Western societies and a growing number of liberals may take refuge in his portrayal of politics as a 'vernacular' spoken by, and particular to, the participants (cf. for the most recent conservative reformulation Cahoon, 2002), Russia currently neither has the privilege nor can it afford such a moderate conservatism since it lacks any established and widely accepted rules of the political game. While the conservative critique of political liberalism in the West aims at preventing the dissolution of an already existing and highly valued political fabric that evolved over centuries, Russia knows only a caricature of politics in its ideological deformation. Thus Oakeshott's warning against an understanding of politics as a formulaic project is conditional upon the temporal primacy of liberal politics. But what about those societies like Russia which so far have failed to establish successfully liberal politics throughout their history and now, exiting the disastrous Communist experiment, are faced with a choice of ad hoc instituting liberal institutions? If Western liberals have expressed growing discontent about unfettered liberalism of late, and a 'mitigated' liberalism is dependent on existing well-established politics, where shall they turn? Is there a fast lane for learning the liberal 'vernacular'? And are such political linguistics suitable for societies in transformation at all? Or are some societies simply doomed to remain averse to political liberalism for the foreseeable future?

Looking at the situation in Europe's former Communist states, the picture is varied. Some societies have managed in the wake of the collapse of the Communist regimes to

revitalise their political traditions, as it were, peeling off the veneer of Communist politics and thereby baring the healthy (or not so healthy) past political arrangements. Russian society, however, has faced a different challenge since 1991. The furrows of the Communist project ran deeper here and the veneer is thicker, rendering it impossible to declare a simple 'return' after an 'accident' that had lasted more than 70 years. Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Russia has been a country in search of the meaning of the suffering that Communism had exacted over the last seven decades. Since neither a simple 'return' to pre-revolutionary times nor a consensus on an entirely novel, modern Russia seemed to emerge for a long time, Russian historians and political scientists had to do it the hard way: to come to terms with, and try to make sense of, the Soviet experiment and thereby address the needs of the present.

The magnitude of this change can barely be glimpsed using the terminology employed by Western political scientists. What Western and some Russian scholars call a triple transition (political, social, economic) is in fact nothing less than an attempt to grasp the complexity of the current processes by neatly packing them into workable 'spheres' of society, each following its own rules and hence requiring its own particular treatment. For Russian historians and political scientists the terminology of transition is often not much more than a euphemism for an intellectual challenge that stares them into the face every day, while they try make sense of the quandary that is called post-Soviet politics. For many ordinary Russians it has been an existential challenge that could never have been anticipated Russia embarked on something that, back then, was innocuously termed 'perestroika'.

Beyond the recriminations for the current problems, Russian academics were caught in a dilemma. Most of them had worked under the Soviet regime, where the accommodation with the authorities would take various forms: some honestly supporting the regime; others paying lip-service to the Communist creed; a few 'internally emigrating' as a means of salvaging their academic independence. Yet, any way of living under Sovietism called for explanations, and so the search for new historical interpretations was always bound to possess

a (in the West rarely noticed) personal dimension. Russian historians and political scientists had often been socialised in a totalitarian society that had tried to ruthlessly obliterate any remnants of the past. Hence recapturing a lost tradition was, and still is, for Russians often synonymous with a denial of their own upbringing, aggravating an already existing enormous confusion of values and day-to-day principles of life. Although this personal dimension of the Russian transition is not part of the subject-matter of this thesis, it has left its mark in the re-forging of interpretations by historians and political scientists and it has not gone unnoticed that often paradigms may have been replaced, while patterns of thought persisted (Shuravlev, 1999).

Carving out a meaningful interpretation of Russia's history from under the rubble that totalitarianism has left behind is then an intellectual, just as it is a personal, challenge and such an intertwining of problems is particularly relevant for the liberal project which Western observers want to see Russia embarking on. Since the concept of freedom cannot simply be understood as an absence of external impediments, it has a personal dimension that reaches deep into the question of identity and 'interpreting yourself' in a rapidly changing environment such as Russian society in continuing transformation. Seen this way, the situation of the Russian historian may very well encapsulate the complexity of the problem of how the national process of identification and self-interpretation coincide with the personal dilemma to create a meaningful and reconciled vision of a good life in transition. As tempting as it may seem to gain some insights into the process of transformation by peering into the mind of a Russian historian, this present study is not a work of discursive re-construction of historiography, but an attempt to determine the chances of liberal politics in Russia from the outside by analysing the interpretative devices employed by Russian political theorists and historians as they try to get a glimpse of the fate of Russian liberalism. The seeming circularity of this approach has important methodological consequences and determines the limits of this study. Yet, the main thrust of the argument aims elsewhere. The thesis will try to

show that the way Russians theorise liberal politics under the conditions of transformation (or initiation of politics *per se*) can be hugely instructive for Western political liberalism. In other words, the way others think about politics tells us something about the way we ought to represent the case for a liberal political order, the way we narrow down or inflate our own tradition, which components of our tradition we have lost or decided to deem insignificant. Looking at somebody else's liberal vision is, so it will be suggested, a valuable path for a re-evaluation of our own way of thinking.

Yet, there is another reason why it would be appropriate to consider the personal dimension of the Russian transformation in the context of political theory. Over the last decade or so political scientists have emphasised the role of agents for the success or failure of political transformations. Although this novel approach has come under severe criticism for its alleged bias towards recognizable agency, that is its pronounced focus on political elites, this new emphasis has, I believe, revealed a potential intersection between the work of political theorists and political scientists that can and ought to be explored further. Although political scientists usually do not make use of elaborate conceptions of human agency that go beyond highly schematic descriptions of ascribed intentions or motivations of political actors, political theorists have long invested an immense amount of work into this field, which still seems to remain an untapped resource for transformation theorists. Human agency, so my arguments runs, can furnish us with a focal point for understanding societal transformations from whichever perspective we chose to view it, be it that of the political theorists or the viewpoint of the political scientist. While the various notions of human agency are familiar 'playground' for political theorists, transformation theorists may be more reluctant to accept that a desideratum actually exists as to a more fully sketched concept of human agency. Since the main impetus of this thesis lies with Western political theory and its possible re-appraisal from the perspective of the Russian scholarly efforts, I will not pursue this argument for political science any further apart from a more detailed portrayal of the case in the fifth

chapter. As to the centrality of human agency for political theory, some more remarks are certainly required. The chapter following the literature review will be the place to make this point in a clear and systematic way.

While political agency may turn out to be crucial for a better understanding of the Russian transformation, the main motivation for this study lies somewhere else and has even somewhat grander parameters. Western political philosophy has consistently been trying to identify the main ingredients that are required for liberalism's universal applicability. Paradoxically, what we may call the universality claim (henceforth: UC) of theoretical liberalism has, however, never looked more beleaguered since (European) Communism has disappeared from the global stage. Never have Western political theorists questioned liberalism's main aspiration towards global ascendancy so severely than in the nineties of the last century.

On the other hand, some scholars have been engaged in building bridges by formulating a satisfying compromise between warring schools of thought. Onora O'Neill has convincingly argued in 'Towards Justice and Virtue' (1996) that human agency can usefully be deployed as the primary focus when trying to minimise the differences between virtue and justice theorists. Following in her footsteps I believe that it is time to put her approach to the test and re-formulate 'what is living and what is dead' in the universality claim of liberal political theory. The concept of human agency will be instrumental in achieving this objective, but the path to such a re-appraisal of Western political liberalism takes a detour in this study through the work of Russian scholars on the theory of liberal politics.

Corresponding to these two broad theoretical concerns, there are two equally interconnected claims which will form the centre of this thesis. Firstly, adopting the scheme of argument put forward by Onora O'Neill I will suggest that the conditions of human agency furnish us with the first evaluative building blocs of normative theorising about Russian political liberalism. The pivot of successful transformations, so I will argue, are unimpaired

capacities of political and social actors to orientate and locate themselves in a constantly transient environment. Adding to O'Neill's theoretical considerations I will try to sketch the importance of intact resources of social and cultural traditions on which agents can draw when faced with societies in transformation. Given the elaborate construction of O'Neill's work on human agency, my account of the significance of cultural and social resources for meaningful agency differs from hers in emphasis rather than substance.

However, there is one particular element in O'Neill's attempt to reconcile virtue and justice theories which still appears in need of substantive change. And it is here that my second proposition has its origin. In spite of the insistence of many constructivists to the contrary their hope often seems to be that the provision of guiding principles for liberal institution building pans out almost with a certain automatism into actual liberal politics. Although more careful thinkers like O'Neill stress the need for deliberation and further interpretation of the various standards of political liberalism, some scholars seem to believe that a great deal is already achieved when such norms are identified and consistently applied. In fact, many constructivists rely on a fairly strong, if possibly unjustifiable, account of either public reason and its infallibility or pin their hopes on practical reasoning as though this would inevitably lead political agents along the right path into the liberal future. For the proponents of such automatism or semi-automatism, the appropriate playing field of normative political theory would thus lie in deliberating the consequences which such basic norms for human agency entail. What receives less attention is that deliberation is conditional upon a convergence of the words in which we use to discuss the various configurations of liberal political institutions. This point may seem superfluous when looking at a terminologically standardised philosophical debate as we have accomplished in the West but gains significance when considered in the context of the universality claim of liberal political theory.

What for O'Neill and others may be a case of reconciling abstract principles of justice with 'context-sensitive judgement of [particular] cases' (O'Neill (2000), p.145), acquires a wider remit once we acknowledge that terminological convergence of our theoretical vocabulary cannot be taken for granted once we look beyond the (predominantly English-speaking) Western discourse. If we wanted liberal political theory in a fashion true to O'Neill's scheme of things to address a universal audience we would notice fairly quickly that deliberation must encompass the essence and meaning* of the things political theorists talk about. While for O'Neill from a Kantian perspective deliberation focusses on, and is neatly confined to, the interpretive work of linking abstract principles to specific circumstances, a truly universal frame of reference offers a far fuzzier picture of the deliberative tasks. Looking at the Russian attempts to theorise liberal politics any observer must be struck by the lack of terminological convergence between Russian scholars themselves as well as between 'their' and 'our' conceptual tools in the West. Crucially, this additional task of public and theoretical deliberation applies not only to the political terms which lie beyond the basic principles of justice but suffuses the very meaning of justice and virtue. This seems to reiterate the need for a contextual approach towards even these abstract principles of justice which we may have thought to be determinable and justifiable prior to, and independent of, interpretation of particular cases. Isolating these principles from interpretive work and judgement coloured by local traditions thus means to misunderstand the real task of political theory, a point evocative of such expansionist approaches to political philosophy as championed by Hannah Arendt.

The revaluation of Western political theory thus gains a new dimension. If the categories of human agency do not translate automatically into a constructivist programme of liberal institution building, Western political theory has to take serious the hermeneutic disparities between Russia and itself. As will become clear these differences are not simply

* I am using these words in everyday parlance while I acknowledge the considerable philosophical ambiguity of these concepts.

some of degree which require only minor terminological adjustments. Rather the predominance of conceptions such as civilisation in Russian political thought throws up the question of how to ensure that localised forms of theorising do not invade abstract principles of justice. The reason for this concern is obvious: once abstract standards of justice (and virtue) lose their unimpregnable status, Kantian universalisability is equally undermined. I believe that this is exactly the point at which conservative liberals must part company with Kantian theorists such as O'Neill if they wanted to salvage the relevance of political thought to particular social and cultural environments. I will argue that abandoning O'Neill's constructivism at this point does not entail surrendering the universalist project to Kantians. Yet, in such a conservative-liberal frame of mind, universalism is, beyond the conditions of human agency, a function of discursive interrelation and hermeneutic deliberation, rather than of agreement on fixed and culturally neutral terms of political reasoning. Thus this work posits a necessarily open-ended understanding of political theory against any conventional attempts to fixate definite meanings of political liberalism while drawing heavily on Western political experiences as congealed in its own discourse.

If theoretical agreement amongst political philosophers then is a result of deliberation on principles of justice as well as locally variant meanings of political terms, Western political theory has committed a cardinal mistake when discussing the applicability of political liberalism to Russia and other post-communist countries (although it rarely did discuss it at all) in terms that carry weight mostly within the framework of Western historical experience.

To criticise the conventional modus of Western theorising of course must mean that we would have to suggest substantial changes in the nature of political thinking as activity, as Oakeshott would have put it. Recovering the universality of political theory as result of a debate conducted from the perspectives of various proponents of culturally inscribed *Sittlichkeiten*, in contrast to a discourse amongst theorists broadly in favour of thinned-out standards of social interaction (*Moralitaet*), political theory has to perceive its universality as

an 'openness' in several ways. Firstly, as dialogue about the meaning of the terminology used to describe political phenomena; secondly, as an acknowledgement that conclusions are tentative and revisable; and thirdly, as recognition that the ultimate aim of theorising, defining political liberalism, must remain elusive since cultural and historical circumstances pervade the theoretical debate 'all the way down'.

To sketch this revisionist philosophical programme in more detail will be the task of the third and fourth chapter following a brief literature review. The bulk of the thesis, however, will try to create some basic referentiality between the West and Russia by selectively presenting and analysing some of the categories of the post-communist Russian debate on liberalism. The highly selective character of this study may seem to provide only narrow parameters for this exchange and only a slim basis for such a project of reconstructing universalism. Yet, in my defence, presenting most of the political terms that may matter in a debate on liberal politics would be a gargantuan task. Still the selection is not without any rationale. The main point of reference for any discussion on political liberalism must of course be the attempt at globally defining the term itself, a task that clearly dominated the agenda of Russian political theory in the first post-communist decade judging by the foci of publications. Yet, apart from these 'expansionist' approaches, Russian scholars have early on started to point to the significance of conceptions that are rarely in the centre of attention in the West, such as civilisation, civility, chaos and the role of societal conflict. In my opinion, it is mainly these heuristic devices that provide us with the most difficult but also with the most rewarding features of the Russian discourse if we wanted to successfully incorporate them into a universal debate on political liberalism. Cross-referencing some significant aspects of the Russian and Western debate may assist in identifying where our specifically Western understandings of politics and theory have invaded the aforementioned supposedly universal principles of justice and virtue.

Yet, as this study derives its main impetus from the agenda of political theory, so this motivation also clearly demarcates the limits of the thesis. As theorists usually do, I will have very little to say on the actual prospects of political liberalism in Russia for the current time. Although I believe that the categories of theoretical inquiry do intersect with those of political science, and I will sketch one of these junctures in chapter 5, there will be no analysis of the chances to establish liberal politics in Russia. The reason for this is simple. Although political theorists may at times be participants in a wider public debate on politics, the objective of this work is, as Oakeshott would put it, to reveal the postulates of theoretical thinking as a reflective activity, not to contribute to or engage in political activity itself. As Oakeshott rightly pointed out, the characteristics of political agency are different to the postulates of any theoretical enquiry. The former may or may not be reflective, may or may not be launched from correct starting places, but, above all, it proceeds from a contingent situation in which the agent is 'thrown'. Political action reflects this contingency and the historian is due to reconstruct this interplay between contingency and available resources for the agent's understanding. Yet, theoretical (as distinct from historical) debate proceeds from a different launching pad. It reflects on the postulates of human and civil agency. It asks for the prerequisites of our understanding of a 'going-on'; it thus does not call upon us for a re-action relating ourselves to a previous activity (i.e. a judgement), but is interested in dissecting what allows me to understand human and specifically political action. Just as this is the proper locus of political philosophy, so it is the seed of universality.

Hence the restricted focus of this thesis: Analysing the way in which Russian scholars think about liberal politics may point to shared resources of universal political theory. Whether this helps political liberalism in Russia is another matter altogether and one that cannot be addressed within the narrow theoretical boundaries of this study.

Finally, and crucially, I do not intend, nor could I manage, to present a comprehensive account of contemporary Russian political philosophy. Russian scholarly activity and output

has increased considerably since the days of the *perestroika* and not always have academic efforts congealed around identifiable themes. To many observers, Russian academic discourse often still looks like a cacophony of voices rather than a disciplined engagement with each others' arguments. That does not mean that, at times, significant debates have evolved, one of them to be selectively presented here, but that pursuing a comprehensive portrayal of contemporary Russian political theory would dilute the focus of this study unnecessarily.

Furthermore, there have been important voices on the political liberalism in Russia which have mostly come from a position conventionally hostile or adverse to liberal politics which equally receive short shrift in this thesis. Some of those were formulated from the orthodox perspective, others from the far left. I believe that the revival of Russian conservatism (while drawing on some of the most important and interesting Russian philosophers) may constitute in the long run the most valuable contribution to both the political spectrum in Russia and the politico-theoretical and philosophical scene. So far, however, most of those who have attracted much public attention for their arguments of conservative drift, however, seem to be heavily coloured ideological and thus exclude themselves from serious scholarly debate (cf. the works by Alexander Dugin). Others face a Western observer with seemingly unsurmountable difficulties to detect a consistent philosophical thesis (cf. Sapronov, 2001).

Therefore this study will confine itself to those formulations of political liberalism in Russia whose proponents have more or less adopted a broadly benign and approving attitude towards liberal politics. Bearing in mind that liberalism can denote many things in Russia, such approval of political liberalism in general is not tantamount to an endorsement of any liberal political party, or (least of all) the liberalisation project as pursued by the Yeltsin administration and its successor.

The thesis is divided into two parts, the first of which contains the theoretical argument whereas the second mainly deals with the empirical material. The connection between the two

is that repaired account of universal political liberalism requires the integration of ‘alien’, in this case Russian, concepts used in the theoretical debate. It would, however, be misleading to suggest that the material presented in the second part could somehow sustain the theoretical thesis formulated in the former. This is not the intention of the author nor, given the nature and foci of the Russian debate, would this be methodologically sound. Rather, the theoretical argument contains the contention that an increase in referentiality between the Western theoretical debate on political liberalism and its Russian counterpart is indispensable for a re-constructed universalism of liberal political theory. For this purpose the second part will present a broadly thematic account of the Russian debate which will allow Western theorists to familiarise themselves with the different terms of reference of the Russian debate.

Besides the literature review (chapter 2) part I consists of three essays which outline the theoretical case for universal political liberalism. The first chapter (3) deals with the concept of agency and tries to establish the significance of this idea for a universal political theory. The next chapter (4) argues that liberty as an un-reconstructed concept provides little guidance in interpreting abstract principles of justice whereas weak foundationalism may provide us with some building blocs for a re-constructed account of political liberalism that can prove relevant for the Russian debate. The last chapter of part I (5) will try to identify the reasons why the concept of agency could play a beneficial role in understanding the Russian post-communist society and its difficulties to institute political liberalism. Agency, so I will argue, may provide some common ground on which political scientists and political theorists can meet and this shared conceptual tool may usefully be employed as a focus of some intellectual efforts by both sides to bridge the often insurmountable differences.

The second part of the thesis contains a selective account of the Russian debate on political liberalism in the first post-communist decade. It is grouped around various themes that either have special relevance to Russian scholars or have crystallised as focal points of the debate. Following a chapter concerned with methodological considerations (6) and after

providing an overview of the theoretical positions in chapter 7, the first theme to be explored is the views of Russian scholars on the appropriation of Western concepts and ideas in Russia's intellectual past and present. The second chapter (9) underlines the importance which Russians attach to the ideas of civility and culture, while the subsequent chapter (10) deals with the complex notion of civilisation as espoused by Aleksandr Akhiezer. His work has been one of the most fruitful in historiography as well as sociology and chapter 11 will try to distill some lessons for a universal political theory from his conception of Russian statehood. Chapter 12 will introduce mainly the thought of the eminent Russian political theorists Boris Gurevich Kapustin on modernity and political liberalism. His notion of modernity as an 'experiment' echoes the thought of Hannah Arendt and may present a particularly helpful starting point for a further exploration of common ground between Western and Russian political theory.

Theoretical explorations of chaos and political liberalism by the philosopher Kara-Murza and the political scientist Fedotova round up the portrayal of the Russian debate in chapter 13. The last chapter (14) will briefly summarise the presented Russian positions and provide some co-ordinates for assessing the relevance of these views for a revaluation or reconstruction of the universal nature of liberal Western political theory thus closing the circle by returning to the initial theoretical argument made in part I of the thesis.

All translations from Russian into English are my own. I have used the Library of Congress system for transliterating Russian words. Within quotes I have only included Russian transliterations when the Russian original would allow alternative terms than the one I have used.

2. Literature Review

There is an immense number of articles and monographs on the post-Communist transformation in Russia written by Western and Russian scholars alike, and the studies dealing with Russian political thought, liberal, conservative, or Communist, are by now legion. The purpose of this literature review is briefly to sketch the main contributions made to the area of interest within the confines of this study and to identify a possible research desideratum. Since the Russian theoretical debate on political liberalism is itself subject matter of this thesis, it will not be reviewed in this part of the study but be presented as comprehensively as possible in more appropriate places.

Yet, there are many other works written by Russian or Western scholars that are located within a grey area in between political science and political theory that have made important contributions to a theoretical understanding of Russian liberalism. It is on these articles and monographs of varied character that this review is focused.

No student of the history of Russian political thought can fail to benefit from the seminal studies by Walicki and Leontovich. While Leontovich's monograph on Russian liberalism has clearly become out of date, it is still the only work that, to my knowledge, deals with the history of Russian political liberalism in such a focused fashion. The enormous amount of research conducted subsequently to the collapse of the Soviet regime surely warrants a radical review of Leontovich's interpretation, but any new comprehensive study of Russian political liberalism has yet to emerge. Although there have been important publications that partly deal with Russian liberal political thought (Schöpflin, von Beyme, Novikova/Sizemskaja, Utechin), which have proven to be extremely useful for the argument presented here, the lack of any new coherent account of Russian political liberalism represents a lamentable gap in research. Two collections of articles dealing explicitly with political liberalism have been published over the years.

Firstly, there is a collection of conference papers edited by Timberlake in 1972, which seems hopelessly out of date by now, given the amount of, and access to, more recent work by Russian scholars which has been published since the collapse of the Soviet regime. Secondly, Zdenek Suda and Jiri Musil have published the proceedings of an international conference on 'The Prospects of Liberalism in post-1989 Europe' (Suda/Musil, 2000). This collection is an example of otherwise rare collaborative efforts between East and West to discuss what liberalism may amount to in a common cultural space. Although the theoretical angle from which the various authors approach the subject differ considerably, the book is instructive, if only for illuminating the immense differences between Eastern and Western scholars, just as it offers a snapshot of a cross-section of the intellectual undertakings to re-define liberalism in face of different historical and political urgencies and academic agendas. It seems telling that the theoretical section of the book is dominated by contributions from Western scholars (with the exception of Srubar's article on Hayek and the relevance of his ideas on Eastern European transformations), while East European political scientist and historians focus more on the question of recovery and revival of pre-Communist traditions (cf. Musil, 2000). Unfortunately, the theoretical considerations of Western scholars in the monograph seem to be far removed from the relevant issue which East European scholars try to analyse, with the exception perhaps of Stephen Holmes' article who has, there and elsewhere, consistently criticised the notion of *laissez-faire* liberalism, or the de-institutionalisation of political power in the wake of the collapse of the Communist regime.

From a more theoretical perspective, some important progress has been made by scholars such as Szacki and Ackerman. The former has attempted to conceptualise East European liberalism as part of the wider historical picture. The most important contribution of his work to a better understanding of liberalism as a theoretical endeavour seems to be the differentiation Szacki makes between 'proto-liberalism' and liberalism proper. Szacki's definition of proto-liberalism reiterates what others, not least Akhiezer, have identified as the

main problem of East-Central European and Russian liberalism respectively. For Szacki as well as for many other observers, liberalism in East-Central Europe is conditioned by the particular circumstances of its genesis. This adopts a situational or re-active profile, rather arrogating a philosophical essence. Szacki notes that liberalism in East-Central Europe lacks any integral function and thereby brings into focus the particularist cultural and social aspects of liberalism in contrast to the universalist strictly political notion of liberalism that is often favoured by Western political scientists. As he outlines what he calls the three forms of Polish liberalism, it becomes clear that he understands the main difference between East and West to reside in the utopian and 'imported' character of Eastern liberalism, whereas Western liberalism is integral and often assumes a legitimising function in Western societies (Szacki, 1995, p.60). What he appears to try to portray here is the transformational process which political liberalism underwent in many Western societies that converted it from a purely political principle into a social and cultural worldview which often provides the glue that has held Western societies together. In contrast, Szacki argues, liberalism in East-Central Europe remains largely 'the property of a particular group' for which the main problem is 'passing from ideas to reality, from postulates to facts' (ibid.).

Although this seems to be a poignant description of the largely abstract theoretical nature of East European liberalism, Szacki fails to notice the normative function which this political liberalism can and ought to play in the development of post-Communist politics. He notes for example, mistakenly I believe, that the relationship between the private and public sphere had lost its cutting edge in the struggles of the dissidence movement with the Communist regime, since the real problem was not to enhance liberties in the private sphere but to gain more participatory freedoms in the public (Szacki, 1995, p.88). This exemplifies the extent to which he underestimates the normative confusion in which most political principles and institutions have actually been operating in the post-Communist era. The separation of private and public realms is problematic, especially for post-Communist

societies, precisely because they involve free standing normative principles and yet draw the justification of their complex relationship from the political precepts of ethical individualism. Thus they require vindication, particularly given the different understanding of such basic concepts as the individual, and the community and society in East-Central Europe and Russia. Therefore Szacki attributes only a far too diminished role to the normative function of liberalism. Although his observation of the largely utopian character of post-Communist liberalism is appropriate, the question must arise as to what the nature of political liberalism could be in a post-totalitarian environment, bereft of any viable and stable political tradition other than the discredited Communist one. If Szacki meant to criticise the utopian idealism of liberal political programmes, his is actually a critique of the political strategies and the chances of liberal parties aspiring to gain political power. In this respect, any Utopianism must appear misplaced.

Yet, if he is concerned with the theory of liberalism, his critique fails to notice the inevitability with which political liberalism is utopian. As a theoretical enterprise liberalism is a critical engagement, thus juxtaposing the actual with the desired. For Oakeshott the criterion of desirability is the coherence which obtains between the principles and maxims that the liberal doctrine (or any other) incorporates. There are very few arguments as to why liberalism as a view of politics should be preferred to other worldviews (conservative, Communist), but once good grounds for a liberal structure of a given polity are established and possibly shared by the majority of the population, liberal political theory is engaged in eliminating the inconsistencies that linger on in the relationship between ideal political rules of conduct and actual social and cultural traditions and outlooks. This is an ongoing project and liberalism thus is unlikely to ever lose this critical or utopian edge.

Szacki also makes much of the difference between notions of civil society in East and West and usefully notes the overly harmonious and communitarian overtones of this concept in the political discourse of East-Central Europe (Szacki, 1995, pp.90-117). He maintains that

one of the reasons East-Central European liberalism remained in the stage of proto-liberalism is that civil societies were intermingled with 'elements of collective thinking' (Szacki, 1995, p.117). This reveals the multitude of meanings and political functions that the concept of civil society has often adopted, and has brought it to the brink of ceasing to serve any useful purpose in liberal theory. In order to salvage it from being captured for many different political agendas liberal theory would have to reassert and reformulate its normative role in the development of political institutions in the past and present, a task that will not be part of the present study. What remains of Szacki's study then is the notion of 'proto-liberalism', which may be a useful concept in describing the particular theoretical and conceptual elaboration of East-Central European liberalism but is of limited application in political theory.

Walicki's monograph on the legal philosophies of Russian liberalism is probably the most comprehensive treatment of the history of liberal Russian political thought. It is an excellent study and one which has clearly broken new ground. Dealing with six prominent Russian liberal thinkers, Walicki focused on the problematic philosophical linkage between law and morality, a problem that is of direct relevance to the concerns of the present study. His work shows how deeply Russian philosophers have penetrated this problem and how closely their work was related to the Western legal philosophy of the late nineteenth century. Although some particular Russian colouring of the pertinent problem was most evident in the thinking of scholars such as Soloviev, Russian philosophy is shown in Walicki's study to have latched on to a debate conducted in the West, and often gravitating around the question of legal positivism, while this discussion seems to have often been perceived in Russia through the eyes of the German scholar Jellinek.

Walicki's contribution to the theory of political liberalism through his work on the legal philosophies of Russian liberals can hardly be underestimated. It ranges from presenting the depth of philosophical thinking to identifying clearly the particular Russian components in

the ongoing debate. Although mostly descriptive, it furnishes any political theorist with an inexhaustible fund of philosophical positions that indicate the peculiarities of the Russian political and cultural conditions to be taken into account by any review of the applicability of political liberalism to Russia. I have made extensive use of Walicki's work in the sub-chapter that delineates the tradition of liberal philosophy on the state, preparing the conceptual ground for a discussion of Akhiezer's relevant expositions.

There have also some extremely valuable contributions to Russian philosophy by some Western as well as Russian scholars, who attempt to describe the course Russian philosophy has taken in the post-Communist decade. Swiderski and van Zweerde's articles on Russian philosophy have elucidated the complexities and intertwining of philosophical traditions in an era when stable philosophical discourses and themes have yet to emerge. The concept of heuristic radicalism (henceforth HR) used in this study echoes these difficulties and the semantic and conceptual fluidity that equally applies to the Russian philosophical debate on liberalism. A contribution to a recently published collection of articles suggests that Russians may find the notion of the philosophical or interpretative paradigm (Thomas Kuhn) useful in describing this discursive instability in conjunction with the sudden de-legitimation of particular philosophical approaches (Pigrov, 2001). However, the present study eschews the description of theoretical formations in terms of paradigms. I believe that it obfuscates rather than illuminates the necessary interplay of discursive flexibility and stability that is required in political theory. It is also problematic with respect to the concept of heuristic radicalism and the universality claim, since it may be taken to insert a normative aspect into both concepts that is certainly not intended by its use in the present study. HR and UC are to be of merely descriptive purpose, while the conditions that they are used to summarise have strong normative implications for political liberalism as a theory. This normativity of political liberalism, however, must not be understood to ensue from the descriptive conceptual capacity of HR or UC.

Progressing to explicitly theoretical work that has focused on East-Central European liberalism, the disappointment of any political theorist must be great. There have been only a handful of articles and monographs that set themselves the task of determining the applicability or validity of Western political liberalism as expounded and elaborated by mostly Western political philosophers. The disappointment must be all the bigger, given that the East-Central European transformations could represent real-life case studies of the genesis of liberal polities. Some political scientists have attempted to relate the two projects (theory and practice) and have come to interesting conclusions (for example, Friedman, 1998). Yet, apart from these laudable exceptions, regrettably there have been few cross-over engagements from either side. The few exceptions from the 'theory viewpoint' are Ackerman's work on Eastern European revolutions as part of a recovery of the revolutionary content of liberalism and Haddock and Caraiani's work on the 'existential' aspect of political post-Communist transitions.

Ackerman seems to pursue his own theoretical objectives, which are probably more firmly anchored in the vagaries of the Western philosophical debate than relevant to the East European transitions. His notion of the role of constitutions in the transitional process takes curiously little notice of Havel's idea of radical continuity and the constraints within which the newly instated governments often necessarily operated (for a critique of the idea of radical continuity cf. Stanger, 2000). In Ackerman's picture of the liberal potential of the anti-Communist revolutions across Central and Eastern Europe, much hinged on the chances to convert anti-communism into constructive liberal state- and constitution-building. This is an assumption that reckons little with the resilience of past political traditions, with the ambiguity of resuscitated pre-Communist ideas of nation and political community, and last but not least with the often non-political impetus of anti-Communist sentiments. Moreover, Ackerman sees little reason to review critically Western political liberalism from a genuinely

Eastern perspective, that would transcend his own essentially intra-Western agenda of theoretical investigation.

Things are somewhat different with the work by Haddock and Caraiani. Both have collaborated on a number of articles and their findings have been insightful and very instructive for Western and Eastern political philosophy alike. Their work offers the indispensable embeddedness and groundedness in local theoretical debates (in this case Romania) to an extent that is regrettably lacking in Ackerman's monograph. Their articles highlight the difficulties transitional Romania has had in forging a stable discursive environment which thrives on a shared terminology and conceptual tools and devices. Haddock and Caraiani also intend to illuminate the enormous depth of the problem of transition as reflected in the local theoretical discourse. They point to the easy utilisation of the theoretical debate for political objectives and postulate that an intellectual hegemony appears to be indispensable to political stability of any kind. They identify the most imminent danger that the newly founded democratic regimes face as being the resurgence of 'the language of identity'. While these observations are of practical as well as theoretical relevance, they emphasise the extent to which any liberal political order must be vindicated publicly, and thus forge a sturdy connection between theory and practice that coercive regimes can afford to dispense with (Haddock/Caraiani, 2001, p.379).

Their conceptual approach to political theory under the conditions of post-Communist transformation is even more instructive insofar as they describe any theoretical engagement as an open-ended attempt to specify rules according to which politics can be executed, while the manner of identifying the adequate rules of the game simultaneously remains highly contested among the participants of any future political game (Haddock/Caraiani, 2001, p.377). This perspective reveals the dilemma of liberals in defining the appropriate limits of future political engagement. What Haddock/Caraiani fail to do is to analyse further this theoretical dilemma and understand it as having a profound impact on the shape and content of Western political

philosophy. Although their vision of political liberalism remains easily compatible with particular political, social, and cultural traditions which may be discordant with Western historical experiences, they fail to notice that much of the difficulty that Western political theory has in gaining any significant purchase on East-Central European transitions is that Western political philosophers often advance a notion of liberty and a set of liberal political institutions that claim to be universal and hence universally applicable. What is needed is therefore a scrutiny of the idea of liberty as construed by Western political theorists and a project to replenish and re-establish the resources for the universality of political liberalism. This is a task whose shape and content will be tentatively sketched in the present study, which emanates from an analysis of the reflections of Russian scholars on political liberalism.

In the field of more descriptive work on Russian liberal theory there have been only few publications in the West. One study that deserves mention is Ignatov's working paper (*Bericht*) on Russian liberalism for the *Bonner Institut für Ostwissenschaften* (Ignatov, 1994). It presents a thorough overview of the then recent Russian published research on liberal political theory (the *Liberalismus-Debatte*) and mostly concurs with the selection of Russian philosophical work favoured in the present study. Akhiezer and Kapustin's works assume a prominent place in Ignatov's paper, just as the present study judges the work of both thinkers to be the most valuable Russian contributions to the theory of political liberalism.

Echoing the findings of many other Russian and Western observers, Ignatov points to the fuzziness and instability of Russian theoretical discourse on liberalism, and portrays it as a reflective engagement with the advantages and disadvantages of radical and conservative liberalism in the intended and necessary reconciliation between indigenous political traditions and Western political concepts. In conclusion, he adds a note of caution, pointing to the changes which concepts and ideas undergo when transferred or 'translated' from their original location to an intellectually alien environment (Ignatov, 1994, p.30) a perspective which

resonates with the findings of many of the Russian theorists surveyed for the purposes of this study (cf. part II, chapter 7).

This brief literature review permits a tentative delineation of the research desideratum relevant for this study. Apart from sketching the Russian debate more comprehensively than Ignatov has done, the bulk of the theoretical work would consist in critically reviewing and elaborating upon the link between political theory as predominantly formulated in the West and the theoretical views and perspectives that are particular to the participants of the Russian debate on political liberalism in the nineties. It has already been mentioned above that critical to this review is the notion of liberty as construed in Eastern and Western discourse, and that, while this study only refers to the Western position in a highly selective fashion, this may not always do justice to the enormous variety of theoretical positions advocated in the West. The selective manner in which Western political theory will be utilised for the purposes of this thesis is justifiable on the ground that those notions of political liberalism that come under criticism here are often those to which Russian political philosophy has been most susceptible in recent years (and, as it turns out, often in the past as well). In sketching the conditions of theorising in post-Communist transition this study will hopefully enable Western and Russian political philosophers to address the shortcomings of an abstract concept of political liberalism as it has often figured prominently in Central and East European public and theoretical debate. On the basis of a thorough critique of any idea of abstract liberty, this study then hopes to give sound reasons for a rejuvenation or re-construction of a viable form of UC compatible with Russian political, social and cultural traditions.

3. Agency and Political Universalism

At first glance the fairly wide range of theoretical intentions of this thesis must look ambitious. It targets not less than three distinct but interconnected areas of theoretical enquiry. Firstly, it strives to say something about the reasons and possible remedies for the failure of contemporary political theory successfully to formulate a robust notion of universal political liberalism. Secondly, it intends to present a convincing case for the centrality of agency for any viable account of liberal political theory, thus bolstering – yet also gently modifying – already existing arguments for human agency as the primary focus of theorising (cf. O’Neill, 1996 and 2000). And, thirdly, it will argue that the case of Russian transformation in the 1990s can be instructive for the work of political theorists, thus (with the necessary care) merging the vocabulary of political science with political theory by pointing to the mutual interest in the concept of political agency.

The path towards accomplishing this ambitious agenda may equally arouse some doubts and misgivings. I would like to suggest that an analysis of the contemporary Russian debate on political liberalism presents us with a unique chance to access the intellectual resources for a repaired account of universal liberalism. But, clearly, such a strong claim must rest on a plausible notion of the nature of political theory, that is to say, why and how the Russian debate would matter to Western political theory in the first place. I will address the last problem first and will then move on to sketch the arguments for the first two central claims. The fifth chapter is exclusively dedicated to an investigation of the third claim. Although, naturally, these claims are interconnected I will try to tackle them one at a time. Thus some overlapping may occur, while the overall emerging picture should be one of synthesis rather than division.

I

There is probably almost universal agreement that political philosophy is an open-ended discourse about how to calibrate the moral demands of justice in political institutions. Or, in the words of Oakeshott, political theory may be seen as an ongoing conversation where the participants contribute to a deeper understanding of politics and ethics. Others (cf. Habermas, 1999) would prefer to see political theorising as a discursive engagement under particular conditions, such as absence of coercion, which permit the practitioners to subscribe only to rational principles of inference and thus guarantee that the discursive exchange arrives at conclusions commanding universal authority amongst (what are for some theorists hypothetical) participants. Despite these different angles from which theorists view their own activity, the bottom line seems to be that this is an invariably discursive endeavour and that certain (still to be agreed) conditions should prevail. Such a tentative definition of political theory would also avoid the treacherous waters of specifying the final end of this activity (truth or temporary agreement), about which diverse opinions exist which in turn are often grounded in different philosophical doctrines.

When conceiving of political theory as a discourse, the issue of universality receives a different spin as well. Superficially, universality may appear as a feature of the way in which a debate is conducted, that is with greatest possible inclusivity, hence encompassing, at least hypothetically, participants in a universal domain. There is at least one good argument why universality would, if anything, be augmented by a universal scope of the debate. This argument goes back to Hannah Arendt's notion of plurality and human conduct. Arendt thought that human beings inhabit this world in their plurality. This enables them to recognize different points of view on their social affairs. This, however, also entails the possibility that something like a public space develops between men in which rules of civil conduct can evolve. Thus, man's capacity to take up someone else's position facilitates the emergence of such regulated public space. Although Arendt was less clear about whether this picture of

human interaction would also apply to the activity of philosophising, conventionally presumed to be a solitary engagement with the world rather than with other fellow scholars (for this problem cf. Canovan, 1992), her thesis would provide us, when slightly modified, with a powerful argument in favour of a serious engagement with Russian political thought. If we think of (liberal) political theory as an open ended activity trying to define the proper setup of political institutions according to our shared, yet often diverse, notions of justice (and virtue), then approximating the ideal rules of the discursive practice will depend on the extent to which we manage to increase the plurality of views within the debate. This may temporarily lead to unworkable amorphous disparities, yet recognising the validity of someone else's point of view in the debate would foster the emergence of rules of the discursive practice, in effect augmenting the chances for a rational debate.

At least two important objections may be raised against such a notion of political theory as a universal discourse. Ironically, one of them has recently been formulated by a scholar whose philosophical preferences may squarely be placed on Kantianism. The other objection originates in the debate on relativism.

Onora O'Neill has argued that justifications for ethical conduct must be subject to the principle of accessibility and intelligibility. Strangely enough, she eschews an entirely universal Kantian position and notes that the radius of accessibility is determined by the scope of the audience which the agent intends to address (O'Neill, 1996 and 2000). She contrasts her practical account of reasoning on justice and ethical conduct with that of theoretical reason which would advocate the entirety of the human race as the proper scope of justice.

As far as her account of such contingently limited practical reasoning convinces, her argument furnishes us with an important objection to political theory as universal discourse. Just as agents do not necessarily address a global audience, so are the resources of practical reasoning of local and possibly particularistic colouring. What would go against the grain of a Kantian in O'Neillian mould is to fail to grant to those who are unmistakably part of this

audience the right to participate in determining whether or not ethical reasoning possesses authority and is broadly accessible. Denying such treatment to recipients of conduct means to base ethical reasoning on an unsound basis insofar as my actions will result in situations in which some or all other agents will no longer be able to pursue similar courses of action.*

Yet, beyond this requirement of coherence, so O'Neill argues, agents have no obligation within this limited notion of Kantian practical reason to count in agents into their deliberation who do not belong to the audience to which the conceived action is to be directed. The implication of this argument for our concerns here is that O'Neill has built a legitimate and sufficiently sound basis for particularistic reasoning, and hence for a geographically restricted political discourse. If correct, O'Neill's line of reasoning implies that hinging the advantages of an integration of the Russian political theory (or any other strikingly different theoretical discourse) simply on the point that it contributes towards the universality of political conceptions of justice as the supposed final objective of liberal theorising is not sufficient. The discrete spheres of national debates may very well be self-sufficient. Of course, neither communitarians nor the protagonist of such a limited cosmopolitanism would want to go as far as claiming that such self-contained bubbles of meaning and discourse do still exist in the modern world. O'Neill does, however, introduce an element of reality that is hard to rebut. Justice and virtue matter most to agents within clearly determinate circumstances and contexts, and so these contexts must provide the intellectual resources for practical reasoning. That human action has a wider remit at times does not contradict the fact that much of human conduct is conduct between identifiable agents, rather than between hypothetical ones. Along these lines, we may have to admit that Russian theorising is primarily of interest to agents located within this circumscribed terrain which conveniently supplies its own (contested or non-contested) standards of accessibility and authority.

* Of course this argument is a modified version of the principle of universalizability as advocated by O'Neill.

There are two problems with this view, however. Firstly, given that O'Neill admits that the modern world is less and less a conglomerate of discrete national or cultural units in which concepts of justice can remain unchallenged by adjacent interpretations, O'Neill's idea of practical reason reduces the urgency of thinking about a truly universal concept of justice, but cannot eliminate it altogether. The questions remain whether or not, and how, ethical reasoning may differ between international (institutional) agents and those who live and act within more determinate contexts. In essence, O'Neill's argument faces inherent tensions between her universal theoretical ambition and the advocated limitations of practical reasoning.

The second counterpoint, however, is more fundamental. It is of meta-theoretical character and directs us to the requirements of accessibility as O'Neill's precondition of coherent practical reasoning. What is the nature of her own account of practical reasoning? Does any justification of practical reasoning not require a universal framework insofar as it must necessarily address and fulfil the requirements of global accessibility? O'Neill surely must think of her own proposition about the scope of practical reasoning as universally applicable. Is she not constructing a practical account of reasoning out of the very theoretical reason which, according to her, was not required for the limited remit of her project? Is her account of practical reasoning not silently feeding upon the Kantian framework of universality? Does her argument for the limited scope of practical reasoning presuppose the existence of a universally authoritative form of reasoning? This, however, would throw us back to square one. Although we could go along with O'Neill's argument for the sufficiency of localised ethical thought for particular contexts, this would indeed be a transient stage, the more so as agents increasingly operate in global contexts rather than narrow arenas with easily identifiable recipients of human action. The temporary status of her argument would be philosophically questionable and can by no means present us with good reasons to argue in favour of an interminable differentiation between Russian and Western political theorising.

Thus it seems that O'Neill has marked the path with only a temporary milestone, one to be superseded as soon as it was placed on the ground.

The second objection is more difficult to refute. We may formulate it the following way. What standards of theorising can we identify for our universal debate on the ethical norms for political institutions if dialogue between East and West lacks the cultural seedbed required for practical reasoning in the first place? Or, to put it differently, if agency is anchored in, and facilitated by, cultural traditions, do we require an already existing set of universal cultural norms and standards to think about justice and politics in its universal applicability? In O'Neill's terms this would be an issue of authority and accessibility, and hence of an epistemological nature. Agents rooted in cultures alien to universal forms of reasoning may lack the necessary conditions for understanding these norms and principles of political justice. But, clearly, this presents us with the problem of finding and defining something like a universal social context that would feed in the heuristic capacities for agents to act on a global plane. Kant's delicate construction of the interplay between theoretical and practical reason just does not seem to be so readily dispensable as O'Neill may think.

Yet, we may approach the topic from another, hopefully more fruitful, angle. We may find it more helpful to view the problem of universal discourse on ethics and politics and its epistemological prerequisites as an ongoing process of assertion, scrutiny and refutation. As Oakeshott has noted, agents may be conditioned by the contingent contexts which deliver their hermeneutic resources. Yet that does not mean that they are not able to, and at times even have to, transcend preconceived explanatory frameworks in their search for sense in as yet inexplicable circumstances that confront them. So, although human understanding may be culturally conditioned, it is by no means shackled to conventional and inherited modes of thought, but often needs to cope with challenges which reveal the previously sufficient sources of understanding as being painfully inadequate.

There is nothing new about conceiving a potentially universal theoretical debate as a series of challenges which would set in motion a process of proposition, affirmation, and refutation. The broadly Hegelian cycle of human thought shines through in MacIntyre's portrayal of epistemological crises as well as in Kuhn's account of the emergence and decline of paradigms in scientific theories. Also, to conceive of political theory in such a manner would release us from the grip of the two ills mentioned above. If theoretical debate is a sequence of epistemological problems, then the authority of theoretical answers (such as the contours of political liberalism) is a result of the successful interaction and integration of their different conceptualisations of the social, political and ethical contexts to which their work refers. Thus we do not have to, and often cannot, specify the proper standards of universal reasoning as we do not yet know the entirety of theoretical contributions to this debate. Equally, neither do we have to postulate a mysterious universal form of theoretical reason on which the accessibility of our ethical thinking depends, nor do we have to disavow our own political cultural and social commitments which form part and parcel of our hermeneutic capacities. The answers we may find for our problems are as universal as the questions we care to ask. And we can hardly ask the questions which have no reasons to arise, that is to say, that have still not happened to grow out of challenges to our hitherto established and confirmed modes of understanding. One such a challenge, then, is to make sense of the Russian ideas of political liberalism within the discursive context of liberal Western political theory.

Thus, the recognition of the plurality of viewpoints receives an epistemological vindication in the discursive scheme of things. The scholarly work of integrating differing accounts of justice and politics contributes to the rise of epistemological problems and therefore precipitates the emergence of less particularistic forms of ethical and political thought. This is why the Russian debate ought to matter to the practitioners of Western political theory; it represents a challenge that delivers us the means to transcend the

preconceived conceptual devices. By taking the Russian debate seriously, Western political theory gains in scope and accessibility, something that O'Neill's describes as the indispensable attributes of a universal form of practical reasoning.

To be sure, such a task is not simply reducible to 'listening up' and translating alien conceptual tools into its own hermeneutic framework. Rather, it is a search for the different way of thinking, or as MacIntyre would have it, finding out about the theories of truth that sustain the epistemological conventions of different cultures and discursive contexts. This point will receive particular importance when we look at the linguistic mismatches between the Russian and Western debates at a later stage (part II).

II

The debate on the universality of liberal conceptions of justice and politics has spawned a complex and sophisticated field of inquiry since Kant. More recently, the issue is conventionally looked at from the angle of the validity of epistemic or anthropological foundations for successful theorising. While there are those, such as Gray and Rorty, who eschew universalism as an operationalisable feature of social, cultural and political evolution and emphasise liberalism's character as being conditioned by particular historical circumstances and political configurations (resonating deeply, albeit inadvertently, with the traditional Russian critique of Western liberalism), there are, on the other hand, those who see modernity itself as a process in which individuals lose their fundamental ethical orientation since moral precepts are being subjected to a rationalistic critique which allegedly severs them from an intact shared cultural background. MacIntyre notes that ethical norms only make sense within contexts of social life, not as commands of abstract (de-contextualised) reason (MacIntyre, 1996). Once we rid ourselves of the cohesion of social and political traditions, morality ceases to receive the necessary justification which it drew from these conventions. For him the deeply teleological structure of ethical reasoning in the pre-modern period was

crucially undermined by the Enlightenment and left us bereft of a coherent chain of legitimation for the moral norms and standards that still continue to regulate our lives (MacIntyre, 1994 and 1996). Although it is less clear what his alternative suggestion is with regard to a stable and shared vindication of political morality in the modern world (cf. Beiner, 2000), his analysis does make a significant contribution to the problem of universalism. His portrayal of the sequence of the various traditions of ethical thought as a cycle of epistemological crises points to the way in which liberalism's universal (theoretical as well as practical) appeal may be repaired. If there is any path leading out of the collision between the various *Sittlichkeiten*, as O'Neill would have put it, then it leads through the arduous process of becoming aware of the numerous conceptual disparities between the debates in question. I think MacIntyre's notion of epistemological crises can help us acknowledge and ultimately overcome the impasse in our thinking on shared justificatory resources for liberal politics.

However, not all political theorists have given up all hope that some ideas of common anthroposophic or epistemic human features can furnish us with a foundation on which to build a universal theory of political liberalism. And, insofar as these attempts represent a viable challenge to the theoretical view put forward here, we need to engage with them and outline the reasons why these alternative visions of political liberalism have less appeal when it comes to viewing universality through the lenses of the Russian debate on liberal politics.

If strong foundationalism has largely fallen from grace, its weaker twin still commands considerable respect. The term weak foundationalism unites a motley crew of theoretical approaches, but two of them seem most promising with regard to the issue of Russian political liberalism. The first stresses the role and underlying assumptions of a legal framework in social and political interaction. The second approach goes back to H.L.A. Hart's concept of the minimum content of natural law. Although it resurfaces in modified form, and plays a supportive role in the former version of weak foundationalism, it is quite different from it insofar as it formulates some assumptions on 'simple truisms ... without (which) ... laws and

morals could not forward the minimum purpose of survival which men have in associating with each other.' (Hart, 1997, p.193). While this proposes the conceivably minimalist project of foundationalism, weak foundationalism as advocated by Haddock comprises more and goes considerably further. Besides adopting Hart's notion of a minimum content of natural law by resting his argument on the role of mutual vulnerability in premising the terms of social co-operation, Haddock identifies a second pillar on which to build his weak foundationalism. He notes that 'the idea of a legal framework implies some normative standards that can help us distinguishing between liberal political orders and others' (Haddock, 2000).

He thereby endeavours to shift the argument from the identification of the conditions for the survival of social forms of life *per se* to vindicating distinctly *liberal* politics. While Hart's minimum content of natural law allows us to differentiate between necessary and redundant requirements of human societal survival, liberal or otherwise, Haddock raises the stakes and asks for the *differentia specifica* of liberal political institutions. The thrust of his argument stems from notions of the transparency and predictability of rules and the ways in which these facilitate social co-operation – a faith in the differentiating potential of both that is, so I will argue at a later point, unfortunately misplaced.

That weak foundationalism may still harbour some valuable resources for liberal political theory might, however, be glimpsed from the fact that few versions of political justice (utilitarianism notwithstanding) can dispense with it. Not even the most comprehensive and notable attempt at constructing 'A Theory of Justice' seems able to rely solely on non-foundationalist, constructivist premises. As many critics have pointed out, Rawls' vision of political liberalism owes much to a silent notion of reasonableness. His modifications in *Political Liberalism* have not entirely convinced his critics while they have often frustrated his Eastern European colleagues who have seen his new stress on existing democratic cultural traditions as doing some serious damage to its universal appeal (Barsa,

2001). For Eastern Europe the question was often thought to be 'how to get there' in the absence of widely shared liberal or democratic political allegiances, not 'how to sustain an already existing if fragile political consensus' (cf. Barsa, 2001).

That Rawls has narrowed the inclusivity of his approach by speaking solely of reasonable comprehensive doctrines may have been a methodologically shrewd move, yet this overlooks the fact that political discord occurs between individuals of strong democratic or liberal convictions just as often as it does between citizens who in fact do not share even the most fundamental commitments of Western societies. As Cahoon and others have pointed out, some of the most highly ranked values of Western societies may easily be viewed as the unacceptable *summum malum* from the perspective of other participants in the political process. The hotly debated issue of abortion in the United States may illustrate the point that, when we consider the issue of reasonableness, we do not necessarily have to think of the commitments of non-Western immigrants. The discrepant notions of reasonableness may be running even through communities and sub-cultures which have genuine claims to being part of the historical foundations of such a broadly liberal society as the United States.

So, we may simply resign ourselves to the fact that some parts of the political consensus which sustain a political framework may appear profoundly incompatible with the idea of the good held by some of the participants in liberal societies. The problem is that these citizens who may hold views that would place them outside the reasonable political consensus might never be able to count themselves as full subscribers to the basic rules of societal engagement. A disturbing theoretical effect of such exclusion is, however, that some of the most famous libertarians, such as Henry David Thoreau, would equally fail to qualify for membership in this exclusive club of reasonable citizens. To put it differently, Berlin's problem of the incompatibility of values strikes deep and, in the long run, must fundamentally undermine any rushed attempt to determine the circle of those who are entitled to voice their doctrines in the Rawlsian Olympus of reasonable debate.

Alternatively, we could go along with O'Neill's suggestion that circumscribing the participants in the debate prior to determining the action to be considered (in our case the Russian debate on political liberalism) is counterproductive since it deprives us of the objects of definition of what a liberal outlook is and ought to be. In this respect, her Kantian vision is more consistent than Rawls' attempt to wed Kantian reason to contractarianism.

O'Neill's argument that action must be the primary focus for ethical thought engenders a constructivist agenda out of the material provided by the strictures of practical reasoning. Her theory offers us the immense advantage that the recognition of differing starting places and contexts for practical reasoning is always already part and parcel of the framework. The move from abstract principles of justice and virtue to concrete judgements on obligatory human action is not predetermined by standards of what could or could not count as being compatible to a hypothetically agreed liberal political consensus. That produces the extraordinary appeal of her theory while it eminently also leads to the most pressing problem, which is the lack of differentiating criteria for categorising liberal and illiberal human conduct. As much as she stresses that the audiences of human actions are diverse and determine the scope of justice, she fails to notice that her benchmarks of liberal justice, the avoidance of violation, coercion, and violence, are problematised only as a result of the particular diversity of the outlooks and attitudes of the participants of modern societies. Forms of coercion (for example, 'arranged' marriages between minors) to which adherents of Western liberal values would react with abject horror and instant rejection may often appear unproblematic in contexts with deeply enshrined cultural traditions and practices.

O'Neill's theory thus builds on the crucial, if seemingly unnoticed, premise that coercion, violence and injury are readily detectable and identifiable to the addressees of human action. What remains opaque is that this detectability is an outcome of the process in which differing notions of these attitudes have become a point of contestation, forcing agents

to exit for good the realm of habitualised unreconstructed and unreflective practice into consciously affirmed or rejected traditions.

Yet, perhaps when we ask why O'Neill's broadly Kantian reformulation of universality of liberal justice fails, we need to probe not so much the tenacity of the philosophical side of her account, but rather the concrete interplay between abstract principles of justice, particular local practices and the origins and sources of human deliberation and judgement. A brief look at her remarks, I believe, reveals the epistemological gap that opens up between these various components of her vision of liberal justice.

To summarise her idea, O'Neill suggests that we conceptualise the way in which abstract principles of justice are operationalised in concrete situations from the perspective of the recipients of a prospective action. The move from an individualistic perspective of the categorical imperative, as advocated by Kant, to action as the primary focus of reasoning entails, as O'Neill convincingly argues, that we approach the issue of vindicating action from the angle of consent. Now, three possible scenarios are offering themselves. We can think of consent as actually existant, leading us into the Lockean quagmire that Mill so scathingly criticised. Alternatively, we may believe that any legitimising criterion is of hypothetical nature. The consent of individuals is conveniently redundant when we declare as our main standard of legitimation the possibility that everybody could agree to a proposed set of ethical norms. O'Neill seems to mistrust this proposition since it throws up the problems of idealisation. Which conditions, so we may ask sceptically, must be fulfilled for agents to express their genuine consent? And, if the situations are hypothetical, so are the agents in our equation. What features, capacities and preferences must agents have to acquiesce into a course of action or to reject it? This, however, is the muddle of idealisations and configuration of preferences of agents which O'Neill carefully attempted to avoid since she identified it as a seedbed of theoretical discord.

Instead, and thirdly, so she argues, consent must be thought of as a reflection of the potential of the prospective recipient of action to reject or 'renegotiate' the proposed course of action (O'Neill, 2000). This gives us an excellent handle on the problem of consent since it moves centre stage the issue of empowerment of the individual(s) from whom the consent is to be elicited. This move translates the whole issue of consent into a debate on what incapacitates (i.e. is to be rejected within a liberal political framework) or enables agents to act (i.e. ought to be facilitated). Despite the ingenuity of this shift of perspective, which O'Neill illustrates poignantly with examples of the subordination of women in many societies, it is presented by her in the overall scheme of things as a guidance or even exemplification of how to individuate abstract principles of justice in particular situations.

However, it is by no means clear that the principle of empowering the recipients of actions in particular situations offers any more concrete guidance in adjudicating between differing options of human conduct in particular contexts. As things stand, we now may have available two equally abstract principles which still require translation into the world of reasoning on action. O'Neill may be right with her insistence that no principles of action can offer an algorithm for action, but that still leaves uncorroborated her claim that local practices could only serve a subordinate role in deliberating action. What receives little light is how individual judgement in fact works and what it requires. This, customarily, has also been the point of departure for disputes between Kantian liberals and communitarians, and her account is no exception to this rule.

How then can we envisage the process of judging? Starting with her two principles of justice, agents may, firstly, ask themselves whether or not a particular action infringes the norm of avoiding injury, coercion and violence. Following on from this, agents have to probe whether or not the envisaged action would harm the capacity of prospective addressees to consent to this action. This last requirement is quite strict. There are not a few actions that social agents or governmental institutions take in reality which deliberately disregard the

invocation of consent or preclude thinking about possibly renegotiating the course of action. Some actions are meant to be prohibitive of certain forms of human behaviour which at times includes incapacitating agents to act or consent, for example restraining a person for the purpose of preventing harm to another. O'Neill may be inclined to exclude from consideration these 'hard cases'. However, they similarly require justification, just as any clear-cut example of violating the rights of economically, politically or socially impoverished agents would. Yet, it is hard to see how vindication for actions in many of the 'hard cases' can come about by without recourse to everyday practices of social and political interaction.

But here we reach the watershed: O'Neill would have us adjudicate along the lines of the principles of justice as primary decisive criteria, whereas communitarians believe that prevalent practices can occupy a prime position in practical reasoning. It may appear to liberals particularly hard to accept that some forms of impairment of agency can be vindicated at all. But this is what the use of governmental authority is all about. If O'Neill wants us to make the transition from abstract principles of justice to concrete recommendations of actions, then she must provide us with an outline as to how abstract norms are mitigated or qualified without being undermined by particular conditions and practices.

O'Neill must believe in the differentiating potential of abstract principles of justice within the process of selecting appropriate action. Yet, when deliberating on the desirable conduct, local practices consequently gain the upper hand. They offer several advantages over abstract principles as final arbiters in a range of conceivable activities. Practices are less hegemonic than principles, i.e. they do not restrain our options beyond the immediate action concerned; they often offer themselves in a structured way, that is to say they have attached to them rules of applicability guiding us in our search for valid options of action. Furthermore they are often grounded in contextually constructed matrices of significance indicating why certain actions ought to matter to us, thus allowing us to offer justifications to the recipients of our actions, thus facilitating consensus and eventually consent.

That does not mean that O'Neill's standards of ethical reasoning may not be evoked for ethical vindication. Yet, what they rarely possess is the superiority and overriding potential over other ethical norms that O'Neill attributes to them. To be clear about this, we can readily agree to demand compliance of economically powerful agents with the principle that stipulates avoidance of injury to weak members of society. What is far more difficult is to identify the extent to which coercive behaviour is wrong in societies whose survival may depend on social and political hierarchies that involve injustices of which most Westerners would disapprove – not to mention the epistemological doubt, hinted at earlier, that injury, violence and coercion are concepts that invite interpretation and require normative conflict to be problematised and to be detectable to agents.

So, the focus for any thinking about practical reasoning must be the conditions and resources of ethical judgement. And it is here that O'Neill's account leaves us in the dark. If O'Neill does not offer any constructive help, despite her insistence on the significance of translating abstract ethical norms into practical guidance in particular cases, Oakeshott does. His account of practical reasoning takes us one step further insofar as he construes ethical reasoning on human conduct as a process of understanding. Without sketching the intricacies of his complex philosophical position, we may gain sufficient leverage for tackling our problem simply by contemplating his thesis that any orientation in the world for the agent starts in determinate circumstances and with a definable amount of knowledge about the individual's surroundings and conditions. To assume that any agent has neither any idea of his being in the world (not even a profoundly mistaken view of his circumstances) nor that he may need one is to fundamentally misunderstand how human conduct is made possible.

As Oakeshott argued in *On Human Conduct* (Oakeshott, 1990), whenever agents are faced with a situation which invites their action they enter a process of diagnosis at the end of which they have resolved either to act or to abstain from action. The outcome of this process is conditioned by the resources of interpretation and diagnosis available to them and they may

indeed gravely misjudge the situation they are supposedly in. Thus, for Oakeshott, practical reasoning is a process which entails learning from and reconsidering the decisions previously made. Although he would broadly agree with Kantians that reflective consciousness forms the core of the deliberating process (Oakeshott, 1990, p.36-37), he notes time and again that deliberation on action does not start with abstract principles of justice but with the necessary orientation of agents in the contingent situations they face. The main argument that Oakeshott offers communitarians in defence of the prevalence of locally endorsed practices rather than universal abstract norms is that understanding is a process by which agents interpret the characteristics of all the variables in their situation, yet do not attempt to analyse their contingent circumstances in terms of the postulates of conduct. But is this just philosophical hair-splitting? What is the difference between postulates and characteristics of agency?

To Oakeshott, thinking about action requires agents to identify, as it were, the personae of all the elements in the equation that make up the situation in which they find themselves (Oakeshott, 1991; esp. part I, pp.1-107). Whether or not somebody misinterprets his own position in the broader scheme of things, he is still called upon to understand what the various components of the situation are and what they could possibly mean to him. This is the core task of agency and insofar as such an understanding of the contingent situation is his own, so he is the author of the conclusion which he draws from his analysis.

What agency does not usually comprise, however, is to inquire into the *conditions* of the elements that make up the situation he is faced with. Oakeshott gives a poignant example when he describes the difference between understanding the action that is required when somebody is asked for the time and the analysis that a philosopher would want to undertake when thinking about the postulates of time (Oakeshott, 1990, p.9). The ordinary individual faced with the question 'What time is it?' may easily take for granted that the concept of time is unproblematic. His concern is not with what renders the question as well as his response intelligible but with the veracity of the answer he gives.

For a philosopher, the conditions of this interaction, however, are part and parcel of his work. He queries the postulates of agency rather than the various characteristics and possible misunderstandings of the interaction. That does not mean that agents may never consider the conditions that enable them to respond appropriately to other agents when the philosophical basis of their interaction proves profoundly out of sync amongst each other. These, however, are rare cases, and reconstituting the theoretical foundation of agency does not add much to their interpretative capacities. It is a move to reassure themselves of the conditions of accessibility, not an addition or adjustment to their understanding of the situation.

Oakeshott's discrimination between theoretical and practical knowledge, between characteristics of a situation and the postulates of this practical understanding of this situation in which agents find themselves, allows us to adopt a new perspective on the problem of how to move from abstract ethical norms to concrete adjudication in particular cases. With Oakeshott's thesis in mind, this whole relocation becomes redundant as far as practical agents are concerned. For Oakeshott, O'Neill and many Kantians put the cart before the horse. Agents do not face the problem of applying abstract principles of justice to particular cases. Rather, they work their way up from understanding contingent situations through locally endorsed practices to, eventually, more abstract norms of social behaviour that may transcend the narrow boundaries of the locally established moral rules. Construing practical reasoning from the bottom up is thus an epistemological necessity resulting from the structure and evolution of human conduct, not simply one of ideological preference for inherited cultures or established practices.

The significant advantage of inverting O'Neill's sequence of practical reasoning is that this perspective resolves the tension between abstract norms and particularistic rules. The former may easily enter the realm of deliberation of agents at any stage if these principles have become part of the corpus of valid moral rules for a specific community. Yet, they do not acquire a superior status or somehow become unassailable standards for acting. The focus

of legitimation of these norms of behaviour remains with the agent when considering the applicability of these universal rules in the concrete situation that he faces. An intention, in fact, that motivated O'Neill in her account of practical agency.

This means that abstract principles of justice, insofar as they are precipitated in their application and validity for specific communities and particular agents in virtue of the categorical imperative (or the coherence principle as formulated by O'Neill), are not part of the ethical considerations of agents. They are integrated into the process of understanding and agency as norms that happen to prevail in societies but not on account of being an act of inference that rejecting them will contradict the very essence of acting itself. Such would be a thought of theoretical nature and thus represent the result of thinking about the postulates of agency. These are the subject matter of philosophical works, not of agents' practical engagement with the world.

Oakeshott's argument on the difference between the spheres of reasoning furnishes us with a powerful point in illustrating the potential benefit of analysing the Russian debate for Western political theory. If Oakeshott's claim on the structure of human understanding is correct then local practices and traditions are privileged in the process of practical reasoning of agents. The universal twist of this claim, however, is that nothing bars O'Neill's abstract principles of justice from becoming an important part of practical reasoning as long as they figure in the agent's resources for understanding and responding to the situation(s) he faces. In order to do this they must have orientating potential; and they gain this by being part of lived, endorsed or contested but recognised norms of a society or community.

In this scheme of things political theorists and philosophers are free to make an argument in favour of universalism, that is to say, to point to the fact that in societies without a shared religious, political or social conception of the good, universal principles of justice may be re-conceptualised as indispensable components of political institutions. What we have to keep apart, however, is the articulation of such a theoretical argument and the epistemic

conditions of agency in concrete situations. Principles of justice may or may not become part of practical reasoning for actual agents, but if they do they do so by virtue of being an integral part of ethical practices, not by virtue of being an irrefutable superior norm for human conduct as reason dictates.

This is by no means an entirely novel line of argument. Communitarians have advanced similar arguments in defence of the priority of the shared background of experience, (practical and theoretical) vocabulary and commitments. What I believe communitarians of the stricter variant have often failed to recognise, however, is that universal values which by now dominate theoretical debates in the West have become a legitimate and vital component of practical reasoning by forming an indispensable part of the political social and cultural orientation of individuals. Universal values belong to the moral equipment of individuals living in those societies that are marked by a lack of religious, political and cultural homogeneity; something that initially gave rise to the universalist and constructivist theories. What distinguishes the revised account of practical reasoning from O'Neill's version of Kantianism is that it identifies the capacity to judge as the core of political agency. While O'Neill remains faithful to her Kantian roots by speaking about the capacity to act as a result of the absence of coercion and injury, reiterating the latitudinal aspect of agency (Cahoone, 2002), the alternative would be, without diminishing the universal drift and potential of the concept of agency, to complement her account with the notion of the propriativity (Cahoone, 2002) of agency, the 'actualisation of choice' which is dependent on the capacity to make and revise meaningful judgements. If liberalism as a historical phenomenon is, as Oakeshott convincingly argued, the result of a series of contingent choices by a multitude of diverse historical actors, then universal liberalism must salvage its universalising impetus by locating it in the conditions that make human conduct possible.

No doubt, some of these conditions are contributory to the evolution of liberal politics. Others, however, may simply facilitate the solution of conflict in human interaction. Most

historians and political theorists may suspect that the economic and political institutions that have developed over the last decades and the social pressures (and opportunities) that have come to bear upon individuals as well as whole communities predetermine or (less stringently) prearrange the range of choices for individuals that figure in their judgements on political action and result in a proclivity of modern politics towards universal values and norms. This may well be true, but none of the visions of universal practical reasoning can augment the defects of an O'Neillian conception of agency. As much as the absence of coercion, injury and violence contributes to the exercise of agency, it represents only the penultimate step on the path towards meaningful agency. The core problem to be thematized is which circumstances permit agents best to bring their judgements to bear upon particular situations in the specific contexts requiring action. By refusing to characterise judgement as subsumptive or determinate, O'Neill concentrates on the relation between act-descriptions and principles. That this connection requires interpretation based on reflective consciousness is willingly conceded. What O'Neill fails to notice, however, is that act-descriptions and principles themselves are the outcome of an interpretative process that is conditioned, yet not inexorably determined, by the culturally or socially inherited and reaffirmed meanings of these descriptions.

This furnishes us with a solid argument for the significance of the diverse categories and concepts of human orientation. The normative work that the project of interrelating the Russian and Western debate requires liberals to do is to describe their initial concepts of understanding and to evaluate them in terms of the standards of liberal views of social and political life. This translates into an agenda with two main tasks. Firstly, to determine or to try to delineate what the various political ideas and concepts in the shared discursive space of the Russian and Western theoretical debate may mean for the Russian liberal project, and secondly, to clarify the extent to which the impairment of meaningful agency can be eased and the capacity for judgement so critical to ethical reasoning can be facilitated.

III

It remains to establish the relevance of the conception of agency for a better understanding of the Russian transformation. Most theorists would leave this academic field to political scientists and note that there are only the most tenuous links connecting political theory with the various analyses of post-communist transformations. The absence of any extensive writing by political theorists on the East European experience, with notable exceptions such as Bruce Ackerman (Ackerman, 1992), speaks for the need to make a cogent argument for this link if we find it warrants any attention at all. There will be a place in chapter 5 to sketch the common ground between political science and political philosophy in more detail with regard to the Russian transformation; for now the following remarks will focus on the theoretical gain any conception of agency can bring to re-constructing a universal conception of political liberalism.

As noted earlier, both Oakeshott's broadly descriptive account of meaningful agency in *On Human Conduct* and O'Neill's revised Kantian notion of practical reasoning refuse to privilege either abstract principles of justice or thick obligatory frameworks of social life. Both accounts also remarkably (and deliberately) fall short of presenting us with normative guidance for building liberal political institutions. The emphasis on choice and the capacity to choose relegates to the background norms of social life which are conventionally thought of as core standards of liberal politics. Although O'Neill undoubtedly believes that the identified principles of justice and virtue take agents a long way towards liberal institutions, the indeterminacy of these principles introduces an element of uncertainty. In other words, O'Neill trusts the proclivity of her rules for just and virtuous action towards liberal politics, but the overall tone of her exploratory account remains sceptical.

Oakeshott's account offers even less straightforward hope for a liberal universalism. In fact, his theory of liberal history eminently precludes liberal politics as the outcome of human conduct regulated by detectable and followable principles of political actions. His notion of

agency delivers us more and less than O'Neill's at the same time. While he refuses to view any political order as the result of human design, he simultaneously creates ample space for human action in its complex interrelationship with the particular requirements of social life. His description of the agent's understanding points to the crucial role of judgement and the epistemic preconditions for it. Oakeshott's account of understanding reminds us that all agency is premised on deciphering the various elements that momentarily constitute an agent's situation. Within this perspective the distance between local particular practices and universal principles is reduced. Both figure as components of the agent's cognitive make-up and the particular constellation between both, the entire absence or any pronounced imbalances in favour of either, is down to the ethical culture that constitutes the resources for the agent's practical reasoning.

There are several problems with both Oakeshott and O'Neill's notion of agency. Although it is not my intention to suggest that a simple combination of both will take us any closer to a feasible reconstitution of universal political liberalism, what should have become clear however is that both accounts offer us the prospect of significant progress insofar as they both refuse to acknowledge an interpretative chasm between abstract universal principles of justice and particular practices and traditions. Agency seems to suggest a unique way to diminish this rift. While O'Neill stops short of identifying the requirements for practical judgement, evidently in order to remain faithful to the Kantian frame of practical reasoning, and Oakeshott notes the central importance of it, it has become clear that the Russian debate on political liberalism is first and foremost an attempt to appropriate to itself the epistemic concepts and ideas that have informed the Western debate on liberal justice and ethics. Facilitating this appropriation, then, is constituting the foundations of practical judgement and complementing the fundamentals of a universal liberal theory of politics at the same time.

To wring some genuinely liberal principles out of a barren account of agency may be impossible. But, as noted above, Oakeshott's description of agency (though his politics are

widely held to be profoundly conservative) seems to go further insofar as it elaborates on the capacities to act. While O'Neill thematises the problem of incapacitation of the agent from the angle of coercion, injury and violence, she fails to acknowledge *that* aspect of choice which conservatives are conventionally more attuned to: the capacity to judge. Many communitarians would want to speak of the embeddedness of the individual will in this context. But we do not need to mince words here. Emphasizing human judgmental abilities and capacities does not mean that abstract ethical norms will be supplanted in their entirety by local traditions and practices, which would make it extremely difficult for theorists to arrive at a truly universal debate on political liberalism. As MacIntyre's notion of epistemological crisis indicates (MacIntyre, 1996; esp. chapters 17-20), it is in fact a prerequisite of normative work to acknowledge and identify the discrepancy of concepts and to interpret conceptual disparities creatively in light of the various interpretations that East and West offer. In the course of such an exercise, a certain amount of 'naturalisation' of abstract principles is unavoidable, but only in order to allow these principles to re-emerge as part of a shared reservoir of ethical reasoning. It is the willingness to take seriously Russian interpretations of liberal politics and to seek a feasible integrated account of concepts and terminology that will deliver us the means to re-forge the universal theoretical debate on liberal politics and ethics which we seek to establish. An example may illustrate the, admittedly ambitious, parameters of this project.

Aleksandr Akhiezer (born 1929) has, over the last decade, become one of the most prominent proponents of a Russian *Sonderweg* thesis. Akhiezer, who currently works at the Institute of Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has not only caused quite a stir amongst historians and theoreticians of culture with his influential work *Rossia: Kritik istoricheskovo opyta* (Akhiezer, 1997) but has also managed to create something like a school of thought to which so eminent and equally prolific cultural historians and political scientists as Aleksandr Sergeievich Panarin belong. Although Akhiezer's theory of cycles in

Russian history gained him little friends amongst Western scholars, it was exactly the aspect of predictability that has made his work hugely popular amongst Russian historians. More recently, his thesis on cultural cycles has informed a raft of publications by various members of the Institute of Economic Forecasting in Moscow. He has repeatedly claimed that he wrote the bulk of the three volumes of *Rossiiia* long before the *perestroika* era (he started writing the first volume around 1974 but lost a substantial part of the manuscript in 1982*) but was unable to publish it for reasons of stringent censorship practised under the communist regime. Whether this is true or not, the changes since the collapse of the communist regimes have certainly reversed his chances of being published and Akhiezer has not only become an immensely prolific writer, but also a scholar who has strenuously striven to enhance the applicability of his theory to collateral disciplines. Raised and educated in Moscow he studied at the Faculty of Economics of the Agricultural Economic Institute in Moscow and worked subsequently for the planning commission at Tusk. Having never received formal philosophical education and, allegedly for lack of time, never been able to complete his doctorate, he has shown remarkably little reluctance to widen the remit of his theory to other social sciences. Whether or not part of his initial intention, his work has assumed a scent of all-embracing system building, reminiscent of the German philosophy in the nineteenth century.

The focus of our concern, however, is not Akhiezer's theory of historical cycles but his notion of 'raskol' or schism. Central to his work is the thesis that Russian society is characterised by a curious rift which has persisted throughout modern history. His thesis will be outlined in more detail at a later stage (cf. part II, chapters 9 and 10). What is of interest to us at this preliminary theoretical stage is how theorists can possibly create a singular discursive trajectory out of two disparate historical narratives. The story of the liberal West

* For a brief summary of Akhiezer's work and life see Matveieva's introduction to Vol.3 of *Rossiiia* (Akhiezer, 1997)

has often been recounted and goes thus: Deep disagreement over fundamental religious and political issues and the solidification of this disagreement in institutional form have in the course of the modern era led to the evolution of institutions that manage conflict resolution which in turn pacified Western societies and set free their immense dynamic resources for economic and social development. Akhiezer's portrayal of the Russian contrasting picture provides a poignant reminder of the contingent nature of liberal political institutions in the West. He argues that a societal rift lying at the heart of Russian modern society had mainly led to the *absence* of a similarly structured political arena with conflict-resolving capacity. Instead the Russian polity was, and still continues to be, characterised by the development of separate spheres of life, each regulated by exclusively and singularly valid rules and practices. One of the main features of this lack of spill-over between domains of life is the utter redundancy of politics as a playground of diverse interests and their regulated exchange, mediated collision and eventual reconciliation. Quite in contrast to the Western experience, Russian politics grows out of the need of an imperial ruler to deliver the administration of the polity in a most efficient way, reflecting the needs of modernity. At best, Russian politics thus remains imposed on society as a whole, which persists in being relatively impervious to the development of political values. At worst, politics is continuously colonised by norms and values extraneous to it, inhibiting the evolution of a genuinely political set of ethical principles.

Akhiezer's thesis is a truly multifaceted highly sophisticated illustration of an alternative path to modernity, which stands in remarkable contrast to Western history. Historians have seized upon various of his more questionable claims and Western scholars have voiced deep reservations about the cyclical aspect of his thesis. Yet, for our purposes, his theory confronts us with a pertinent though classic question as to how politics can be justified in a society which, in the various spheres of social existence, has somehow adopted codes of practices peculiar to these compartmentalised domains while generating a sufficient capacity

to solve interior problems. It is the problem of the justification of politics as a 'latecomer', where economics and social sphere have developed deeply entrenched and perhaps frequently malign rules of existence, sentencing politics to be the subordinate to others. It is the question posed by Russian conservatives time and again: What grounds can we give to establish politics if locally prevalent ethics would prove to be the better guide?

There can be no doubt that Russian reality has long radically undermined the claims of Russian conservatives that ethics could supplant politics. In face of the great extent to which Russia is nowadays a religiously, politically and culturally diverse (and divided) polity, political institutions as means of conflict resolution are necessary and do not require any further justification. It is harder to dismiss Akhiezer's thesis, however, when it comes to constructing a reconciled (European) theoretical account of liberal politics.

I will illustrate briefly what I mean by the need to integrate the Western and Russian debate as a requisite for a discursive universalism of political theory. At first, Akhiezer's argument seems to strike a note that is mainly historical in nature. He points to the remarkably redundant features of Russian politics as opposed to the organic development of Western politics out of the need for the mediation of conflict between political forces. At a deeper level, however, Akhiezer's thesis does resonate with concepts and ideas which would conventionally be considered the home of political theorists. The question of the status and nature of politics, which Akhiezer is concerned with, possesses more than a fleeting reference to the problem of the primacy of ethics over politics which Russian conservatives have so fervently articulated in the debate of the nineteenth century (perhaps most eloquently formulated by Leo Tolstói). In a society where politics has continually been unable to establish its own boundaries and prevent its domain from being colonised by economic and to cultural norms, the question of the exact relationship between the right and the good emerges with deep urgency.

Politics itself, being stripped of its habitual embeddedness in societal practice and institutions, becomes an object of theoretical inquiry. For some, its very existence ultimately appears to require justification. From the perspective of the Western theorist, this may seem a call from a distant past and the argument hardly worth contemplating. As pointed out earlier, however, modern political theory owes its very existence to the fact that societies have ceased to be based on homogenous, uncontested conceptions of the good that can command unanimous allegiance amongst all of its citizens. Thus, political theorists assume that the problem-solving capacities which the various spheres of human life have evolved are *per se* insufficient and require one way or another the appeal to a set of political principles which regulate potentially destructive disagreement between individuals. Akhiezer's thesis must therefore appear curiously out of step with modern reality and the absence of all-embracing and homogenous notions of national or cultural identity.

Yet, sketching Akhiezer's account of Russian society does generate a different view on the role of normative theoretical justification in politics. It alerts us to the fact that the relative autonomy of politics and the emergence of norms and values intrinsic to the exercise of political action is something that cannot be presupposed. The definition of politics in political liberalism thus gains a wider remit. Any theory of politics must resist the colonisation of the political realm by economic and cultural categories of understanding, if it wants to create the initial conditions for liberal politics. This sheds light on the disparate positions of politics in Russia and the West. Western political theorists, when arguing over the neutrality of the state towards cultural, religious notions of social organisation, look at domestic politics as a domain exhibiting co-ordinates and standards that are essentially 'homegrown' and intrinsic to its existence. Russian theorists talk about politics as a source of power in a society where the rules that distribute and legitimate this power are at best opaque if not simply adopted from the dynamics of the economic sphere.

This illuminates how frustratingly superfluous many of the arguments in the Western debates on political liberalism must appear in the context of Russian transformation. As Akhiezer notes in his work *Russian Statehood*, co-authored with Il'in (Il'in, 1997), the rift between society and the state apparatus prevents the development of a viable political arena. Yet, such a space for politics is necessary for the articulation of ideas about the desirable shape of political institutions. In lieu of such a public arena and sustainable politics itself, the elaborate argument for the relative independence of the various spheres of life which are supposed to generate civic freedoms falls through. In Russia the withdrawal of the uninhibited influence of market forces from politics would leave behind only a simulacrum of politics, easily falling prey to the only functioning forms of social organisation, the bureaucracy, the military, and the secret services who would appropriate the state for their own interests.

Thus, to discuss political liberalism solely within the contexts of individual freedom and its preconditions is to disregard the very foundations on which any political debate rests: the existence of a distinctive set of principles indigenous to politics and sustaining a widely autonomous realm of politically motivated civic articulation. The integrity of agency thus requires in their standards and rules distinguishable spheres of life. On the back of such distinction, an argument for their mutual interdependence can develop and political agency can begin to show preference for, or reject, market oriented norms and principles. Taking note of this fact, I believe, can propel us forward to a truly universal notion of political liberalism.

4. Building Blocs for a Viable Universal Liberalism

The previous chapters have advanced an array of different arguments and claims. Some of them might still appear unrelated and it is the objective of this penultimate section of the first part of the thesis to tie these loose ends together. What has received little attention so far is that liberty as an abstract concept has played a significant role in the reform efforts of the Russian liberals after the collapse of Communism (cf. Gaidar, 1995). Yet, while liberty may seem of central importance for the Russian political debate, to Russian scholars it has been to be of little guidance when trying to define what Russian liberalism could be. Despite many attempts to circumscribe as accurately as possible what Russian liberalism is, most Russian political theorists would reject as unsuitable to their country a vision of political liberalism as founded on abstract individual liberty. Thus a more contextualised concept of political liberalism may have more appeal to Russian scholars, and the second part of this chapter will argue for some considerable benefits in trying to construct liberalism from 'weak foundations'. A brief overview of the points formulated in the previous chapters will help to illustrate what remains to be done.

It has been argued, firstly, that agency is central to a viable universal notion of political liberalism. The chapter following these theoretical considerations will then make the case that agency can provide solid common ground between political science and political theory, facilitating the benefits when looking at the Russian transformation from what are often thought to be mutually preclusive perspectives. It has also been argued that, secondly, universalism is conditional upon the successful integration of other (in our case: Russian) notions of liberalism without marginalising the differences and dissonances between Western and Russian political and ethical concepts. A third argument pointed to the need for ethical resources of liberal theorising and institution building, something that may have notably been absent in many post-communist societies. Before this argument receives any further

elaboration, I would like to return to the problem of what the foundations of liberal theorising could be and whether or not weak foundationalism may provide sufficient grounds for political liberalism. In the first part of this chapter I will try to further establish the case for an integrated and historically sensitive account of political liberalism. The second half of this chapter then critically reviews weak foundationalism as providing such a basis for a reconstructed account of liberal politics.

I

Rationality and abstraction are the inseparable twins that define UC in political philosophy, and there have been thorough and sometimes scathing criticisms of them by distinguished Western philosophers (Rorty, 1991; MacIntyre, 1994 and MacIntyre 1996; also see the critical call by O'Neill for differentiation between idealization and abstraction in political theory, O'Neill, 1988, 1996 and 2000). On a positive note, the effects of conceptual abstraction may render philosophical constructs accessible to any prospective participant in the debate and ultimately foster the incontestability of the results, but they also ensure the irrelevance of the findings within actual environments. Hence, liberal political theory may become a discourse of topicality rather than one of pertinence. O'Neill has warned against confusing abstraction with idealization in political theory. While the former is inevitable insofar as theorists must at some stage 'bracket' some or other features of moral agents, they may not ascribe arbitrarily capacities or capabilities to agents that they do not possess. Where abstract accounts of agents increase the appeal of these accounts to actual agents operating from within diverse concepts of *Sittlichkeiten*, idealized notions of agents falsify reality and reduce the applicability of these concepts of agents across a varied spectrum of ethical and social practices (O'Neill, 1988 and 2000).

To illuminate the incoherence of such idealized concepts of human agency and its effects on political theory, one could usefully employ the ideas of the British 'contextualists',

such as Skinner and Pocock. In an article on social action and meaning Skinner tries to carve out a middle position between strict positivism and the rigid *Verstehen* tradition expounded by thinkers like Dilthey. He writes,

‘We can imagine an alien system of beliefs in which the paradigms used to connect the system together are such that none of the evidence which we should regard as evidence in favour of abandoning those beliefs is taken to count as decisive evidence either for or against them. We can then imagine an agent, operating within this belief-system, who accepts on trust these prevailing paradigms, recognising and following only those moves accepted as rational within the given system, but never challenging the rationality of any part of the system itself.’ (Skinner, 1972, p.151)

Hypothetically, we may think of political theory as one such system of belief. In the present context, what matters is not how this may possibly undermine the truth credentials of any theoretical discourse (an issue positivists would be concerned with) but the best possible manner in which an observer can understand the various parts of this system of belief or discourse. Skinner again,

‘...to disclose the meaning of such a work, (one) must ... begin not by making an intensive study of the text in itself, but rather by trying to see what relations it bears to ... existing conventions.’ (Skinner, 1972, p.155)

For Skinner, the task of the historian of ideas is to reveal the conventions and assumptions that govern a discursive practice. Buried in these conventions are the intentions of the social actor, which can, once identified, give a plausible explanation as to why an action was initiated. From here one can criticise the lack of referentiality of modern political theory. If any form of UC can be upheld it must be via a re-constructed link between what political liberalism means in a given environment and what it could mean in others. This gives us a theoretical justification for forging an integrated debate on political liberalism. If liberalism is not to renege on its universal promise it must be understood as a theoretical inquiry into the conditions and norms of human life that need to be honoured if a liberal order is perceived to

be desirable. And this argument can by no means serve as a justification for unbound particularism. The resources for universalism are no doubt extant. Irrespective of the varying social and cultural circumstances in which theorists operate, weak foundationalists are correct to point out that the motivation for universal liberalism resides in the desirability of a political structure that honours the most basic characteristics of modern human life, those that are inescapable across the globe, such as human vulnerability, scarcity of resources, division of labour that necessitates co-operation, and some form of equality. Given the irreducible plurality of faiths, convictions and outlooks on all forms of human life in the modern world, this would give us an essential pool from which to draw the most general requirements of a modern political order, although not necessarily a liberal one. Note that neither of the characteristics above can be taken to condition any specific shape of political institutions. All they provide us with is some guidance in the selection of those norms and principles which political regimes ought to respect if they aspire to be liberal.

The sheer variety of ways in which liberty and liberalism are invoked in public debate or theoretical discourse makes it necessary to structure the following thoughts so that irrelevant aspects of political liberalism can be omitted from the discussion. The objective of this penultimate chapter of the first part therefore is to sketch the connection between the conclusions drawn about the UC and the nature of political liberalism on the one hand and the particular situation in Russia on the other. I indicated above that it can be useful to think of the Russian 'condition' as an impairment of agency and I will elaborate on this in the next chapter. Political scientists may prefer to describe the Russian situation as a loss of history, or alternatively, they may find the idea of a radically contested national identity more suitable. Since this study is motivated by a politico-theoretical impetus, however, the concept of heuristic radicalism highlights accurately the dilemma which the transformation period poses for those people who are faced with the gargantuan task of what Tismaneanu called the 'reinvention of politics' (Tismaneanu, 1993). It was already hinted at above that the notion of

agency and an idea of what Hart called the minimum content of law may be helpful in conceptualising the guidance that is required for a successful advance from the pre-political to the political. In this very limited space lies the manageable task of liberal political theory. Bearing in mind the necessity to continually reconstitute the historical context of theorising, all that political theory can deliver is to provide these general rules which political orders tend to internalise. Somewhat more reminiscent of the language political scientists employ, one could rephrase this objective as identifying the essential aspects to be considered in the constitution-building process of a polity (Ackerman, 1992).

It has been suggested that the notion of agency as formulated by Oakeshott and the concept of a minimum content of law as advocated by Hart provide some essential common ground for a re-constituted political liberalism which could be shared by East and West. One might object that such a thin notion of the foundation of liberalism is on the brink of being irrelevant to the Russian case. But I do believe that the several components or guiding rules which Oakeshott and Hart's arguments propose for instantiating a liberal political order do have some 'pulling power' in a hitherto mainly non-liberal political environment. Incidentally, they also do translate into substantive requirements rather than fulfilling only a formal advisory role in the politics-constituting process.

But first, the field of concern requires some further circumscription. Four broad areas of theoretical inquiry offer themselves for the purpose of initial categorisation. There is, firstly, liberalism as a problem of distribution or distributive justice. When dealing with this category liberal political theorists are mainly concerned with specifying the amount of liberty that each individual can justifiably be allocated in a modern society. Several main ideas have regulated this field of inquiry. Most dominantly, there was the classic notion of liberty as being placed under restrictions by the harm principle. Not incidentally, this stood at the very inception of liberal political theory in a historical situation where individual freedoms had to be defended and boundaries of state interference required a firm vindicative strategy.

Secondly, however, a further issue came gradually into view. With the ascent of the republican view of liberalism came the awareness of the particular urgency of re-ascertaining and re-conceptualising the boundaries of the activities of the political authorities, while the latter, this time, were seen as emerging organically from the nascent social communities in need of political organisation. The Federalist Papers epitomise these theoretical efforts, trying to define the conditions under which a threatening concentration of political power can be averted and viable political institutions be built. Broadly speaking, while liberalism of the first variety was vindictory, political liberalism of the second order was constructive.

What remains out of sight for these two foci comes under the spotlight from the two other perspectives of liberalism. As liberal political structures developed in the West liberalism also came under challenge from the appalling destitute living conditions in whose creation its economic counterpart of laissez-faire was undoubtedly implicated. Liberalism accordingly changed its tune and problematised the social conditions that were perceived as being conducive to the sustenance of a liberal political order. Ideas such as social liberty and the nowadays pervasive language of opportunity are manifestations of this readjustment of the liberal doctrine. Liberalism received a social and cultural edge in addition to its political weight. Thus liberalism was increasingly seen as intricately related to social and cultural circumstances, and this revealed how much it created its own (economic, cultural, social and political) resources for stability. Broadly speaking, the holistic views of liberalism were strengthened and it gradually lost its solely political and economic meanings. Most of the difficulties encountered by Russian reformers in the nineteenth century occupied this theoretical field. Under conditions that lacked an independent civil society as a forceful initiator of the demand for individual liberties, as well as a strong middle class operating within a well regulated economic sphere, few demands were placed on the state authorities to implement progressive political institutions. In fact, the roles were tragically swapped insofar as the state appeared to many liberals as the only viable 'societal' force to initiate and carry

out reforms and would ideally restrict its own power ultimately by introducing constitutionalism.

A fourth mode in which political liberalism can be theorised is markedly different from all the preceding versions and it might not be a coincidence that this manner of political theory has, apart from the English tradition that was engendered by long civil strife and religious plurality, strong roots in German philosophy. Although Germany did not lack the economic impetus for liberal political theory, its anti-statist and republican orientations (1 and 2) have remained considerably underdeveloped. In contrast, this fourth perspective strives to reveal liberalism as an apt response to the 'modern condition' of human life. The Heideggerian philosophical baggage is apparent. He probably came closest to a satisfying description of the existential dilemma posed by modernity. This approach left deep traces in the Russian tradition of philosophy and the two most valuable contributions to the theoretical debate in Russia (Akhiezer, Kapustin) contain clear references to an understanding of liberalism as a problem of modernity.

The first three perspectives on political liberalism certainly have relevance to the Russian transformation in several ways. Yet, if one follows Oakeshott's characterisation of political theory none of them would constitute a field of inquiry for this discipline. Political theory, according to Oakeshott, has little to do with the definition of the final end or objective of societal life, nor has it any task in determining the principles towards which a given society will want to orientate its decision making. Rather political theory is the endeavour to reveal the inconsistencies that arise from the process of constant re-adjustment and change which any society is inevitably subjected to in the modern world (Oakeshott, 1993a and 1993b). In other words, political theory must fail if it strives to set the conditions for modern life unequivocally. The pluralistic nature of modern life would undermine any such attempt to enshrine some basic principles in any conceivable form, be it a written or an unwritten constitution. Plurality results in contestability and political theory is not capable of reducing

contestability, but only to bring about the momentary equilibrium of the present norms and principles by which a society has decided to live.

The fourth perspective thus remains as the only valid playing field for liberal political theory. And it has already been hinted that the extent of this field is still truly colossal. In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to, as it were, move into this field in incremental steps so as not to expose the findings to a lack of rear support. It has been indicated that the condition of modernity as an irreducible factum of social life can be immensely helpful in venturing into this field in a guarded fashion. The notion of modernity as being one of an inextricable plurality of worldviews, social norms and values has emerged as a point of convergence for most political philosophers in East and West, irrespective of the disagreement amongst them about the nature of this plurality (cf. Akhiezer, 2002). Yet, arguably, political liberalism must involve some understanding of individual liberty.

Liberals in the West have long preferred to think of liberty as an ultimate norm and individual in nature. In fact, despite some valuable criticism, the idea of liberty as essentially individual and a 'trump' over other values has a long, though not uncontested, tradition in Western political philosophy. Returning briefly to the aforementioned first three perspectives, one can see how much damage this individual, and normatively ultimate, notion of liberty has done to the Russian reform efforts. If freedom is taken to reside only in the individual, and is conceived as an insuperable norm, most aspirations for a republican or vindictory formulation of liberty fall apart or make little sense in the Russian context. Some Western critics have argued that positing such an essential and ultimate norm did not and does not make sense even within the context of Western traditions of political culture and sociality (Cahoone, 2002).

Given this deficiency of the notion of liberty as the supreme principle and solely individual in nature, the problem of modernity, in contrast to all other three notions, shifts the focus dramatically to the contribution liberty can make to finding a solution for the inevitable

conflicts of norms and values that exist in any modern society. Liberty here is understood as being conducive to bringing about a state of affairs rather than being a norm to be honoured at any rate. There can be no doubt that this would run counter to the very intention and supposed meaning of political liberalism, as some Western political theorist find it reasonable to advocate. Yet, what is less clear is why this alternative perspective of freedom as a means rather than an ultimate end would make less sense of the modern world than its theoretical contender. The Russian post-Communist reforms have demonstrated that neither of the various conceptualisations of liberty, whether republican, vindicatory, or social, would receive appropriate manifestations in the social and political life of the Russian polity if reformers mostly operate with an abstract notion of liberty. What seems untenable is not that freedom represents an indispensable value in the life of any modern society. Rather, what seems so mistaken is to take it as an absolute norm not qualifiable by cultural, political or social traditions. To believe that the removal of *any* constraints placed on the individual by society could act as a viable principle for the generation and evaluation of political and social institutions in times of far-reaching transformations runs counter to the need for societal arbitration between inevitably conflicting values and norms.

One may object that hardly any Western liberal political theorist would advocate such a radical position. Yet, the dividing line here is thin and not always clearly detectable. The separating line runs between a notion of liberty as the overriding principle in all cases of 'normative conflict' and an idea of liberty as the most likely contributor to an enhancement of societal peace. Conceptually these two areas are as different as they can be. In Oakeshottian terms the former notion of liberty involves a recommendation or proposition of an ideal or insuperable norm, which no political theory can sustain, while, on the other hand, in the second position liberty is taken as a property of social actions. As the former may very well be (mistakenly) a regulatory idea for the establishment of a political order, the latter is a qualification of human actions. While some may argue for the increase of human freedom in

the latter sense and advocate the condition of utter independence, such an argument can be refuted philosophically, while the former is simply an ideological contortion of politics. In the words of Cahoone,

‘The problem of the notion of freedom as independence is that while freedom and necessity may be antithetical conceptually, they are intertwined in reality. .. (F)reedom is not the absence of constraint, it is the *constrained selection of constraints*.’ (Cahoone, 2002, p.169)

However, there is nothing political theory can sensibly say about ideological politics apart from the fact that it is profoundly discordant with the conditions of modernity, i.e. the identified plurality of beliefs, faiths and worldviews. What we should be concerned with in the Russian case then is to exhibit the structure and limits of a reasonable idea of liberty as property of human activities, rather than as an overriding norm.

II

From a theoretical point of view, why did the Russian reforms found themselves on such difficult terrain? It was clearly a laudable aim to increase everyone’s personal liberty by liberalising the economy and introducing market elements. For a liberal political theorist the crux of the matter must lie in the idea of liberty that the reformers thought to promote. It transpired fairly quickly that to posit personal freedoms simply as a value in themselves neglects the conditions for such freedoms and the ways in which they require sustenance from social and cultural forms of life. If one accepts that the Russian society was, and still is, engaged in a fundamental process of re-constituting politics, what political theorists may want to term the transition from the pre-political to the political, or in Rawlsian language the creation of an overlapping consensus, then one must ask oneself how useful an abstract idea of liberty can be in this process. To put it simply, do we get from the ‘war of all against all’ to viable politics simply with the guidance of one principle? There seem to be two arguments to

deny this. Firstly, liberty, taken as an abstract principle, does not allow any differentiation amongst the many norms and values that any society has to accommodate. An example of this difficulty would be the question of the continuity of the old state constitutions. The repeal of these constitutions would certainly have increased momentarily the extent of personal freedoms available to every individual. Yet, so would the repeal of any constraints. Liberty taken as an abstract trump over other values thus appears to inhibit, rather than facilitate, a necessary differentiating account of the complex interplay between values and norms existing in a society.

Secondly, and more importantly, however, any transformation is inevitably a process in which past traditions are weighed and evaluated from a new, and sometimes, radical perspective. Any society in the throes of transformation undergoes the introduction of an aspect of uncertainty whose extent very much depends on the ability and tenacity of the population to reject any old political, social and cultural arrangements. This evaluative process involves criteria that are constantly shifting, the more so as the Russian society operates under what has been called heuristic radicalism. Russian reformers have tried to introduce an element of stability by suggesting that the idea of liberty would represent a reliable criterion for the successful execution of this assessment process. However, this attempt to insert stability by reference to such a highly ambivalent principle as liberty must now appear naive. It posed a serious problem for the reformers as well as to society at large insofar as liberty carries little endorsing or disapproving capacity in respect to social and cultural norms. The increase of personal liberty for the sake of liberty hardly helped people to make more sense of the dilemmas in which they found themselves than operating without any postulate at all would have done.

Or, as political theorists prefer to put it, the question is in which circumstances one would want to exercise one's freedom, and this involves an aspect of personal *relevance*. Things must matter to people to be identified as objects of desirable change or retention

(Taylor, 1985; Cahoone, 2002). Although this characterisation of personal choice may be conventionally understood to be fundamentally individual, it is informed by experiences that are social in nature. And it seems of crucial importance to understand that the meaning that is imbued in someone's action is derived to a great deal from these social practices. That does not mean that individual choices never reject sometimes deeply embedded social practices and rules. But it does mean that individual actions are enabled in a profound sense by a person's capacity to judge what matters most to him, and this capacity is implicitly a result of social experiences. Contrary to the usefulness of liberty as a criterion for appeal in public discourse, liberty as an abstract idea offers no guidance in this process of personal arbitration. It has little potential to assist selection when it comes to people trying to make important choices. We can want to live under circumstances where we are allowed to do as we wish, but expressing the desire to be free in the sense of ridding ourselves of all constraints would also rid us of all benchmarks of evaluating our lives. In this way, liberty is a deeply flawed standard when it comes to judging past and present norms and values. Societies in transformation require more than an abstract idea; they need principles that reflect those aspects of human life which matter to the people concerned and can be expressed through particular types of social and political arrangements.

A helpful heuristic device for the conceptualisation of the Russian political and social transformation may be to understand it in terms of the relationship that does and ought to obtain between morality and law. This approach has resonated well with Russian scholars more recently as they try to understand the failure of the liberal reforms either in terms of their collision with received social and cultural traditions (Fedotova, 2001), or as a project of the imposition of legal norms that conflict with deeply ingrained Russian moral standards, or as a result of the magnitude of the impediments to the establishment of the rule of law in Russia. Several Russian political theorists have argued that the phenomena of rampant crime and gangsterism are a result of the striking lack of congruity between what is morally

legitimate and what has legal endorsement (Sergeyev, 1998). This theme, developed most clearly recently by Sergeyev, corresponds to the intention of this study to understand the normative implications of the recent upheavals in Russia as a translation of the prevailing transformation of the existing moral norms into legally binding codes. A closer look at Sergeyev's thesis is therefore warranted.

In his book on law and crime in Russia (Sergeyev, 1998), Sergeyev begins by outlining the various concepts of crime in respect of different ideological perspectives. He calls these representations of the varying concepts of crime 'caricatures', but maintains that they nevertheless have heuristic value. Conservatism understands crime as a lack of public order and as the result of the weakness of law-enforcement. In contrast to conservatism, socialism or communism (what Sergeyev dubs 'the left') conceive of crime in terms of exploitation, deprivation and the way in which people react against these maladies. There is no crime as such but only the individual's will to reveal the in-built injustices of society that inevitably leads to 'crime' as an act of rebellion against the order that protects or even perpetrates these injustices. In contrast, liberals view any violations of public order as originating in a lack of individual freedom. Although Sergeyev's characterisations may be highly contestable, his conclusions are insightful. He argues that any tenable concept of crime must understand it as a discrepancy between the law enacted and administered by public authorities and the moral codes embedded in prevailing social and cultural practices. While traditional societies were in a privileged position insofar as they operated on the basis of a near congruity between law and morality, in modern societies this concordance has vanished for good.

Thus, all ideological currents must develop an idea of how to reconcile legal standards with the increasingly discrepant moral norms existing in any society. For liberals, so Sergeyev argues, the law represents an instrument which has been deliberately chosen by modern citizens to promote a peaceful societal life, whereas morality continues to function as a regulatory principle of intra-human relations that are not legally prescribed or circumscribed.

Thus, Sergeyev draws attention to the fact that law is an artefact, an instrument, and, as he believes, not a value (Sergeyev, 1998, p.13). He then distinguishes between three kinds of law. Firstly, law as tradition, secondly, law as social instrument, and thirdly, law as a device for exerting power (Sergeyev, 1998, p.14). The insufficient overlap between these three forms of law produces so-called 'gray zones' in which no notion of law operates, and hence the social activities taking place there are comprehended as being outside the legal system (Sergeyev, 1998, p.15-16). These 'gray zones' expand in societies in flux as the interpretative systems that correlate the three understandings of law are impaired or have broken down altogether. Sergeyev writes:

'Significantly, in the case of societies in transition, complicated mechanisms aimed at co-ordinating the different understandings of law either do not exist or work poorly. Tradition, 'instrumental' law, and administrative power seem to exist independently.' (Sergeyev, 1998, p.15)

And later

'If a considerable part of social activity takes place in the 'gray zones,' members of society lose their idea of what crime is.' (Sergeyev, 1998, p.16)

Sergeyev now argues that since any societal transition involves a profound re-definition of the legitimacy of administrative power, of law as instrument of social regulation and of its congruity with traditions, the rise of crime and the 'criminalization of society' are inevitable. According to Sergeyev, the question is now under which conditions three new interpretations of law can emerge and eliminate this process of criminalisation as an upshot of a lack of overlap between the three forms of law.

For Sergeyev then, the transition process can be conceptualised as a translation of group rationality and group objectives into a public reason that comprises all social sub-groups. He calls this the emergence of 'a collective cognitive coherence' that transcends the particularistic aims and interests of groups operating in 'gray zones' (Sergeyev, 1998, p.50-

51). The difficulty of this process, however, so Sergeyev notes, is that the natural process of self-organisation in 'gray zones' only reaches this collective stage via the elaboration of common stereotypes of behaviour, and therefore requires a considerable degree of homogeneity within the polity (Sergeyev, 1998, p.50-51). Whether this really reflects the actual plurality that exists in such societies can be doubted. What remains even more questionable are two ramifications of Sergeyev's argument that relate to the normative content of his conceptualisation and the character of legal codes emanating from illegal yet commonly accepted practices, respectively.

The first point draws attention to the differences between law and moral practices that need to be respected conceptually. As he states accurately, when writing on the liberal view of law, moral codes are incongruent with legal norms in a variety of ways. There are social practices that attract moral disapproval, even though they are not necessarily illegal. For example, not on all occasions is lying an illegal behaviour, yet most people would say that lies are unacceptable judged by moral standards. Thus legal constraints and moral maxims do not seem to be synonymous in everyday life. And the occasions on which moral condemnation is invoked against certain human conduct are often clearly different to the occasions on which legal sanctions are threatened in response to human actions. This does not mean that there exists no 'overlap' between what is morally reprehensible and what is illegal at certain times. Yet, any conceptual link between morality and law must take account of this existing incongruity between human actions endorsed or condemned by moral or legal codes. Sergeyev appears to assume that only complete synonymy between morality and law ensures that the 'gray zones' of human behaviour are suppressed and hence the society which observes the 'overlap' between moral and legal norms avoids the danger of condoning criminal behaviour by one of the three forms of law.¹

¹ Law here not as enacted and codified law but as form of rule or standard of behaviour. Cf. above p.

More significantly, however, Sergeyev's efforts to deduce law from morality confuse the different character of these two forms of rules for human behaviour. Although it would be highly desirable to find the golden way to travel from the prevailing moral codes of communities to the legal norms a society has given itself, even if this was possible, law nonetheless would still lack one of its most important normative components. It seems that Sergeyev is over optimistic about the moral congruity between ethical norms and legal codes, a viewpoint which he shares with other Russian scholars (cf. Reshetnikova, 2000).

The problem is one of origin, and political theory since Hobbes has tried to define it as clearly as possible. While Sergeyev is right in stating that even communities riddled with crime possess some norms and maxims that regulate behaviour for the relevant members, the transition to law involves something more than a mere extension of the applicability of these rules to a greater membership. If this was so, the peculiar conversion of morality into law through this path would have to explain the voluntarist component that has been inscribed in law ever since Hobbes first conceived of politics as a realm based on individual volition. For Hobbes and every liberal political philosopher since, law in any free society has included an element of approval originating in the will of the individual which is quite redundant for the validity of moral norms. Since Rousseau and Hegel, furthermore, this aspect of volition has become the bedrock of liberty in free societies and thus represents the indispensable normative core of liberal legalisation. Envisaging the transition of post-Communist societies as a process of extension of norms inscribed in the somehow rule-guided behaviour of groups that are bound together by common interest has the problem that it cannot explain *that* normative aspect of law which rests on individual liberty.

Liberal societies are indeed, as Sergeyev accurately noted, different to traditional societies in that they require a law-giving process which respects individual freedoms. Most modern societies have thought that democratic participation or some form of representative democracy honours this requirement. The rules of mafia behaviour cannot become the rules of

a free society – not because they are not rules at all, but because they do not acknowledge this voluntaristic requirement.

Oakeshott has formulated a similar argument (to that expounded by Rousseau and Hegel) against the vision of a society as a group of people bound together by common interests and regulations that are conducive to the procurement of these interests. His point focuses on the implications for individual choice and freedom of human actions if society is guided not by formal rules but instead by substantive aims and common interests. He terms these different ideals of society civil and enterprise association, respectively. A civil association is regulated by non-substantive rules for behaviour. These rules do not prescribe certain actions but stipulate certain requirements that everyone has to adhere to in acting. In contrast, enterprise associations are governed by the stipulation of a common interest, and the achievement of this interest is supposed to be the objective of the actions of every member of such associations. Oakeshott now argues that, if we were to think of modern societies as enterprise associations, we would eliminate any personal freedom insofar as societal membership is not voluntary, with the result that the subscription to the substantive ends and interests of this society would not be a matter of choice for any particular member. The coercive nature of any state would bear down on any behavioral deviation from these prescribed substantive ends and obliterate any individual freedom. Thus, modern liberal societies must necessarily be conceived as civic associations, prescribing rules for conduct, but abstaining from prescribing substantive ends of human actions. Oakeshott's argument is little more than an elaborate and sophisticated reformulation of Hegel's presentation of the intricate relationship between right, law and freedom, which he explores in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* from the angle of the requirements for liberal states if the predication 'liberal' is to be taken seriously at all. However, Oakeshott presented a truly theoretical argument while Hegel sought the philosophical path.

Both arguments reiterate equally strongly, however, the normative aspect of law in liberal societies. And Hegel's argument in fact indicates, as he argues against Kant's idea that both morality and law originate in the categorical imperative, the profound difference between law and morality. Yet, to delineate the likely transitional course from the pre-political to the political in a community regulated by a basic form of morality, one does not need to take recourse to either Hegel's or Kant's idea of law.

More significantly, the transformational process can be described as intrinsic to the differences between moral norms and positive legalisation. In trying to frame a moderate version of legal positivism, H.L.A.Hart has enumerated a range of characteristics of natural law that could constitute the core overlap between law and morality. His argument is simply that without honouring these, what he calls, truisms of social life, neither morality nor law would be able to 'forward the minimum purpose of survival which men have in associating with each other' (Hart, 1997, p.193). He cites five aspects of human life that need to be inscribed into moral and legal codes if human survival is correctly thought to be the ultimate regulative idea of human existence. Two of these aspects warrant closer attention for the purposes of the present argument. Both can easily be translated into the conceptual framework required according to Oakeshott for civic associations. Hart writes on 'human vulnerability':

'Of these (common requirements) the most important for social life are those that restrict the use of violence in killing or inflicting bodily harm. The basic character of such rules may be brought out in a question: If there were not these rules what point could there be for beings such as ourselves in having rules of *any* other kind?' (Hart, 1997, p.194)

The rule to avoid bodily harm thus can act as a grounding maxim that renders human life possible and further legislation meaningful. The parallels to Hobbes' hypothetical state of nature and its function in the course of his argument for a strong unitary public reason are quite apparent. Hart on the second principle of relevance here, 'limited resources':

‘It is a merely contingent fact that human beings need food, clothes, and shelter: that these do not exist at hand in limitless abundance but are scarce, have to be grown or won from nature, or have to be constructed by human toil. These facts alone make indispensable some minimal form of the institutions of property (...), in the distinctive kind of rule which requires respect for it.’ (Hart, 1997, p.196)

For Hart this necessitates some form of co-operation and division of labour without which no society can survive in the long run. Any modern society thus must ensure that, in whatever form property is instantiated at a particular time, it receives protection so as to enable people to engage in co-operation facilitating some basic amount of trust and reliability. No viable society can disregard these two ‘truisms’ of societal life. While this constitutes the area of overlap which Sergeyev intended to circumscribe, any further alleged congruity between morality and law must be judged by the criteria that Oakeshott and Hegel formulated as binding for any society that aspires to be liberal in character. The small pool of common principles for law and morality reveals the strict limitations of any attempt to deduce legal norms from existing forms of morality.

Haddock (2000) has tried to alleviate this shortcoming of foundationalism by pointing to the fact that legal systems provide individuals with a preferable amount of predictability in organising their lives. Arguing in favour of stable and transparent legal systems thus may appear the next logical step from Hart’s minimum requirements of social life. The problem with such ‘amended’ weak foundationalism is, however, that Haddock’s opposing alternatives are a far cry from fairly representing real options. It is easy enough for political agents to express their preference between an arbitrary ruler (Rex I) and a liberal legal framework that is enacted and codified according to transparent and followable procedures. What is less obvious is how agents would place their preference when choosing between a thick matrix of social obligations and a liberal legal framework. The criteria of predictability cuts little ice between the two. Arguably, social webs as they solidify into practices are just as little, or even

less, arbitrary as liberal legal systems. In fact, they can often muster an extent of legitimacy that newly established legal systems may lack.

That Haddock's attempt to augment weak foundationalism fails is due to the fact that his political agents are, implicitly and ideally, rational choosers, while the actual process of expressing preferences for one or another political (or legal) system must take into account that differentiating criteria (such as predictability) are evaluated by agents not from a standpoint extraneous to the vision of social life they have pursued.

Thus, weak foundationalism may give us a list of standards that need to be observed if societies in transformation are to progress towards liberalism. However, any supposed automatism fails to recognise the difference between assessing the options agents have as they are reconstructed by theorists and their actual preferences as outcomes of particular situations.

As to the Russian case I have claimed that their particular condition of HR impacts considerably on this transitional process and needs to be taken into account in any feasible description of the transitory path towards liberal politics. HR was supposed to highlight the lack of unambiguous resources from which societies can rebuild the boundaries of the political realm and some hope has been placed (by Russian theorists of all political persuasion) that existing moral practices may act as an incipient core of legal norms. While many observers have hinted at the disarray and condition of distortion in which these moral norms currently are, Sergeyev seems to argue that even particularistic ethical norms can function as a reliable foundation for the genesis of social standards of behaviour within the polity. It was argued that this disregards the normative implications of legalisation as enshrined in the idea of representative democracy and articulated in a long tradition of political thought. But, even more than this, Hart's definition of the minimum content of natural law indicated that the common sources of law and morality are fairly restricted indeed. While morality may be more resilient to sudden change and HR only applies to the regularities that make politics possible and are most usually inscribed in constitutions, to

deduce (legal) rules of conduct from commonly shared moral principles would not suffice for any properly regulated society that aspires to be liberal.

This additional characteristic requires the observance of Oakeshott's suggestion that any liberal society must be based on non-substantive prescriptive rules of behaviour. This is an argument that corresponds to Akhiezer and Kapustin's emphasis on the irreducible heterogeneity of any modern society and is echoed in Sajo's warning that 'public opinion in post-Communist countries is full of the cobwebs of 'constitutional' delusion from the past' (Sajo, 1999, p.1), lacking the awareness that neither law nor constitutionalism can 'substitute morality, tradition, and common sense'. Law and constitutions, Sajo observes, 'cannot replace the cement of society' (Sajo, 1999, p.9).

How far HR can be overcome by a single constitutional act has been explored by Ackerman. Besides his somewhat misplaced but unflinching optimism and belief in a world revolution of liberal colouration, he argues along more moderate lines when characterising the constitutional act in which most post-Communist states have had to engage sooner or later. Contrary to Havel's notion of 'radical continuity' that served the practical purpose of holding the old elites to account on their own ground, Ackerman sketches the aims and objectives involved in the operation of constitution making. Unfortunately, the analytical capacity of his description is overwhelmed by his burgeoning faith in the success of the collective efforts of East-Europeans to define themselves in the face of deeply contested traditions, histories and territorial claims. He remarks that 'the revolution is a collective effort to repudiate some basic aspects of the past, (where) the constitution offers the revolutionary polity a chance to define affirmatively principles that will mark off the 'new era' from the 'old regime'.' (Ackerman, 1992, p.69)

There is little sensitivity in these words to the particularly difficult business of determining to what degree this soon to be discarded past may still be useful for shaping the future of the prospective polity. Ackerman seems to assume that identities and trajectories are

based on acts of affirmation effortlessly performed and engendered by the sheer will of the populace to 'walk a different path than before'. What he fails to conceptualise is the continuity of politics, the lack of complete breakdown of political practices and institutions, even though the revolutionary events in many Communist countries suggested the imminence of a 'fresh start'.

HR therefore captures more accurately the situation insofar as it intimates that what had become obfuscated were the principles according to which politics had hitherto received its basic definition and shape. Or as Kapustin puts it, polities require some prior ideas about 'kto 'my' iest'' before they can set about in determining the constitutional framework which they believe most adequately reflects their prior decisions on the boundaries of belonging (Kapustin, 1995, p.140). Kapustin and others thus prioritise the identity problem over any constitutional choice (cf. Batalov, 1996, on identity and state ideology). This may strike one as overemphasising the distinctiveness of both processes and disregarding the interconnectedness or simultaneity of these processes, yet it highlights a centrality of identity politics to which Western political theorists are rarely attuned.

Summarising, one could say that Ackerman's argument features a peculiar absence of any deeper notion of what informs revolutions. For him, post-Communist revolutions are liberal because they have a liberalising agenda and will therefore come to subscribe to various characteristics of Western liberal politics. What he fails to see is the resilience and obstinacy of past traditions and the fact that liberalism in the West as well as, if likely, in the East will be borne out of a dilemma, a struggle for finding a solution to the problem of contested histories and values, something akin to what Kapustin called an 'experiment' (cf. chapter 12).

Ackerman's false projection of political liberalism into the post-Communist space must not be taken, however, as the only possible conceptualisation of a liberal political order. It has been argued that liberals do have certain basic principles at their disposal which can assist in shaping the future political framework. This does not relieve them of any persuasive

efforts, neither of the theoretical resources for political liberalism cited above is either self-evident or uncontested. Yet, they can guide the process of identity formation once the 'modern dilemma' has been acknowledged by most of the prospective participants. This is bound to be a dynamic process, in which none of the delineations of the future polity are cast in stone. Oakeshott's characterisation of politics seems most accurately describing this activity of constantly readjusting and questioning the desirability of political arrangements in the light of new insights and inevitable social change. As Gray paraphrases Oakeshott's notion of politics: 'It is an inherently open-ended activity in which people [continually] renew their identity and communities' (Gray, 1989, p.205). Therefore any prescriptive nostrums on what Russia ought to become or what traditions and values are eternal, immutable or simply ephemeral, are only short-cuts to another disaster. Laudable though Tolz and others' visions of a Russian ethno-pluralistic pan-civic idea of politics are, they are only ideal-typical representations of desirable conditions of Russian political life. Politics, however, does not emerge from desires or wishful thinking but from the complex interplay of traditions and customs that come to be seen as either valuable or detrimental, and dispensable or indispensable, for the survival of the polity. Outlining the particular difficulties of forging a new political consensus in Russia will be the objective of the following chapter.

5. Russian Transformation and Agency – Why Agency Matters to Russia

In this chapter I will refine the previous argument about the conditions that need to be met to render Western political theory applicable in the Russian context. This requires some clarification of the common ground that political science and political thought could possibly share. Arguably, both enterprises could be perceived as different forms of enquiry altogether. Yet, I have argued above that, while Western political theory shares this assumption, it thereby dismisses too easily one important component which any form of intellectual endeavour in politics must consider: the relevance of historical conditions to the process of theorising as well as to scientific political research.

Hence I will propose to do something unusual. Political theory as a form of intellectual inquiry is generally considered to have its own methodological tools and areas of concern. The former are supposed to be mainly borrowed from philosophy and feature amongst others conceptual clarity and rigour, as well as plausibility of inference. Although there is less agreement on the initial assumptions of philosophising, the academic community certainly shares a basic reservoir of methodological tools. For political theorists there is equally considerable disagreement on what the project of political philosophy entails. There are quite a few divisions which run through the academic community, most of which are of no concern for us here. For some (the optimists), political theory has a guiding capacity in our search for a well-structured political order that may be acceptable to the many. For others, it can do little more than to elucidate intellectual fallacies and conceptual incoherences in the day-to-day business of political life (Oakeshott, 1993). Those who belong to the latter category, we may call them the sceptics (Gerencser, 2000), remind us that philosophy has no subject matter as such and that to disregard this fact would take us inevitably to the political utopias that have wreaked so much havoc on humankind in the last century. Although this particular strand of

political philosophy has been fashionable at times, its significance has receded and the 'construction workers' clearly have won out over the last two decades or so, taking courage by the success from so eminent works as Rawls' 'A Theory of Justice' or the contributions by Barry (Barry, 1996) and Gauthier (Gauthier, 1986). A wide range of differing political theories have evolved from the time of its alleged 'rebirth' in the 1970s (Gaus, 2000), only replicating the state of affairs prior to the revival of political philosophy induced by Rawls' work. No particular philosophical conviction will be advocated here. Yet, for the purpose of our objective we will proceed from a notion of political philosophy as a project which sets out the conditions of a legitimate political order in a modern society. This represents somehow the essence and indispensable common ground for almost all political theorists and it will be sufficient for our purposes. Despite its confusing variety, political theory will be treated in the argument to follow as an intellectual enquiry which shares a certain aspiration, that is to understand the terms of social co-operation which would be acceptable to most participants. Such a political theory is not necessarily liberal in all its attributes (Cahoone, 2002) but it may involve reasoning from the principles of individual liberty and a form of (non-substantive) equality.

One further premise should be equally uncontested amongst almost all political theorists: the normative nature of the enterprise. The normativity of this form of inquiry has more than any other (possibly contested) characteristic of political theory engendered the epistemological boundaries and limits within which political philosophy operates. It clearly distinguishes political theory from political science, which is generally thought to be descriptive and explanatory. These boundaries seem to demarcate areas of an entirely different methodological and theoretical nature and the fences erected around them appear daunting and insurmountable. Yet, I will attempt to question the usefulness of this division in the following chapter, since I believe there is a resource of theoretical overlap between these

two, originally distinct, projects which needs to be explored if we want to make sense of the East European transformation.

Such an attempt does in fact break new ground and therefore the risks of producing pseudo-insights for both forms of enquiry are considerable. The initial reaction of political scientists to an attempt by a political theorist to encroach upon his territory might be one of benign neglect. And so might be the reaction of a political philosopher when he is asked to think about the consequences which the collapse of the Communist regimes (i.e. reality) may have on his theorising. Yet, I think the particular impasse at which both have arrived with regard to the East European transformation warrants a look over the academic fence. Since we must proceed here with care (the wasteland between the sciences resemble methodological and epistemological minefields) I shall try to specify below as clearly as possible what this impasse consists in for both enterprises. This will be easier for political theory than for political science, but then the gains for the latter will be bigger too.

I will, firstly, discuss separately the literatures for political theory and political science which deal with Eastern Europe. In a second part I will outline the particular problems which both academic enterprises encounter and which could benefit from an infusion of the insights the other has produced. This will only be setting the scene for the actual work of correlation which I will undertake in a third part.

I

Since the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, area studies (and in particular, Sovietology) have been counted among the fatalities in political science. They had ostensibly failed to predict the collapse of the regimes even when their demise was imminent. Arguably, their methods of enquiry as well as the results they yielded had been insufficient and needed to be replaced (criticism of Sovietology has been widespread amongst political scientists in East and West. For an example of post-collapse reappraisal see the various

articles on the merits and prospect of Sovietology in Cox, 1998 and Hanson, 1995; or for a Russian view on the matter cf. Kapustin, 1998, esp. pp.195-267). Democratisation theory, the successor of old-fashioned modernisation theory, has risen to prominence once again. As political scientists sharpen their conceptual tools and debate what a most reasonable definition of democracy might look like, there has been an odd silence from political theorists with regard to the developments of the last decade in Eastern Europe. The field of East European regime transformations appears to have fallen under the interpretative hegemony of transition studies and democratisation theorists rather than political philosophers. However, I believe that this area constitutes a serious *desideratum* of philosophical research as well, for two reasons.

First, political science in its mundane form of transition theory would benefit immensely from the insights which liberal political theorists have gained about the necessary conditions of a viable liberal political order. Secondly, transition studies would be able to adopt a critical perspective on their own enterprise, in which theorists often seem to assume that only operationalisable factors count in the transformational process. Political theorists and philosophers have naturally emphasised the conditions of personal autonomy and choice thereby focussing on the contingent factors of historical development. Consequently, political scientists could treat philosophers as trespassers on their territory rather than as providing a welcome complementary (critical) perspective on their project. The stress on the contingent aspects of political transformations renders the theoretical foundations of interpretative models fragile. Equally, political theorists have rarely crossed the fence that marks their academic fiefdom. Comparative political science relies on models which sit uneasily with the language of autonomy and obligation which liberal philosophers preferably employ. There is the realm of moral choices which lies squarely in opposition to (semi) deterministic models. The rare exception here is rational choice theory, whose language, however, is often clouded and obscure to political theorists.

I suggest that this is a regrettable state and point to a range of overlap which would enable political theorists and transitologists to reassess this artificial schism within political studies. I will outline below what I call points of juncture. Initially these are locations of possible common interest; eventually, however, I believe that we can generate strong transmission belts of mutual theoretical influence from these points.

To outline these points of juncture we need to reiterate as clearly as possible the theoretical differences. Besides the normativity of political theory and the descriptive and explanatory nature of political science, there are at least two further aspects which would impede a project of common theoretical interest. Firstly, political science most usually theorises the East European transitions with the help of the concept of democracy (see the remarks of the most outspoken critic of this approach in Cohen, 1999b and Cohen, 2000). Although there is considerable disagreement over what democracy exactly means, political scientists with few exceptions shun the language of liberalism. Liberal political culture may appear in some of their conceptualisations but rarely represents an integral part of their debate (cf. Weigle, 2000). In fact, liberalisation is often treated as a first step towards democratisation (Munck, 2001; Hughes, 2000), and refers to the relaxation of strict totalitarian or authoritarian control of society rather than the development of wider liberal political attitudes or attributes of political institutions. In short, liberalism is not a focus of conceptualisation in political science and only plays an ephemeral role in democratisation theory. Most political scientists may (personally) favour the emergence of a liberal political culture in post-Communist countries yet they largely exclude it from their theoretical considerations which focus on democracy as a regulatory framework for political competition.

In contrast, liberal political theorists are of course concerned about the requirements of decidedly liberal politics. This involves reasoning from a position of individual liberties. Thus the objectives of political liberalism as a theoretical endeavour are defined both more widely and more narrowly at the same time. Political liberalism sets out to identify the conditions for

a liberal political order in a society of social, religious, and economic diversity and seeks to define the terms under which all political orientations can be accommodated in such an order. Its premises are therefore narrow and strictly defined, while the goals of reasoning are open and undefined and hence wider than political scientists would permit. Democracy might offer the best form for political accommodation but liberal political theorists are notably divided over this.

Democratisation theorists and transitologists, in contrast, define the objectives of their debate more narrowly. They focus on how to institute a democratic order while simultaneously leaving their starting point variable in order to subsume as many cases as possible under their models. These points of departure have attracted more and more attention amongst political scientists as they became aware of the relevance of historical, political and social traditions for this institutionalising process (for an overview cf. Beyme 1994, Beyme, 1996). There have been attempts to narrow models of democratisation to the most likely successful transitions, just as some political scientists have emphasised the need to widen the net in order to be able to subsume even those cases which so far have failed to democratise (Hawkins, 2001). This is fundamentally a debate on the attributes of comparability (DiPalma, 1991/1992; Terry, 1993).

Despite the wide differences between liberal political theory and political science with regard to the goal and the initial premises of theorising (liberal political culture vs. democracy), political theory and political science are, in a more general sense, concerned with a similar problem: to specify the terms of non-coerced co-operation within a polity. Where liberal political theory differs from political scientists is that, for the latter, liberties are consequences of democratic institutions whereas, for the former, they are non-negotiable fundamentals of reasoning. To put it differently, both academic projects possess profoundly different epistemological thrusts in their theorisations but a similar vision of outcomes.

Undoubtedly, this must have an impact on the possibility of relating the two forms of inquiry, as will become clear later on.

Thus we have a range of differences between political theory and transitology which we need to be aware of: normativity vs. descriptive and explanatory approach, variance in their points of departure or premises and objectives of theorising, as well as an emphasis on agency and freedom vs. the relevance of structures (democratic institutions) as guaranteeing free agency in the political realm (political participation). Out of these differences emerges some common terrain between them: non-coerced co-operation, the importance of rules for such co-operation and a desire to universalise their conceptual results. This may allow us to characterise the incompatibility of transition studies with political theory as mostly heuristic, while their compatibility may be identified in the desired outcome of theorising. I believe that this provides sufficient space for an attempt at mutual referencing.

What would be the advantages of such a project? I will argue that transition theory underestimates the importance of agency for the success of political transformation. Such an argument is not new. It has been advanced before in more sporadic attempts to rescue area studies from the onslaught of comparative science (cf. Kopecky/ Mudde, 2000, esp. p.528f.; for an over view of this debate cf. King, 2000). Yet, I will try to provide a philosophical justification which Sovietologists have not usually employed.

Since their inception in the mid-seventies, transition studies have been afflicted by an extraordinary amount of division on a whole range of issues. Political scientists first of all disagree on what 'transition' could designate and which processes and attributes it requires for its success. Additionally, the time frames of transitions have been questioned and this has led to the articulation of the concept of 'consolidation' which has, so it appears, amplified problems rather than solved them (Schmitter/Karl, 1994; for a critical review see Guo, 1999; and offering an alternative to transitology Kubicek, 2000). There is also considerable disagreement over the end result of transition, i.e. how to define democracy and how universal

the concept needs to be. This strikes at the very core of comparability, and political scientists are highly divided on this issue. Instead of discarding the concept altogether, some have tried to specify attributes of democracy which resulted in a narrowing of the comparative cases, whereas others maintained the openness of the concept, not least to salvage a reasonable empirical basis for theorisation (for methodological implications of this disagreement cf. Guo, 1999; Bunce, 1995 doubting the usefulness of some comparisons). I am here less concerned with a further contribution to this process of conceptual clarification than with the implicit assumptions which underlie the theory of democratisation. Speaking in philosophic-scientific terms, their problems originate in the nature of models as ideal characters, and the parallels to the discussion of Max Weber's concept of 'ideal cases' at the inception of German sociology are striking (cf. Weber's famous article on the 'objectivity' of knowledge in the social sciences, esp. his comments on the logical structure of the conceptualisations of ideal cases. Weber, 1988, pp.190-213). A brief overview of the debate in recent years is particularly instructive.

Although it has been claimed that transition studies are only a further elaboration of modernisation theories (Kapustin, 2001a), this claim appears highly questionable. Modernisation theories seek to identify characteristic attributes of modern societies which set them apart from traditional political and social orders. Irreversible societal processes such as industrialisation and urbanisation, so modernisation theorists argue, require new (preferably democratic) forms of political and social institutions if the polity is to remain stable. Traditional state institutions may prove unable or unwilling to react appropriately to these changes and this might undermine political regimes but modernisation theory says little about democracy as a political and social requirement for the stability of a particular regime. In fact, the connection between economic performance and democratic political institutions is often weak (Przeworski, 1996).

Definitions of democracy oscillate between a merely procedural understanding and attempts to qualify democracy as a qualitatively different category to mere rules and regulations. This indicates the significant conceptual flux in which transition studies persist. Equally fluid has been the understanding of political scientists of whether democracy is a state of affairs or a process. Although political theorists have pointed out that both concepts are inherently flawed (Haddock, 2002), I believe that viewing democracy as a process constitutes a remarkable progress in conceptualising the subject matter and represents a significant departure from a static idea of democracy which has failed to capture the most fundamental mechanism of democratic transformation. Ironically, however, this conceptual redefinition also moves democracy theory closer to its final demise and undermines its model character. Since this is important to the argument to be advanced in this chapter, I shall briefly outline what it implies.

Democracy is traditionally defined in terms of political institutions (elections, political parties, parliamentary system) and/or as an aggregate of these in various combinations of significance. This constitutes its model character with its components being easily operationalisable. This also allows political scientists to generalise democracy as a concept and render it applicable to new cases, a precondition for its use in comparative political science. However, this way democratic theory sits uneasily with the fact that Eastern European countries undergo transformations *towards* democracy and that it is this *process* which political scientists endeavour to describe. Democracy as conceptualised above represents a state of affairs rather than a process. It is an end product defined by the existence or prevalence of some clearly identifiable attributes. The description of the interim period of transition towards democracy thereby remains out of reach for this theory. Some political scientists have therefore suggested that conceiving of democratisation as a process is more appropriate to capture the transformations which are going on in post-Communist countries. They point to the sequential nature of the genesis of democracy and the possible varying

paces at which the various attributes of democracy may evolve. This introduces an element of temporality that democratic theory hitherto lacked. Yet, the problems arising from this are daunting. It amounts to less than a dissolution of the conceptual rigour of democracy. Democracy is now taken to mean a whole range of differing degrees of manifestations of the defining aspects (elections, political party systems etc.) and this can only decrease the lack of conceptual clarity as to the exact location and nature of democracy. Hypothetically, one could now point to a myriad of differing positions on the sequencing scale on which countries may be identified as democracies.

The problem can be described as one of temporalising a model or ideal type, in Weberian terminology. This is something that scientific logic precludes since, although the hope of being able to submit these models or ideal cases to historical sequences is tempting (cf. the recent work by Ertman, 1997), only a narrative can produce plausible descriptions of historical developments – a point we need to come back to later.

The impact on the generalisability of such a temporalised model of democratic transformation should be apparent now. With the plurality of ‘entry’ points to democracy on a sequential scale of different attributes comes a fuzziness of the concept itself that is hard to eliminate. This also decreases the possibility of generalisability of the overall concept of democracy. The more attributes are co-ordinated on a time scale and their applicability as sufficient conditions of democracy is debated, the more the generalisable concept shifts towards descriptions of singular cases and thus loses its comparative potential – something of which Max Weber was already aware a century ago. He pointed out that ideal types can collapse into cases of singular applicability when characteristics are too much refined (Weber, 1988). This is the basic logical tension at the bottom of democratisation theory which we need to bear in mind.

A similarly contentious issue arose when political scientists debated the role of agents in the transformational process. Usually agents are readily operationalised as independent

variables, which does not pose a problem to the overall theory of democratisation. In this respect, the growing sensitivity of political scientists to the effect individuals can have in the transitional period has increased the applicability of the theory rather than diminished it. Problematic, however, is the often unexplored relationship between agents and the institutional and social structure that surrounds and conditions their behavior. Comparative studies have pointed to the significance of individual players in the transition period for regime stability. Yet, the explanation of their intentions and motives requires separate theories which can hardly be integrated into theories of democratisation. To explain agents' behaviour political scientists need to problematise the political and social environment as well as the potential goals and aspirations of the agents (cf. Lewis, 2002). Agents thus connect different situational contexts by acting intentionally and on discernible motives. This is a problem for democratisation theory, not because the agent's role cannot be taken into account, but because the agent's intentions are naturally informed and conditioned by an environment which, during transitions, is (by definition) constantly in flux. Democratisation theory does not lack the component of agency itself but the necessary flexibility to account for changes in motivation and intention which necessarily occur as transitions progress and accomplish partially or entirely the targets pursued.

In order to operationalise agency in transition studies, stable surrounding structures are required which may allow the agent to define lasting objectives. Yet, this prerequisite for stable agency is exactly what is absent in such fundamental economic and political transformations as occur in the post-Communist countries. This calls for a readjustment or redefinition of the agent-structure relation in transformation studies.

These two aspects, I believe, provide the points of juncture where political theory can be usefully employed for the theory of post-Communist transition. To recapitulate: the theory of democracy has diversified its operationalisable components and subsequently submitted them to sequencing. This inclusion of a temporal element is duly reflected in the use of the

term democratisation, which indicates a process rather than a fixed state of affairs. Additionally, and inadvertently, it moves transition theory closer to a narrative structure of affairs which undermines its model or ideal type character and thus its comparative aspirations. The second aspect under review was how transition theory conceptualises agency. And it appears questionable that a simplified account of agency as being conditioned by extraneous structures will be sufficient under the conditions of radical transience in post-Communist societies. Although the fact that political scientists have become more sensitive to the issue of agency in transformations represents a big step forward, it is doubtful whether a merely descriptive approach to agency in transitions can be sustained. It reiterates the doubts raised earlier about uncertainty as an abstract principle. However, in times of post-Communist transformation, I believe it reaches deeper than suspected and this demands a conceptualisation rather than a mere incorporation of it as an exogenous factor in transitional processes.

II

The absence of concern with East European transitions among liberal political theorists is startling not least because a vital component of most political theories is but a process of transition. The following remarks serve as a clarification of the extent to which political transformations in Eastern Europe can be comprehended as mirroring political contractarian theories. This requires us to take a closer look at how deeply involved normative issues are in 'really existing' transitions. In what follows I will be mainly concerned with locating and evaluating the normativity of political order as construed by liberal political philosophers. This will enable us to assess more closely the chances of relating transition theories to political liberalism and how far their different nature could inhibit such an endeavour.

Ever since Hobbes formulated his theory of societal compact in 1651, many liberal political theorists have followed closely in his steps. Most contractarian theories involve a

pre-political stage in which human behavior is governed by principles of human rationality and a limited amount of co-operation. This allows members of the community to grasp the necessity and desirability of a political order which is to be established by a minimum of mutual obligation which everyone undertakes to pledge. Even more recent re-formulations follow this pattern closely, although emphasising the consequences of reasoning from the position of individual freedoms and equality (Rawls, 1992 and 1993). The normative character of contractarian theories springs from the basic principles which are deemed necessary to establish an ideal (but not utopian) political order which accommodates various political, religious or economic conceptions of the common good. Since these conceptions might be mutually exclusive, some political theorists indicate the framework character of such a political order and its non-comprehensiveness or non-substantive nature (Rawls, 1992; Oakeshott, 1990). Now, it seems important to realise that, however liberal political philosophers reach their conclusions, the order to be established encapsulates a normative content as long as their foundations represent principles of human nature which are taken to imply the inevitability of ethical behavior.

Or, to put it differently, freedom as an essential condition for a fulfilling life is a value, not a fact. Whether or not it is a value in itself or derivative since it enables us to pursue other valuable goals is of little consequence here (cf. Raz, 1986). The normative character of liberal political theory as an intellectual inquiry therefore hinges on its foundations: personal liberties which inevitably carry normative implications.

Does this mean that liberal political theory has no bearing whatsoever on the issue of political transformations? If liberal political theory is concerned with normative questions, what can it contribute to a form of inquiry that is admittedly descriptive? Given this sceptical argument we need to establish the exact realm in which the overlap between the two academic disciplines can possibly be located, while we can surmise that the boundaries of such a field of congruity will mostly be determined by the extent to which political liberalism can assert

the relevance of normative principles within the area of transition studies. Thus, the following tentative considerations are motivated by the need of a justification for the encroachment of the theory of political liberalism onto transition studies.

There are some liberal political theorists who have pursued a similar project. Haddock and Caraiani have persuasively argued that political debates on the future of the polity inevitably take the shape of normative arguments. To believe that democratisation is a process according to a pre-conceived plan is naive (Haddock/ Caraiani, 2002). Yet, they have not provided a reason as to why transition theorists should take notice of this other than an acknowledgement of the deep personal dilemma in which former elites as well as ordinary people have been placed by the post-Communist transformations. I will argue that we can construct a good reason for such an adjustment in transition studies by exploring and characterising the particular situation in which agents operate under conditions of transition.

Liberal political philosophers operate with a distinction between two different spheres which are hypothetically arranged along a time sequence. Usually, these spheres differ in either their basic principles or some additional attributes. They are often called the pre-political and the political stages. Political liberalism grapples with the problem of how to generate the latter from the former in a logically consistent fashion and by adhering to principles which are contained in the former. Hobbes thought that a form of limited rationality would be sufficient for people to agree on the fundamentals of a social contract which would engender a stable political order. This limited rationality endures beyond the moment of contracting and ensures that (now) citizens remain convinced of the benefits of this arrangement. The environment in which people form this contract ideally features individual freedom and absence of coercion. Thus, although some political theorists might emphasise the generating capacity of the contract and would stress the difference between the pre-political and the political stage, the relation between the two is one of continuity rather than discontinuity. It is, however, exactly the possible surplus produced by the contract which

allows us to understand contractarian political liberalism as a form of transition. One could reformulate this issue by re-phrasing the process in constitutional terms. Establishing a liberal polity rests on a constituting act. This act cannot be governed by principles which can only be an outcome of political competition submitted to an agreed regulatory framework (such as parliamentary democracy). This difference contains its singular character and also its problematic nature. Although we can specify the principles according to which people must decide on the future concrete shape of the polity, they do not have un-contentious rules of interpretation at hand (Locke, 1993).

Empirically this fundamental difference between the actions constituting a polity and, subsequently, the establishment of its political arena is corroborated by the existence of constitutional councils or assemblies in many states which have collapsed due to external pressure or have had to be re-built due to historical circumstances. Often these constitutional assemblies were in fact not legitimated in the ordinary democratic fashion, a story easily recognisable in contemporary pre-constitutional councils such as the current EU Convention on the Future of Europe.

The intrinsic relationship between these constitutional assemblies and subsequent ordinary political parliaments is then one of continuity and discontinuity alike. Often the former are informed by democratic ideals yet do not necessarily conform to the political rules which are an outcome of their work. The resemblance to political liberalism in its contractarian form should be apparent now. The pre-political, as contractarians define it, is governed by principles which continue to influence politics as it comes to be established subsequently. Yet, in addition to this, rules and regulations are introduced, not least to provide the necessary legitimation of punishment in case of non-obedience. So although political liberalism is suffused with normativity which resides in its guiding principles of the pre-political sphere, structurally it resembles closely the empirical process of constituting a polity. To put it differently, just as the pre-political differs from the political proper, so

reconstructing politics is a different engagement to practising politics under agreed norms and regulations which are enshrined in a constitutional document.

Consequently, the question as to how agency could possibly differ in the pre-political realm as opposed to the sphere of established politics must be at the centre of theoretical concern. This is something in which political theory can guide us, even though the range of alternative answers to this question comprises wildly different philosophical approaches. I will outline briefly below what could be called a general account of agency, stripped of the particularities of the various philosophical doctrines. Proceeding from there I suggest ways of differentiating between the pre-political and the political in terms of human agency and, lastly, delineate some ways in which consequences of previous considerations can be traced for transition studies.

Neither transitology nor any particular theory of politics has claimed to be able to dispense with a conception of agency altogether. In fact, transitology was thought to represent a considerable theoretical advancement in comparison to modernisation theory insofar as the former provided some room for the role of agency in the transformation process. Critics have pointed out that this conceptual space was severely limited, and hence flawed, since the efforts of transitologists focused mainly on capturing the influence of elites upon the instigation of democratic politics.

Furthermore, I have already remarked on the ironic side of this development, since it brings democratisation theory considerably closer to political theory than political scientists may like to admit. The motivation for such a slow undermining of the theoretical core premises of democratisation studies must be seen in the limits for explaining the events of 1989 without taking into account the contingent and often irritable effects of human agency. As pointed out earlier, since human agency is operationalisable to a certain degree it does not pose a particular problem to democratisation studies, yet, it does present a challenge to the coherence of its theoretical foundations.

For liberal political theory, in contrast, human agency has always formed a critical part of its enterprise, even though it has not been sufficiently problematised with regard to societies in transformation. Without penetrating too deeply into the bewildering range of different conceptions of agency, it will suffice here to outline a reasonable conception of agency that commands widespread philosophical backing, and would assist us in formulating the possible requirements for stable (or meaningful) political agency.

The objection might arise that human agency as a general category of understanding is necessarily different from political agency. This claim would undermine any chances of philosophy to be in a position to say anything substantial and valuable for political science. Although there is a philosophical justification as well as a repudiation of this claim (Oakeshott, 1993a and 1993b), I will avoid this issue here. I believe that the philosophical doubts with respect to the viability of differentiating between accounts of political and human agency in general have merits but limited relevance to the matter dealt with in this section.

For some political philosophers of our day, human agency hardly invites specific consideration beyond the conventional Kantian frame of reference. Rawls adopts a broadly Kantian notion of human agency and deems it sufficient, mainly because he focuses on the issue of autonomy but also because his is an analysis of political morality as it exists in functioning non-transitional societies where the norms and principles of political interaction grew out of the existing political institutions. The benign neglect with which many liberal political philosophers have treated the problem of human agency and the readiness on their part often to adopt a Kantian position might have contributed to the fact that a conservative political thinker has increasingly moved centre stage on the issue of human agency. Michael Oakeshott's notion of civil association has received heightened interest in recent years, while the conservative thrust of his thought is by no means diminished or neglected (Coats, 1985; Coats, 2000; Devigne, 1999, Gerencser, 2000). In fact, we might witness currently a modest

revival of conservative thought spurred on by the need to come to terms with the possible modification of what have been hitherto immutabilities of human life (Cahoone, 2002).

Two notions developed by Oakeshott might be particularly useful here. His idea of civil association aims to clarify the necessary conditions for free human agency. This in itself can provide the normative backdrop to the present considerations. On the other hand, his conception of authority supports and underpins this notion of civil association insofar as the normative condition of human behaviour consists in a recognition of rules whose voluntarism is less than sufficient for the sustenance of the polity. Oakeshott derives this idea from Hobbes and points to the invaluable suggestion that to undermine and diminish authority, which is based on voluntary agreement of the individual to non-substantive rules of behaviour to be subscribed to in the course of his actions, is to reject any meaningful notion of authority as well as to endanger the liberty which the establishment of authoritative powers is supposed to enhance. Oakeshott thus illuminates the crucial, and often neglected, connection between political order, as a set of rules to be coercively implemented, and human freedom. The viability of his link, he argued, depends on the character of these rules rather than on the extent of authority, which by definition is not circumscribed.

Transferring this argument to the context of political transitions, this would reiterate the need for a stable political order in times of transformation if human agency is to be effectual. It reinforces the idea of the primacy of rules over unregulated conduct – a point which has repercussions for the concept of liberty. Yet, within the Oakeshottian theoretical setting, the problem arises how a lack of rules affects human agency and Oakeshott's normative account of personal liberty and authority say precious little about this.

The most significant dimensions in which agency would be a focus of theoretical debate would be to understand how actions grow out of, and are embedded (in terms of justification) in, a usually rich and often ambivalent web of social structures. Agents and their actions are often fatefully conditioned by this ambivalence which, in an extreme case, can

inhibit acting altogether. In a Heideggerian sense, to act is to reveal the commitments one is willing to make, just as it exhibits one's interpretation of the various and often conflicting meanings of social norms and precepts. In Oakeshottian terms, by acting one is disclosing one's identity or, alternatively, one is taking a stance on the project of one's life into the future (Heidegger). Yet, existentialist language obfuscates rather than elucidates the extent to which acting is dependent on the offerings of pre-existing social structures and norms.² The latter, as it were, pre-digest the sheer multitude of options for any agent and relate them in a hierarchical way which makes them meaningful for individuals. Without such a pre-selective screening or filtering function, acting would be almost impossible since an agent would lack the tools for evaluating his options (Taylor, 1985; Cahoon, 2002). This is a consequence of the view which portrays values as a necessary condition for human choice and of Berlin's claim that these values might well be incompatible. Accepting this would involve shifting the significance of factors which enable meaningful agency to the traditions and customs which surround the prospective agent. Such a picture of human agency has, more recently, often supported the argument for the positive impact of civil society on viable choice. Yet, traditions are not as unambiguous in the modern world as they might previously have been. And the theoretical challenge to utilise the customs and traditions encoded in stable societies as a benchmark for agency could not have been far off (Raz, 1986). The challenge then is to decipher the causal connection between action and social structure (Lewis, 2002).

It might be helpful to differentiate between four argumentative scenarios which require separate attention. These are logically possible arguments, yet not of the same reasonable standing. Firstly, one could argue that rules and norms engendered by the agent's interpretation of society's actualities are neither applicable nor necessary for human agency. These are mere justifications which agents provide for their own actions rather than an intrinsic and indispensable part of agency. Philosophically such a position would require an

² Existentialism intended to merge the two rather than to differentiate

amount of 'decisionism' (in Nietzschean usage – random choice) to explain human action which appears quite difficult to sustain. A more moderate version, however, can be formulated in order to generate a justification for the inauguration of a polity or constitutional choice. The term radical constitutionalism might appropriately capture the amount of 'decisionism' in this reconstruction of agency and political norms. Secondly, one could contest the relevance of rules and norms on a more general level and defend this position with the argument that agency is the actual generator of rules. This position is theoretically different from the previous one insofar as the latter does not adopt a radical stance towards the relevance of justification of action. A proponent of such a position may want to stress that, although agency might emerge out of an environment devoid of rules and norms, it is nevertheless not arbitrary or pure decisionism. If one wanted to sustain such a position one would have to indicate alternative sources for providing grounds for actions other than a normative framework enshrined in pre-existing societal habits and traditions. On a more useful note, however, such a view hints at the creative role agency plays in exercising choice.

Thirdly, one could conceive of agency and rules as mutually sustaining and inseparable but logically distinguishable dimensions of human action. Such a view would have to explain how we came to differentiate between agency and structure and why an argument in favour of a more pronounced distinction between the two is philosophically mistaken and hard to sustain in practice. Although this third view might appear to be acceptable in a general sense, it would have to provide a philosophical backing that seems hard to come by. Existentialism has attempted to formulate just this and I do not propose to assess the validity of its philosophical claims here. Yet, what appears more to the point is that such a view would render the guiding question of this inquiry quite irrelevant. If rules and agency are the two sides of one and the same coin and we accept that no rule free environment as such exists, however distorted and morally twisted some political traditions and social habits might be, then the question about the depth of the challenges of transitions to human agency is

trivialised. It side-steps the issue of how they are related and what the nature of this relation is. Such a notion, however, needs to be distinguished clearly from a similar view of agency, the fourth, which accepts that agency cannot be and is virtually never exercised without some pre-existing rules. In this last view the connection between the social environment and agency is yet to be problematised, while in the former it is circumvented on its problematic side. This last notion of agency seems to be most reasonable and represents a convenient starting point for the present considerations. It neither privileges nor prioritises agency or social rules, something which matches neatly the fact that transitional societies do not operate in a vacuum of rules but under conditions of a radical re-evaluation of them. To characterise these conditions more clearly is our next task.

Political theorists notably disagree on what conditions must be met in order to facilitate meaningful agency. These conditions have one thing in common, however. They are suffused with normative assumptions, whether as a form of (Western) rationality (Kant, Rawls) or a thicker description of social institutions and habituated traditions (Hegel's insistence on the role Christianity played in the evolution of Western society. Hegel, 1991; Patten, 2001). In fact, encapsulated in Hegel's critique of the contractarian model are some significant aspects which are worthwhile considering when examining the conditions of agency.

In understanding agency one engages in an enterprise of the intellect. Therefore we are concerned with actions which are not accidental but deliberate. The quest for a thorough understanding of agency builds on one or another form of rationality and precludes the acceptance and affirmation of the coincidental as valuable conditions of reasoning. Proceeding from this position, we can lay out some circumstances which are deemed necessary as well as desirable for this rational engagement. Although political theories are highly diverse in structure, objective and method, they concur in accepting that societies are arenas of human interaction with certain specifiable frameworks which ultimately have to render this social co-operation possible. Thus philosophers have constructed a minimum of

requirements of human existence upon which any model of social co-operation must rest. It must provide a matrix of valuable options which enables choice. This is identical neither with political stability nor with societal pluralism. The latter features would require an additional argument, but Oakeshott and others have articulated a minimalist foundation for politics in pointing to the necessary consequences of the need for social co-operation and the frequent tension or even conflict between the various ends people pursue. He characterised the political order as a coercive framework stipulating conditions to which people must subscribe in pursuit of their more substantive wants and desires. These conditions are non-substantive and do not prescribe certain actions. They act as a form of grammar of conduct and politics is consequently the way we think about changing and re-adjusting these grammatical rules to bring them into line with the changing ethical outlooks and norms in society. For societies undergoing major transformations the question arises then as to which rules are the most desirable or suitable to foster a viable outcome, a stable political regime. The particular dilemma remains unsolved with this notion of politics insofar as it does not indicate the guiding principles which need to inform the pre-political engagement from which politics could arise.

Hegel's critique of the social contract, however, is more indicative here (Hegel, 1991; Taylor, 1995, esp. pp.428-461; Patten, 2001). For him freedom as precondition for human agency is only possible in a situation in which people act from a pre-existing social environment which provides meaningful choice and the capacity to choose. Others have argued along similar lines that some social institutions are antecedent to and facilitate human choice, in much the same ways that language, a national identity and culture do. In the context of post-Communist transformations, to emphasise these prerequisites of human agency would be to magnify the standing of at times rather malign principles and ideas. East European transformations have often been accompanied and afflicted by a reiteration of ethnic and nationalist conceptions of identity. In fact, in the historically discontinuous context of Eastern

and Central European post-Communist societies, the occasional lack of conceptions of ethnic and cultural identity have often motivated Central-East Europeans to resuscitate chauvinistic, rather than cosmopolitan, notions of citizenship as well as exclusive, rather than inclusive, concepts of nationality (cf. Cohen, 1999). Thus, although Hegel's critical remarks concerning a free-floating agency remain valid, they throw the argument back to square one.

If the fourth notion of agency is somehow concordant with general assumptions about social action we are confronted with two logically distinct problems. Firstly, which means are available to people in constructing a stable lasting political order. And secondly, which guiding principles can assist in this endeavour. I have already hinted at the argumentative force of what liberal political theorists call weak foundationalism (Haddock, 2000). This in fact might do a lot of work here. The need to co-operate and the awareness of human vulnerability have a constraining effect.

It should be clear now that the hitherto insoluble problem of how to derive the political from the pre-political is not one of guiding norms and principles. It is one of means, of how this inevitably normative engagement is forged in an environment broadly hostile to Western liberal political categories and assumptions. It is therefore a problem of re-structuring a normative engagement, not one of determining the norms and precepts which will guide participants in this debate. To accept this point is not to accept Western political order (Haddock/Caraianu, 1999). It is neither to confirm the universality of Western politics nor to regard such a universality as desirable. It is only to adopt Oakeshott's argument that, if one conceives of politics as a stipulation of the conditions of social interaction, one inherently and simultaneously must take on board the assumption that the way one thinks about politics helps to define the configuration of this intellectual engagement. To perceive politics as a debate on the desirability of moral precepts cast into legal non-substantive restrictions is to concede that it is a conversation between free citizens.

Naturally one could think of forms of politics which depart from this prescription. Yet, in Oakeshottian terms, this would hardly qualify as politics in the sense of a dialogue between intelligent and free people deliberating the norms and ethical principles to be applied and enforced through a political order. However, the resources for this conversation that are available to people in transformation societies vary immensely and pose the real obstacle to democratic politics. This ongoing conversation is thus constantly endangered by the possibility that people might draw upon illiberal conceptions of nationality and ethnicity or other notions of identity which are discordant with the principle of non-substantiality laid out above.

If post-Communist transformations can be understood fundamentally as challenges to the means for re-constructing a viable polity, the first reservoir of available rules may reside in the already existing patterns of co-operation. It seems entirely plausible to assume that these societies do not operate in an utter void of rules and regulations but retain a whole range of more or less functioning institutions which originated in the previous regime. Even in the post-Communist world it would be hard to envisage a society under total collapse in which no institutions are working and everything would have to be built from scratch. In fact, transition theory has had to come to terms with the lingering continuities of formal institutions as well as of informal personal networks. Reformers have often expressed their dismay at the fact that post-Communist societies are built on existing foundations which inform (and deform) the process of political re-constructing and permeate the future polity with Communist legacies. Havel's notion of radical continuity epitomises the desire to turn this into an advantage for the post-totalitarian society.

The theoretical challenge, however, consists in the lack of congruity between these preconceived traditions and the ideal of democratic political societies sketched above. Traditions usually carry precepts prescriptive of certain behaviour in given situations. This would conflict with Oakeshott's definition of political association as a framework of rules of

conduct. Politics as a practice ought to differ from prescriptions of behaviour insofar as it is to identify the degree of desirability of conditions of conduct, not certain activities themselves. Oakeshott's terminology is particularly instructive here. Politics as a conversation (Oakeshott, 1991) can only materialise if there are certain ground rules set out and widely accepted which stabilise the public realm in which negotiation and deliberation about the desirability of these conditions take place. These basic rules which facilitate politics as conversation cannot, however, be subject to the deliberating process, lest politics is never initiated in the first place. For Oakeshott this is a historical problem, not one of political theory (Oakeshott, 1990, esp. chapter 3). And he responds by presenting the process of the emergence of Western liberal (and democratic) politics as a story contingent on a myriad of factors, comprising not least of all the element of the slow but steady retreat of substantive religious and ethnic conceptions of political order (Oakeshott, 1990, chapter 3).

Yet, for post-Communist societies the hurdle cannot be overcome in a period of time of such historical dimensions. Re-constructing politics, or the shift from the pre-political to the political, is a momentous process burdened with the pressing economic and social needs of the population. It is, indeed, a dilemma of existential scope (Haddock/Caraiani, 2002).

The question then is not how to derive non-substantive political rules from substantive conceptions of politics, but how to inaugurate and maintain politics as a mode of non-coerced conversation with basic rules that facilitate more or less equal participation of the adherents of the various political views (resembling a Habermasian scenario). These pre-political principles that regulate the initially unimpeded exchange of views and opinion, however, will not be found in such intellectually high-flying ideas as rationality or reason, as some Kantians and Neo-Kantians suggest. Such a view would not correspond to the realities of the post-Communist societies in which political institutions (however distorted and often appropriated by particularistic interests) do exist and impact upon the process of re-construction. To rest the work of political re-configuration on mere ideas of rationality and/or reason would only

increase the remoteness of liberal political theory from the dilemmas of actual political transformations. It thus must be only through shrewdly nurturing and re-adjusting the existing institutions that politics can come to life. But how can post-Communist institutions, understood as forming the pre-political, assist in building the political arena?

III

Part of the problem of employing the language of liberal Western political theory in the context of post-Communist states is the attractiveness of its high level of abstraction. It suggests a universality which is constantly belied by the very real difficulties of economic and political transformation in Eastern Europe. Western liberal political philosophers may no less be implicated in these problems than the East European reformers who naively thought that the biggest transformational challenge would consist in a mere West-East transfer of abstract ideas while simultaneously readjusting them to the particular local conditions. In contrast, liberal political theorists in the West seemed to have perceived the abstraction of their terminology as a sufficient shield against the suffusion of their semantic constructions by particular Western historical and political traditions.

Western political observers then too often and too glibly have attributed subsequently the political and economic dilemmas of Eastern Europe to a lack of proper application of Western conceptual tools. What remains out of sight, with sometimes tragic consequences, is that the belief in the universality of the abstract language employed in liberal political theory is profoundly mistaken and may rather be seen as serving as a deceptive tool in order to maintain the integrative function of liberal political theory within the West. The extent to which Western liberal political philosophers seem to be oblivious to this function of political theory as a reassuring prop for a now globalised political debate on the merits of liberal democracy and their claim of the conceptual superiority of the West, which hinges on its

capacity to abstract, reveals little more than the absence of critical reflection on the historical contingency of the Western mode of political thought.

In the context of an attempt to relate Western liberal political theory to the Russian transformation, however, the delicacy of such an undertaking should now become obvious. What is required is a de-construction of the appropriation of Western terminology, in order to provide the critical element which Western political theorists try to fend off by persistently fusing rationality with universality.

To put it differently, one needs to delineate the boundaries and internal structures of what the pre-political could look like in a post-Communist society, or how borrowed terminology acquires new meaning and is often converted into its opposites due to the historical and intellectual context (for an excellent analysis of the post-Communist Russian political ideologies cf. Lester, 1995; and for a convincing account of the transfer and modification of a Western intellectual concept into the Russian context cf. Shlapentokh, 1997).

Political transformations are highly complex bundles of relationships in a process of re-appraisal. They are characterised by factors that can be operationalised, such as status and formation of elites, exit strategies from the failed regime, emerging party systems, preference for certain constitutional configurations, the existence or absence of charismatic political leaders and so forth.

Yet, in the language of political normativity, periods of far-reaching transformation in post-Communist countries are above all framed by the moral and ethical claims and failures of the previous political regime. And whereas liberal regimes advocate only a minimum of political and legal standards which are supposed to facilitate uncoerced social co-operation, Communism has held and promoted an incomparably more comprehensive view of politics. It is this comprehensive character of the Communist doctrine which, in conjunction with its historical origin in the (West) European Enlightenment, frustrates the constructive re-

configuration of the pre-political. To disentangle the Communist legacy and to grasp its impact on the viability of any political order is therefore a function of two distinct processes of comprehension. Firstly, to set out what Communism was and which claims it propagated, and secondly, to determine what these claims amounted to in reality. Both areas (claim and reality) contribute in the interim period to the disparagement of prospective liberal and democratic politics and delegitimise crucial components of the conversational form of politics for which Oakeshott argued so persuasively.

Stating the claims and theoretical pretences of Communism as an ideology is to step on a well-trodden path. I shall therefore focus specifically on those aspects that bear some significance in the current theoretical context. Apart from its various claims on the political, social and economic life of humankind, Communism transmitted a particularly disturbing message about the nature and possibility of knowledge which matters for our context. It asserted that the history of societies as well as their future are decipherable and that there would be one singular interpretation which approximated the truth most closely and which thus mandated a specific social class to act in a particular way. This epistemological claim about the past and future of societies rested on the allegedly scientific character of Marxism. With it came the alleged validity of Marxist ideas on societal structures (classes) and economic relations (mode of production, means of production etc.). These views informed an idea of politics that envisioned a non-competitive, harmonious political arena based on the concurrence of interests as opposed to the antagonistic class struggle pervading pre-Communist societies. This promise of a harmonious and non-conflictive politics is of particular interest here. It predetermines popular post-Communist expectations in two ways.

On the one hand, the failure of Communist politics prepares popular sentiment for the futility of expecting a harmonious political life and increases the acceptance of political conflict which exceeds the framed and regulated political negotiation and competition. Two results may be an overemphasis on politics as a struggle and a delegitimation of political

compromise. Post-Communist opposition parties which have originated in dissident groups have painfully experienced exactly this rift between expectations and the dissident's idea of politics, which defines politics mainly in opposition to the state.

On the other hand, however, Communism's ideal of politics may also have influenced popular sentiment in the opposite way. It might have inculcated citizens with an idealistic portrayal of what politics ought to look like and which will, in any case, be hard to sustain. Democratic politics after all is the art of compromise, which by definition is precluded from absolutist ethical considerations. Politics that has been infused with ethical claims (such as harmony and substantive equality) is inevitably inimical to negotiation. Any democratic political order would appear strangely incompatible with such an ethically underscored political vision.

This may serve as an example as to how Communist ideology has distorted normal understanding of political institutions. The reason for this process of distortion seems clear. It is the double nature of Communism as an heir to the enlightenment tradition of thought as well as a propagator of claims to have transcended the project's sceptical component and transformed it into a proper science of human relations. This double nature acts as something like a prism through which Western liberal political discourse is sent and fans out in a myriad of disparate positions. To rein them back in is a prerequisite to make sense of the Western debate on post-Communist politics and its usefulness for Central and Eastern Europe. It is essentially nothing less than a project of semantic de-construction under the circumstances of shifting historical interpretations.

In fact, however, Communist politics in practice approximated nothing like its own pretentious ideal. This is the second dimension of the pre-political stage from which democratic politics must be instigated. Political life in the Communist reality involved high levels of physical and psychological coercion. This intrusion of the authorities into private lives was commonplace. In fact, the private realm largely ceased to exist as a distinguishable

sphere of non-political social relations under the constant pressures from the regime to standardise human life and punish 'aberrations' from the declared norm. More importantly, civil society was incapacitated to such a degree that it probably all but ceased to exist (cf. Hosking, 1992, for a different account; for useful analyses of the concept of civil society in the Russian context Zweerde, 1999, and Kharkhordin, 1998) or, when revitalised through the dissident movement, it adopted a decidedly anti-statist/anti-institutionalist approach. In the Russian context this unfortunately coincided with the traditional stance of the intellectual elite, which consistently defined itself in opposition to a authoritarian state (cf. Yelena Bonner's characterisation of political opposition as portrayed in Gessen, 1997, p.167f.). This has palpably hampered a constructive role for civil society in the re-constitution of political order: Applying the stricter criteria of Hegel's notion of civil associations, we might even speak of a serious malfunction of civil society. On the other side, Communist reality had shown little concern for the proclaimed goal of acting in the interests of the 'working class'. Once the small Communist elite had hijacked the state apparatus, it removed all constraints on the ways it was used and produced an elaborate system of co-opting new members without endangering its grip on the political institutions. The nomenklatura system was probably a shrewder version of power retention by an elite than any 'elite theorist' could have ever imagined.

This is a highly selective list of some salient features of Communist reality. The particular ways in which they have interacted with the Communist ideals and pretences have decisively shaped the post-Communist pre-political sphere. Transformation periods are thus a transmutation of Communist politics both as it existed and as it was thought to be. Most importantly, the idea of liberalism suffered from being projected through this perverted prism of human relations (on the problem of 'being a liberal' cf. Chuprinin, 1995). This has motivated observers to speak of the merely relational character of political ideologies in Russia (Simonsen, 2001, esp. pp.266-269). The contents of political positions cannot stabilise

themselves in an environment that is little more than a playful employment of words and concepts emptied of any meaningful reference to reality whose stable frames have evaporated before the vagaries of life in a country undergoing shock 'therapy' and 'big bang' institutional transformation.

From here we can re-formulate the dilemma of post-Communist societies as it presents itself to a more fortunate participant in the political order in the West. Not only have social and political institutions been delegitimised, but they also carry a variety of meanings which can only be determined referentially rather than in absolute terms. We might usefully read the operating conditions of societal participant as conditions of heuristic or semantic radicalism. The pre-political as the arena for the generation of societal conversation on the future of the polity is in a retarded state. How does this translate into the domain of political theory?

One of the functions of the pre-political is to constitute the participants of the 'conversation' that is to be established. It configures the way future political citizens want to talk about politics. The outcome of such a prefiguration is open: one could envisage that most of the prospective members of such prospective community may find any such conversation uncongenial and prefer not to subject themselves to any structure or pattern of rules. They may believe that they would benefit most from an unregulated political sphere rather than from one which stipulates rules and norms to which citizens are required to adhere. It is, in effect, the problem that people can and do anticipate their position in a future society whereby they extrapolate from their current situation and capabilities. Rawls' veil of ignorance is an attempt to solve this problem by introducing a hypothetical device which screens out any prior information from which people can deduce their rank and status in a future society (for one of the very few attempts at relating Rawls' political theory to actual political transformation cf. Friedman, 1998). But the present concern exhibits a different perspective for theorising the pre-political in societies undergoing transformation. Whereas Rawls seeks to erect a universal edifice of political justice and asks how this may influence the shape of

political institutions, transformation societies act and operate not only from a platform of diverse personal aspirations and outlooks but also in an environment in which political meanings are referential rather than absolute (*heuristic radicalism*). This deviates from mere societal diversity insofar as it inhibits the initial discourse that is so essential to the pre-political. As Kizelev writes about the loss of an unambiguous political culture and its effects on language:

‘...we borrow from the West not so much institutions as terminology. But terms alter their meaning when translated, and no longer represent what they did in the Western thought. Therein lies our great difficulty with contemporary intellectual disputes, in particular in regard to politics. People do not so much effectively oppose one another as they become confused over terms, because of the lack of culture of Russian political language. Once there was only one political culture- the Orthodox culture and the language that corresponded to it. But since the imperial period, Russia has discussed political topics only in a ‘French-Nizhnii Novgorod’ dialect.’ (Kizelev, 1999, p.73)

Or as Western liberal political theorists would put it, the hitherto uncontested foundations of public reason which allow convergence of views relating to a ‘distinctive public set of issues’ (Ridge, 1998, p.538) have evaporated under the onslaught of modernity. While the story of Western liberalism is much entwined with the gradual renaissance of political discourse which underpins the various emanations of public reason and produces a minimum of (semantic) accord, post-Communist societies labour under the effects of communism’s distorted visions of the Enlightenment tradition often seem to have great difficulty in recovering or reconstituting this bare minimum of heuristic concordance.

It should be noted that, while ‘common’ heuristic radicalism can be perceived as mainly a semantic issue, the fault-lines of the same phenomenon occurring in post-Communist societies run deeper than the mere discordance of views on how to settle (rules to solve) disputes in the public sphere. Richard Sakwa has argued that Russian ideas of subjectivity inhibit the formation of a viable political sphere insofar as they grow out of an expansive notion of private sociality which abrogates political life as regulated social

interaction. Or, to put it differently, the social sphere has been dislocated under the pressures of Communist pseudo-politics to the private realm (Sakwa, 1995). The result is an anti-political sentiment which can be understood as a political culture inimical to the very idea of politics.

This strikes at a deeper and more debilitating level than mere semantics and indicates an additional aspect of the heuristic radicalism which conditions the pre-political in post-Communist societies. It relates to the conditions of agency on which transitional politics must build its foundations. It also illuminates the prerequisite for liberal hypothetical contractarianism. If political justice is to be an outcome of contractarian deliberation, it requires a willingness on the side of prospective citizens to conceive of the political to be constituted as an essential part or precondition of their life-plans. Political liberalism in the contractarian mould might feed on an Aristotelian conception of politics/ republicanism that most Western liberal political theorists are unwilling to explore as their foundation for politics.

The concept of heuristic radicalism (in lieu of a more suitable term) captures the theoretical challenges of political transformations in Russia and by the same token relates to the difficulties of transitology and liberal political theory in the little common ground identified above. If political theory is preoccupied with reducing or eliminating altogether the uncertainty of transition, i.e. facilitating the transfer from the pre-political to the political stage by institutionalising contingency, then it must specify the enabling conditions for human agency. Heuristic radicalism may indicate a profound obstacle (besides many others) for a Russian successful transformation, which lies in the absence of a minimum of stability of the interpretative or discursive framework. Without this heuristic edifice, the initial stage of liberal politics, the pre-political 'conversation' which is supposed to specify the rules of negotiating or, to put it in Oakeshottian terms, the way the future participants of political negotiations decide to talk about politics, is unlikely to materialise.

A couple of points are emerging from this argument which political scientists as well as political philosophers need to take into account. Firstly, it illustrates that political negotiations on the foundations of polities require a degree of terminological stability as a pre-requisite for agency that appears to be crucially absent (as yet) in the Russian context. To rephrase this point in the language of liberal political theorists, successful political transformations might considerably depend on a stringency of the (pre-political) discourse between the participants of the prospective political order. It seems more likely than not that such a minimum of discursive coherence which enables meaningful agency is a product of a long historical development and is therefore absent during the periods of far-reaching transformations. It also appears highly unlikely that it will either be successfully adopted from the West, or that it will emerge from Russian indigenous traditions of political thought. In fact, a possible scenario, the first symptoms of which we might be witnessing currently, is the emergence of a hegemonic discursive practice (of politics) that is fundamentally undemocratic or authoritarian. There should be no doubt that the easiest way to mitigate this heuristic disorientation is to take recourse to exclusive, often nationalistic or chauvinistic, ideas of Russian identity. This would indeed facilitate the evolution of a political practice, needless to say, of an illiberal kind. Thus, the hopes of liberal political theorists to see some sort of political structure emerge which, in conjunction with the bare rationality of political actors, may generate a liberal-democratic political order are likely to be frustrated.

This leads to a second point which an account of agency under the conditions of heuristic radicalism in times of transition can demonstrate. To view the Russian transformation from the angle of the condition for political agency might help us in understanding the protracted character (or possible failure) of the Russian transformation. Political scientists might gain insights from a perspective which emphasises the necessary circumstances of successful transformations as conditions for agency. Equally, the failure of some transformations may also be a function of the heuristic radicalism, or, to put it

differently, the absence of the minimum of interpretative overlap which facilitates (collective) agency. This may warrant a closer analysis of discursive strategies of political actors and how far their conceptual terminology approximates Western connotations. From this we might be able to gauge the proximity of the Russian transformation to Western democratic politics.

Part II

The Russian Debate on Political Liberalism

6. The Problem of Parallel Debates – Some Methodological Remarks

Relating two debates which are largely separately conducted is a precarious undertaking. It is not only that debates have their own destination (leading questions) and internal authorities (paradigms), they also operate with terminology whose meaning is often peculiar to them. In the case at hand these divergent meanings of the central terms could not be more conspicuous. To illustrate this point one only needs to attend to the term liberalism itself. For Russian political theorists and for the wider public, liberalism has come to be synonymous with the enrichment of the few and the deprivation of the many. To reconstitute liberal political theory for the Russian scholarly community is often tantamount to the task of distancing oneself from the economic and social policies or the rent-seeking capitalist vision of liberalism of the Yeltsin era. Liberalism in the Russian context often means the bare minimum of political order, the priority of economic considerations over political and social ones, and a widening gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged. In part then, the philosophical discourse on Russian liberalism and what it could mean has been and still is the endeavour to reinvigorate for liberal theory its mandate to exist in resistance to the discursive hegemony of practice.

Why then should such an interrelation be relevant, given the dissimilarity of meaning of terminology? Must Russians then not find their own answer to the problem of political liberalism, if the meanings of the terms employed are peculiar to their discourse? An argument along the lines of particularity of meaning is not new. It goes back to the Slavophil-Westernism debate. Yet, to advance such an argument requires a philosophical defence, and ultimately it may signify the abandonment of the project of the Enlightenment and rationality. In the West, such a philosophical defence has found its most articulate proponent in relativist philosophy, engendered by the works of Lyotard and Bergman ('The Social Construction of Reality'), and found further elaboration in some linguistic philosophy. Yet, in political theory (despite Rorty's popularity in newspaper feuilletons) this has not found many friends and the

thesis on the need for the contextualisation of political thought elaborated by Pocock and Skinner does not deny the possibility of inter-cultural understanding *per se*, nor does it imply a general philosophical reason for the lack of translateability of meaning across times and historically distinct cultures.

Given that not even the strongest historically-minded critics of the adherents of abstract political theory maintain a position of *radical* relativism, it should be safe to assume for the purpose of this study that interrelating two different discourses is *philosophically* unproblematic, even though it requires theoretical clarification. In order to accomplish this theoretical task the following section will be divided into two parts, each of them looking at a sub-theme. Firstly, the theoretical implications of the general are to be assessed in terms of their methodological appropriateness. This part thus focuses on the idea of bridge-building and the complex inter-relations of meanings. The question to be tackled is how meanings and their contextuality impact on the process of correlating the two discourses in question and how this limits the possible findings of the work.

In the second part, it will be suggested that the subject matter of the study is not only theoretically problematic but has also philosophical implications which need to be examined. In short, the argument put forward throughout the work attempts to carve out a more viable (and more inclusive) definition of political liberalism, and the nature and structure of such an argument is not self-evident or self-justifying. Yet the focus of this second section is not the question what this concept of political liberalism could consist in, but how to proceed in a consistent manner in forming such an argument. Some considerations on the nature of normative work in political theory round up this section.

I

When analysing the seemingly parallel discourses on liberalism in Russia and the West it becomes quickly apparent that, contrary to the natural assumptions that discourses are

similarly structured and require similar interpretative devices, the Western debate on political liberalism varies considerably from the Russian one. A recent study on the vagueness of the Russian term 'dusha' [soul] (Pesmen, 2001) should have cautioned me against any unfounded assumptions about discursive commonalities. Given the findings of this study, it might even appear naive to presume a structural similarity. Therefore the thinking behind this presumption may warrant some comments.

Western political theory has over the last decades achieved a terminological coherence that speaks for the high level of its academic credentials. In fact, one could perceive the evolution of theoretical agreement as a result of the high quality and intensity of academic exchange. Although disagreement persists with regard to the approaches favoured in solving the theoretical issues in question, within philosophical orientations there exists a high consistency in the use and interpretation of terminology. So, for example, utilitarian theorists might disagree with contractarians about the proper way the problem of political order should be conceptualised, favouring the principle of utility whereas contractarians prefer the idea of the social compact, yet within those academic orientations, there exists considerable understanding as to what counts as appropriate uses and meanings of the terminology employed. Their disagreement regarding the philosophical foundation is not a matter of mere preference. Good arguments have been formulated for or against the utility principle or the notion of the social contract. Yet, looking at a range of criticism brought forward against Rawls' conception of liberal political theory, it is properly fair to say that most constructive (that is eventually eradicable) discordance emerged within the camp of social contract theorists.

Although Rawls explicitly understood his theory as a theoretical challenge to the utility concept, engagements with his theory by utilitarians are few and far in between. This seems to indicate that theoretical progress relies on a high homogeneity of initial approaches and philosophical foundations. While this is not the place to illuminate the detailed epistemic

justification for this view, it may suffice to acknowledge here the considerable theoretical coherence of employed terminology and its meaning as a condition for successful intellectual engagement and constructive debate. Western political liberalism, regardless of its exact geographical origin³ in the West, as a debate appears to be a result of the great extent of this terminological consensus (which extends to the methods employed in political theory) amongst the participants.

At first glance there was no indication that the Russian debate, even though differently focused and concentrating on different issues, on political liberalism might not feature a similar terminological consensus as a precondition for constructive exchange and mutual influence. The term paradigm may be overused, but it could adequately describe the expectations of a foreign observer of the Russian debate, hoping that the Marxist-Leninist paradigm would be quickly replaced by the new paradigm of Russian political theory where political philosophers re-adjust topic and terminology along the lines of Western discourse. Although such a process of re-adjustment has undoubtedly taken place, the result is far from unequivocal, hence the methodological problem of relating two discourses which purport to dedicate themselves to the same subject matter but, at a deeper level, are divergent with regard to fundamental terminological meanings. This disagreement is not philosophical at heart. No Russian political philosophers who favour a utilitarian approach are under review here. The problem is of a different nature to the philosophical dissent between contractarians and utilitarians in the West. Rather, as will become clear during the course of the second part, it is a lack of theoretical sophistication and terminological fine-tuning on the side of the Russian theorists that produce the disparity between the two debates.

But perhaps, it could be objected, this lays the blame at the wrong doorstep. Russians have long argued that the cause of their particularity is either the inapplicability of Western

³ The term 'Western debate' throughout the thesis refers to the Anglo-American discourse on political theory which originates mainly in the analytic tradition of philosophising and excludes post-modern, structuralist approaches or hermeneutics.

terms in the Russian context or the infusion of Western terms with different meanings. One of the greatest Slavophil critics of Western liberalism and of its imposition on Russia through ill-conceived reforms, Konstantin Aksakov, famously argued in the 1840s that the idea of freedom as it congealed in the West around the concept of politics would inevitably fail to resonate with Russian people since their notion of freedom is 'moral' not 'political' (Aksakov, 1966, p.234). And others, like Tolstoi (though not endorsing the Slavophil doctrine or its political agenda) did so in a similar vein. At the centre of this argument resides a presumption about the primacy of human life over language, a course of argument that has gone out of fashion in the West at least since the relative independence of linguistic structures were discovered. This is not the place to decide this debate, yet it is important to point out that any such radical view of language as a mere reflection of social and political life would prohibit any substantial as well as critical referentiality of debates conducted in different social and cultural environments. Political theory, just like this project, thus hinges on the philosophical assumption that this position of the primacy of life over language is false.

More constructively, however, Russian academics have pointed out that the problem of disparate meanings is describable and therefore manageable when awareness of the lack of homogeneity is raised amongst the practitioners of political theory. This would entail an analysis of terminology and how its meaning diverges from that of the Western discourse. Il'in (1997) has argued that this has long been a problem not only for Russian academics but also for the more general public and politicians. The root of the problem, he argues, lies in the continuous process of terminological formation for aspects and components of politics that have no indigenous existence. To borrow terminology from the West has been a natural solution. Regime became 'rezhim', and constitution became 'konstitutsia'. But, transliterated terminology poses a problem insofar as historically these terms constituted a vacuum of meaning. To fill this vacuum two developments have taken place, so Il'in argues.

Firstly, Russian, not accustomed to the way of thinking of the West, and inheriting the word but not the meaning, 'cut off' the rich and varied content and connotations of the borrowed term from the original word and the vacuum was filled with specifically Russian interpretations. This 'hollowing-out' of the term gave rise to a de-rationalisation of political thought and its mystification, reducing the term to its 'self-evident' meaning. On the other side, some Russian terms, taken to be roughly equivalent, have been related to the borrowed terms of Western origin and therefore immensely complicated the cross-cultural understanding. 'Pravovoe gosudarstvo' is imbued with different meaning in the Russian context insofar as 'pravo' and 'gosudarstvo' are rarely synonymous with their German or English equivalents (Il'in, 1997, pp. 35-39). An apparent agreement in a debate can thus easily turn out to be premised on the identity of meaning of the similar terminology – something that requires a degree of semantic control.

This issue has characterised the difficulties facing this study throughout. However, since it is the objective of the present work not only to give an overview of the Russian debate on political liberalism but also to initiate a further exchange of ideas, the problem can receive a different, more positive twist. If it is correct that Western political theory has achieved a comparatively high consistency of terminological meaning and that this permits a formidable degree of exchange and constructive engagement, then this consensus could be understood as a result of a process of interaction over time rather than as residing in the unequivocal meaning of terminology *per se*. Interrelating two different discourses then is an undertaking achieving such a consensus, a laborious crafting of referentiality, rather than an enterprise based on the presupposition of the existence of such a semantic agreement. It would make sense then to perceive this study as a contribution to a desirable increase in referentiality, rather than simply a correlation of the semantically incommensurable. From these methodological difficulties then emerges an additional task of the study: to raise awareness of

the initial semantic differences and to contribute to their careful overcoming without imposing the predominant Western meanings.

An additional problem of the approach taken in this work is what could be described as an element of circularity, given that Russian political theorists not only make use of Western terminology and concepts, but also undoubtedly are beginning to latch on to the Western debate more specifically. However limited the reception of more recent political philosophy in Russia might be, the considerable problem arises that, to reconstruct the Russian debate, is a reconstruction of a reconstruction. To put it differently, originality and semantic differences are the necessary sources for theoretical contributions if one works from the assumption, as this study does, that political liberalism is conditioned by cultural and historical circumstances and must mean something that is at variance with the Western connotations and that this, in turn, could be the origin for a productive re-appraisal of the concept of political liberalism in the West. Thus, the loss of originality of Russian political thought that is certainly inaugurated by the willingness of Russian political theorists to join Western political philosophers on their agreed terminological terrain is a loss to the potential project of the critical re-conceptualisation of political liberalism in the West. Circularity is then a function of the approximation of the Russian debate to the terminological or semantic consensus that has evolved in the West. In other words, as Russian political theorists and philosophers exclude references to the particular circumstances and meaning of liberal politics in their country from their theoretical considerations, they might gain access to, and level with, Western theorists in a semantic sense, yet in doing so they lose the potential contributions they can make to a theoretical debate that often abstracts from their own socio-cultural peculiarities. The line here seems to be fine but walkable. The few reflections by Russian political theorists on the Western debate that concerns itself almost exclusively with political liberalism as it has emerged there over the centuries (and is often not conceived as particular but universal!)

would be of little interest to the intended course of the present analysis (see for example the work by Kusmina, 1998).

This entails a deliberate selection that derives its justification from the intended objective of this work and is thus methodologically contestable. The findings of the study would be predetermined by the selection of the material considered. Yet, examining more closely the intended outcome and the argument presented, any methodological misgivings should disappear. The course of argument is not directed towards denying that Russian political theory can represent a valuable contribution to Western political liberalism if it adopts the terminological stringency and consistency that Western political philosophy to a large extent possesses. Neither will it be argued that Russian philosophers are not capable of conducting their work in a Western fashion or that they do not already do so. In brief, what is at issue here is neither the concept of rationality *per se* nor its function for the internal coherence of an academic debate. Instead what will be argued is that the particular circumstances obtaining in Russia have impacted on theorisations of political liberalism that can be conducive to a re-formulation of Western political theory or rejuvenation of a more inclusive philosophising strategy, and in particular of the concept of liberty and politics. The conditions of liberal politics are varied and this should be taken into account by any political theory of liberalism. A re-formulation of liberalism can take its inspiration from the work of Russian political theorists who are compelled to take issue with problems that Western theorists can neglect, for example the problem of societal rift ('raskol') as formulated by Aleksandr Akhiezer (cf. chapters 9 and 10).

A final objection might, however, be raised at this point. Perhaps, so it could be argued, the participation of so few Russian theorists in the Western debate on political liberalism is evidence of the misguided orientation of Russian political philosophy in general. Russians have frequently doubted whether the philosophical issues they debate have any significance outside their Russian cultural and intellectual milieu (for the re-structuring of

Russian philosophy cf. Swiderski,1998; and van Zweerde, 1998). To counter-argue this objection one would have to point to the assumption on which it rests. It is the assumption that an existing discursive hegemony can draw its philosophical justification from the exertion of influence and the resultant further strengthening of the hegemonic potential. This, however, makes little sense. Theoretical paradigms might have a justification insofar as they homogenise terminology and concepts for internal practicability, yet this says little about the degree to which they are justifiable or superior vis-à-vis other interpretative paradigms. To question and analyse their feasibility across the paradigmatic boundaries is to engage in the philosophical work that is needed and to undermine the hegemonic structure of paradigmatic thought that crosses over into dogma..

II

This last section of the methodological chapter will be concerned with the impact of the immense variety of definitions of political liberalism on the thesis to be put forward in this work. Given the sheer multitude of notions of liberalism, is it feasible to suggest a singular, comprehensive definition of liberalism? Perhaps, as has been argued recently (Gaus, 2000), the fact that liberalism does not come in a singular form has added to its appeal over the last century and helped ensure the eventual predominance of liberal politics not least across Central and Eastern Europe. What would we lose if liberalism would remain a pluralistic theoretical enterprise, comprising so diverse philosophical approaches as communitarianism and individualism or constructivism and anti-constructivism (Gaus, 2000)? Ever since Hobbes laid down the principles of human nature in 'De Corpore' and 'De Cive', liberals have engaged in controversies on the potential of human reason. While some philosophers have adopted a sceptical stance towards man's reasoning capabilities, others have credited human beings with greater degrees of comprehending capacity. The latter might have predicated the road to the illusory belief in the possibility of absolute control of nature and human affairs, and

eventually to political totalitarianism, yet the line that divides the sceptics from the believers in human capacities is a fine one. Not least so, because any sceptical theoretical endeavour is still premised on a certainty of intellectual elitism. Sceptics argue about the extent and potential of public reason to capacitate man to identify the most ideal (or feasible) political order, yet any theory about the absence or presence of such capacity is only made possible by the belief that human reason can find out the limits of its own deployment. This might invalidate only the position of the most radical sceptic, but it highlights also the tension that exists between the Enlightenment project (of rationality) and the theory of public reason. Liberalism as a theory of public order which is to be based on only a minimum of coercion and a maximum of discerning concord is then squeezed between the two. Kant still argued from a position of cognitive hope and expectation, whereas later liberals have scaled down any prospect of wider human understanding of the intricate problems of political order. In a sense, political theory has gradually found itself compelled to reinvigorate the concept of instrumental rationality from which pre-Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes deployed. Yet, the history of political thought is far too diverse to be encapsulated in a singular trajectory. Thus what is of present concern is not how such an alternative concept of liberty can justifiably be actuated but how permissible it is with regard to the principles of logical coherence and conceptual consistency.

Given this question, there are two broad areas which would come into focus. The first relates to the standards of theorising that need to be met by Russian theorists in order for their conceptualisations of political liberalism to 'count' for the Western debate. The second area would concern the way these are made to 'count', i.e. the particular manner in which these conceptualisations are used in an argument for a re-formulation of political liberalism. One could call this the standards of discursive practice.

With regard to the first, Russian theorists must conform to the most basic rules of rationality in setting out their conception of liberal politics. This precludes any assertion that

particularity extends to the forms of rational argument and reasoning. Arguments must be generally conclusive, possess an internal logical structure acceptable to the Western debate, and be translatable. This does not imply that Russians must abstain from using their own terminology but that the rules of inference must be upheld. This may sound banal but the history of Russian thought shows that theorists have frequently asserted Russian particularity on the grounds of arguments that did not observe these most basic rules of inference. The result was often dogmatic thought rather than argument and open debate. Even today Slavophil positions are often advanced in similar fashion.⁴

On the other side, the question of how these arguments can be invoked for the stated purpose of the re-appraisal of political liberalism is more difficult terrain. It involves a distinction between what is a valid definition of political liberalism and what can constitute good reasons for accepting any singular conception as the only valid one. As has been pointed out above, the various forms of political thought have usually claimed being exclusively valid. Arguing against utilitarianism from a contractarian position only makes sense if one assumes that, firstly, a contractarian position can be shown to be relevant also in the discursive context of utilitarianism, and secondly, that one position is not incompatible with the other to the point of irrefutability. What has received less attention by philosophers is that varying concepts of political liberalism might better be complementing each other rather than be competing for universal validity. The present work does not intend to forward an argument that could sustain this idea. But it seems methodologically admissible not to rule out the possibility of the complementary character of differing versions of political liberalism rather than their exclusivity. Being able to show that a particular conception of liberal politics can be theoretically sustained and is logically coherent, would present at least some indications that making such an argument would be worthwhile.

⁴ By definition, religious positions may have to resort to dogmatic forms of argument.

7. Characterising the Debate

Much of past and contemporary Russian political philosophy has been preoccupied with the deep divergences between the Western ideal of liberal statehood and the existing Russian political order (for excellent overviews see Ignatov, 1996, Novikova/Sizemskaja, 1994/1995 and 2000, Sizemskaja, 1999, and, of course, Walicki, 1992). The chasm between these two traditions and the possibility of bridging this gap has been a major, if not the most prominent, theme in Russian state theory, past and present. Historically, the question of this divergence between Western precepts and Russian reality was posed as the problem of how to bring about a limitation of political power in Russia without having enjoyed any lengthy tradition of intermediary institutions that would have contained, or completely prevented, the unhampered exercise of absolute powers concentrated in the hands of the Emperor. Or, in other words, political power in Russia never reached the stage of feudalisation and therefore was never able to utilise the mitigating effects of gradually institutionalised contractual relationships (Sashalmi, 2002). It never experienced or comprised the elements of mutual assistance or benefit that could make inroads into the indivisible justificatory centre of power. This might be misleading if it is taken as evidence for not only absolutist but also strong pervasive power. In fact Russia experienced throughout its history a persistent weakness exactly because the failure to develop feudal contractual arrangements required its rulers to exercise power in a much more immediate personal fashion than did their Western counterparts. Il'in et al write in summarising the pre-Petrine state-society relations:

‘The absence of legal codes of authority, ..., the lack of regulation of the hierarchy of governing institutions (the legislative non-specification of the authoritative structure in the pyramid of power) engendered a non-legal (nepravovoi) type of government of the country on the basis of a tax-class system. The foundation of social interaction was constituted by obligation, which was emasculated in any civic and legal sense.’ (Il'in, 1996, p.30)

In other words, although formally indivisible, Russian statehood was nevertheless continuously afflicted by a striking weakness in implementing and exercising its political will.

The present chapter will try to give a brief survey of the theoretical positions as they have been formulated by Russian historians and theorists over the last decade. However, to speak of the Russian debate as one in which discussants pursue leading questions and clearly defined objects of inquiry may be misleading. Academic debates necessarily possess a fluidity and dynamism which prohibit the imposition of pre-conceived objectives and interpretative purposes. Yet, observing a debate through the lense of thematic foci may serve a useful purpose here. Such leading questions or areas of concern introduce a coherence into research with regard to the external limits of any discussion. Additionally, they also direct attention to particular areas on which research can then focus and attempt to solve it. Besides the general limits that are set by the vague notion of political liberalism no such clear demarcation of the area of concern has emerged in the Russian debate. In fact, one might even argue that treating the concept of political liberalism as a demarcating feature somehow carries an arbitrariness by the observer rather than being an intrinsic focus of the articles and contributions discussed here. Indeed some extremely valuable contributions to the debate have been formulated outside the concern of political liberalism and are by-products of modernisation and civilisation theory, which, strictly speaking, possess only fleeting relevance to political theory. Yet, insofar as the historians or political philosophers have aspired to widen the application of their theory to politics, it started to bear on political liberalism and Russian politics and this would justify to see them as being part of a wider debate.

If the outer demarcations of the debate are hardly discernible, its inner coherence is even less so. More accurately, the term 'debate' should not be understood in the strict sense but rather as a cacophony of voices (Oakeshott) with all its implications of looseness and lack of referentiality. This looseness is mostly a result of the particular way in which the debate

has been (and still is) conducted and it can only be guessed at this stage how far the incoherence is a function of a conspicuous lack of research interaction and terminological consistency. Below the more general category of political liberalism exists a multitude of often conflicting methodological approaches (even within political theory) and thematic orientations. There is hardly any particular topic around which some attention by more than one political theorist has congealed and been sustained. Although several publications on the general topic of political liberalism in Russia have appeared over the years and there seems to be a core of participants who attended successive (annual) conferences and contributed to the conference proceedings, the level of theoretical collaboration seems minimal.

One particular publication offers a unique insight into the conference discussions, yet the level of engagement with other conceptual approaches appears to be surprisingly low (cf. the discussion pages in *Liberalizm v Rossii*, 1996). This produces a situation where the theoretical debate on political liberalism appropriates more a plurality of different unrelated conceptions. There is little effort either to relate these conceptions appropriately or even to agree on terminology and its usage. The resultant picture is one of a variety of singular interpretations, exclusive with regard either to the meaning of the terminology or to the approach favoured. One notable exception to this rule is Akhiezer's theory of Russian history, which has spawned a whole range of similar interpretations and works and has proven to be a theory exercising a remarkably widespread influence among historians.

To create some unity in diversity then is the purpose of the following section of this chapter. Without imposing a particular interpretation of the various works and contributions, it will be attempted to categorise them in two distinct genres in order to gain an overview of the positions adopted. Since the categories have been selected so as to not to privilege or preempt any interpretation of the various components of the debate, they possess a high generality. With few exceptions no specific works will be cited or categorised at this stage

since this would in most cases fail to reflect the fact that many of the contributions favour a multiplicity of conceptual approaches or explanatory patterns.

Two main approaches offer themselves for a categorisation of the contributions to the debate. These two broad categories then invite further ‘branching out’ into sub-categories where the interrelations of the upper categories then become apparent. A diagram illustrates the location of the different theoretical positions with regard to the two general groupings.

| | Universal | Particular |
|---------|---|---|
| Theory | -Core concepts of liberalism: liberty, rights, rule of law | -Particularistic definition of core concepts, role of state in development of Civil society and liberal values |
| History | -Modernity -European civilisation incl. Russia -Codification of moral norms -Conflictuous political culture -principles facilitating pol. Liberalism: civility, tolerance, mutual respect -capitalism, entrepreneurial class | -Russian civilisation (Orthodoxy) as opposed to Western Europe -‘Democratism’ -ethical principles as regulating politics -consensual political culture |

Table 1. Categories of the Russian debate

Two different approaches have crystallised over the last decade in the debate on political liberalism in Russia. Each implies a different prioritisation of how to understand political liberalism in Russia. Normative and empirical aspects are subsumed under the same category at this stage. On the one hand, Russian theorists have endeavoured to define political liberalism in theoretical terms by identifying a core of concepts and ideas that are irreducible ingredients of liberalism, such as individual rights and liberties, rule of law, limitation of state activities and the like. These can be taken to be universal in meaning and application or, alternatively, be interpreted as assessing particular shape and content in Russia’s past and

present. Such an approach to defining political liberalism can hence accommodate a universalist as well as a particularist notion. On the other hand, political theorists and historians have taken on the task of understanding Russian liberalism in its historical formation and historical conditionality. Despite the emphasis on history as a conditioning force for political thought, universalist positions have been formulated here too, just as this approach has provided some room for a particularist interpretation of Russian liberalism.

A universalist reading of Russian liberalism could take various forms. It could either be maintained that liberalism is a feature of Western society and can be explained as a combination of various social and political factors. The idea of a strong middle class as carrier of a liberal ideology is an aspect that has received particular attention and represents, in a way, a revival of the interpretative pattern of political liberalism as it emerged in the previous debate at the beginning of the twentieth century. The fate of Russian liberalism in this view depends on the emergence of such a social stratum. Moreover, the idea that the state should play a 'constructive role' here has been re-formulated in various shapes (not least amongst the opponents of the liberal reforms during the nineties). Yet another universalist position has stressed the particularity of Russian political and social conditions which are taken to be detrimental to the emergence of liberal politics along Western lines, while maintaining that beyond the Western form of political liberalism lies a core of concepts and precepts that might prove compatible with Russian conditions. By relegating Western liberalism in its concrete manifestations to a particularity and denying it its universality, some theorists and historians have striven to identify aspects of liberal politics which sustain a universal core of political conditions. Such a position might be born out of the need to comply with some components of any political system as perceived to be essential to a modern state, yet at the same time grounding these in Russia's specific path towards modernity. It is not surprising then that some proponents of a Slavophilist way towards what they take to be a liberal political order in Russia have argued in this fashion.

The particularist versions of the historical approach to Russian liberalism are understandably many and need little further introduction here. Not all of them are strictly liberal, but their valuable contributions lie in the arguments they adduce with regard as to the non-feasibility of political liberalism for Russia.

A substantial area of research is located in between these two approaches and crosses the theoretical boundaries sketched by the division between theory and history. Some of the capacity to straddle a historical and theoretical approach is due to the terminological confusion or lack of conceptual clarity. But the attempts to conjoin in their interpretation of Russian liberalism a historical with a politico-theoretical explanatory schemes constitute some of the most valuable contributions to the discussion on Russian liberalism. Akhiezer and Kapustin certainly belong to this category and their works are characterised by a high awareness of the complementary roles of history and theory in defining Russian liberalism.

Two central concepts prefigure this area of overlap between theory and history. Some historians derive theorisations of political liberalism in Russia from the concept of modernity and its concomitant effects on political order. Others make use of the idea of 'civilisation' to explicate the absence or presence of a liberal political order. Both concepts play prominent roles in universalist as well as particularist interpretations that fall into the history category as well as into the category of (political) theory. The notion of a 'catch-up' modernisation and the role therein of liberal reformers and/or a liberal ideology prescribing a specific course of modernising reform is especially popular amongst Russian historians and theorists. The influence of Western historiography is palpable here.

In concluding this brief overview of possible theoretical positions, it must be stressed that no singular category exhausts the diversity of views that is expressed often within one article, let alone within the works of one particular thinker. Equally, the presented categories taken altogether are not exhaustive of the multitude of views that can still be formulated. The purpose of this brief exercise in categorisation was simply to provide some co-ordinates that

will allow the thesis to allocate positions and identify theoretical orientations at a later stage. It should also be noted that, within the field of research under consideration here, each of the positions which it is possible to adopt under these general terms has received a formulation. As mentioned above, it must also be stressed that this debate has rarely congealed around particular topics or acquired a specific focus that would enable researchers further to collaborate and to identify semantic dissonance. Hence it would be premature to infer from the dichotomous categorisation invoked here that the debate would have occurred along the lines of universalism and particularism, often taken to be roughly equivalent to the ideas of Westernism and Slavophilism. As has been pointed out above, often any of these latter positions could be subsumed under the universalist or particularist label. In fact, one of the upshots of the analysis of the debate is that the dualistic categories of Westernism and Slavophilism, as well as their concomitant pair universalism and particularism, provide surprisingly little co-ordinating value for the identification of *singular* theoretical positions. This might be because of the generally amorphous character of a debate which is still in the process of locating themes around which the discussion can coalesce, or, alternatively, this might indicate that the past discursive dichotomies have lost their strength to shape and define the theoretical debate amongst Russian academics. Such a diversion from this interpretative dualistic scheme of the past can only be of advantage for the debate, considering the tenacity with which the proponents of opposing views were locked into their positions during the second half of the nineteenth century and how this situation stifled real theoretical progress. Hopefully, then, the by-passing of these dualistic frames of reference might signify a lasting diversification of the theoretical debate. Following on from this initial categorisation a brief more detailed overview of the theoretical position may be helpful to prepare the field of discussion and the justification of further selection and foci.

The section on political theory proper yields the lowest number of sub-themes. Roughly speaking, they can be identified as four theoretical ideas. Firstly, some Russian

theorists have attempted to define the notion of political liberalism in its particular formation under Russian conditions or, more generally, in its universal manifestation, by isolating some central concepts or arguments that characterise political liberalism as a theoretical discourse.

Secondly, Russian theorists have attempted to link the problem of political order (or its obverse disorder and chaos) with considerations about the evolution of political liberalism. Hobbes' ideas on how to overcome a 'war of all against all' had particular pertinence for some thinkers, not least because of the striking similarity of Russia's slowly disintegrating society to the hypothetical picture painted by Hobbes. Thirdly, some theorists and philosophers have engaged in a critical self-reflection on the methods and concepts of political theory and have tried to describe some features that are supposed to be peculiar to liberal theorising or philosophising. Their critical commentaries on Russian political philosophy or theory often utilise the concept of an interpretative paradigm. Two more sub-themes are located in the overlapping area between theory and history, yet have resulted in some considerable theoretical work as long as their initial approach has been more theory-guided in nature.

The question of modernity and its connection with a liberal political order plays a prominent role in Russian political theory, just as the idea of a liberal civilisation does. Instances of Russian political theory as a critical engagement with Western ideas and concepts are remarkably rare and hence do not warrant to be subsumed under a separate category. Yet, two examples of outstanding quality will figure in the survey of Russian political philosophy and the evaluation of its contribution to political theory in general later on.

Given that political theory is a very young academic discipline in Russia, it should not be surprising that the historical approach to political liberalism is far more diverse and offers an incomparably wider range of interpretations. For the purpose of convenience, six different sub-approaches can be listed. There is, firstly, the history of political thought in the strict sense, which has enjoyed an unrivalled revival over the last decade. Books on particular

political thinkers, whether strictly liberal or more accurately described as conservative liberals, have been produced over the last ten years in great numbers and it seems to have turned out to be the most fertile ground for studies on political liberalism at the moment. Sometimes related to this area of interest, but often rightly seen as a research area in its own right, is, secondly, the historical analysis of the political programmes of liberalism during the reforms of the 1860s, the turn of the twentieth century and, last but not least, the brief period of constitutional democracy in 1917. Although the role of individuals in the reform era and during later attempted reforms cannot be overstated, the analysis of liberal reforms either as events in themselves or embedded into a wider social, economic and cultural context has come to be more appreciated recently (Il'in et al, 1996). Often not distinguished in the Russian debate from political theory proper is the theory and history of political ideologies which constitutes a third, sub-field of the debate. Although Western political theorists clearly differentiate the theory of political liberalism and the political ideology of liberalism, Russian theorists often use the terms interchangeably. This lack of terminological differentiation might have its reason in real political life, i.e. that liberalism as a notion of a well-ordered society has in the hands of the liberal reformers of the nineties turned out to be merely another ideology stipulating abstract conceptions of a capitalist market economy and liberal politics. Or, alternatively, it may have its roots in the Marxist view of ideology as direct expression of class interests. The strongly deterministic variant of Marxism-Leninism would allow ideology to assume the role of critical reflection on politics which was previously occupied by political theory, or as Robert Conquest once put it: 'the pre-scientific gropings that had hitherto prevailed'⁵. The resultant rather benign understanding of ideology might still linger on in the conceptualisations of some Russian political theorists and thus preclude a clear differentiation between political philosophy and ideology.

⁵ Conquest (2000), p.44

The view of liberalism from the angles of historical interpretations of modernity would constitute the fourth sub-theme. The intricate connection between liberalism as a view of politics and the reforms that were an essential component of the process of Russian modernisation have in fact originated in the historical interpretation of Russia's nineteenth century. Insofar as the references of this approach still provide some evidence of its inception in Russian historiography it would be justified to treat this sub-theme as conceptually and theoretically distinct from the similar views theorised from the perspective and with the concepts of political theory.

Russian liberalism has been considerably influenced by some competing programmes of political reform or explanations of social and political change. As political liberalism was pressed to develop ideas on democracy and political participation as well as a conception of national sovereignty, its notion of politics creatively incorporated some concepts that are peculiar to the political debates taking place in Russia. The relation between the democratic ideal and 'narodovlastie' have therefore received considerable attention from historians who argue that the influence of these concepts on, as it were, a premature political theory of a liberal social and political order informs many of the peculiarities of the Russian variant of political liberalism. This constitutes a fifth sub-theme elaborated by Russian historians of political thought. A methodologically unique approach is offered by those historians who apply a comparative technique of historical interpretation to political liberalism in East and West. Their analyses warrant special attention insofar as they are rare examples of cross-cultural and cross-theoretical engagements.

As with theory, historiography possesses a self-critical component whose findings will constitute not a separate sub-category but will be referred to at times throughout the survey. Theory and history might be seen to cover the main ground of the arguments that were advanced in the debate. Yet, there are other theoretical considerations that do not fall into either of the above categories but are relevant for the question of Russian political theory in a

meta-theoretical sense. There has been some work over the last decade which attempts to clarify the extent to which Russian philosophy (political, moral or ethical philosophy) is a distinct form of thinking, informed by cultural, political and/or social conditions. These considerations can at times illuminate the historico-philosophical background of political theory and Russian historiography. And inasmuch as Russian political thought succeeds in recovering its rich philosophical heritage from pre-revolutionary times, these meta-theoretical considerations might become increasingly relevant for an analysis of Russian political liberalism.

For the following review of the detailed positions a cursory thematic separation seems in order. Although many positions will appear in more than one part of the review, such a separation allows us to introduce a focus that would otherwise be lacking. It should be emphasised that the particular way of thematically grouping them has been selected for being beneficial to the subsequent discussion. Other topical arrangements are entirely feasible, depending on the focal interest of the observer.

The debate will be presented in four main parts. The first section will deal with all theoretical positions that describe or analyse Russian political liberalism as a form of political culture and civility. In a second sub-section those views of Russian liberalism will be considered which emphasise the dependency of the theoretical shape and content of Russian liberalism on the interaction between East and West. The justification for subsuming these approaches into one bigger category is that all positions show an awareness or even theorise from the observation of mutual influence of intellectual concepts and terminology between West and East. There will be space for a more detailed discussion of the views of the eminent scholar Aleksandr Akhiezer on statehood. The concepts of culture and civility, as has been pointed out before and will become clearer as the discussion progresses, serve by no means as sole references to particularistic ideas of Russian liberalism. Therefore it would be equally mistaken to imbue such concepts as political culture with the connotation of acting as a single

determinant of the prospect of political liberalism in Russia as has been argued in the West (e.g. by Weigle, 2000). The most that can be said in face of the multiplicity of roles that the idea of political culture plays in Russian historiography and political theory is that it is an extremely loosely defined concept and functions often both as an explanandum and an explanans.

The second and third sections of this chapter will focus on theorisations of political liberalism as a form of civilisation and as an aspect of modernity. Strictly historical as well as politico-theoretical approaches will find their place here. Much of the civilisation section will present the social and political theory of statehood as formulated by Aleksandr Akhiezer. In a fourth section, what could adequately be described as political theory proper will be portrayed and discussed. This will be the location for the analysis of those contributions to the Russian debate that deliberately engage with the Western debate and provide a genuine constructive synthesis of Western and Russian conceptualisations.

Although the mere presentation of theoretical views might seem rather tedious, one should bear in mind that the purpose of the subsequent section of this study is twofold: on one hand to prepare the ground for a re-evaluation of Western political theory and, on the other hand, to familiarise a Western audience with the highly diverse, not to say amorphous, Russian theoretical debate on political liberalism.

8. Russian Liberalism between East and West – Influences and Misunderstandings

The history of Russian political thought is littered with cases of mistaken identities. For example, it is widely accepted amongst historians and philosophers that the appropriation of Hegelian thought in Russia in the nineteenth century was riddled with misunderstandings and partial, politically influenced, interpretations. Pantin's remarks on the distorted assimilation of Western liberal thought in the second half of the nineteenth century are also corroborated by many other accounts. The reconstruction of the way in which Russian thinkers have incorporated Western political thought into their worldview must therefore be of paramount importance to any critical appreciation of the role Western political philosophy has played and can play in Russian political thought. What follows is an overview of the more recent critical assessments of Russian political theorists and historians on the form and content of Russian liberalism and the ways in which it diverged from, or conformed to, Western political thought.

The purpose of this sub-section is, firstly, to sketch how Russian historians have recently attempted to reconstruct past Russian liberal thought. This field of re-construction of the Russian liberal heritage has probably been one of the most fertile areas of Russian research in political theory since the time of *perestroika*. The articles and monographs published on the history of Russian political thought are innumerable now and it is the more surprising that this revived interest in the history of Russian political liberalism has so far spawned only a modest resurgence of political theory proper amongst Russian academics. To outline how Russian historians portray past Russian political thinkers and the liberal political movement might seem methodologically incestuous. But it should be remembered that the purpose of this section is twofold; on the one hand, to present how Russian academics critically re-evaluate their intellectual (liberal) heritage and; on the other hand, to determine what this means for notions of the immutable or irreducible content of liberal theoretical

concepts and ideas. The former is a view of the arguments intrinsic to the Russian debate, whereas the latter strives to achieve a referentiality of two hitherto by and large separate debates.

An appropriate starting point would be some critical remarks on the value and role of conceptual appropriation amongst Russian thinkers in the nineteenth century. Zelezneva has attempted to give just this in an article for a conference on Russian liberalism held in 1998. Formerly a teacher at Rostov University, she now holds the position of Professor for Political Science at the Humanitarian State University in Moscow. In her article she argues that Russian political thought has traditionally oscillated between originality and the assimilation (borrowed – ‘zaimstvovannyi’) of foreign concepts and ideas, but that to perceive this relation as a dichotomy would be to misapprehend the significance of the original element. Assimilating imported theoretical elements, she argues, does not contradict the originality of either the concepts or the overall project (objective). Rather, the process of borrowing or lending conceptual tools from one intellectual context to another is an organic element of any interaction and mutual influence, without which isolation would set in that would eventually lead to decay (Zelezneva, 1999, p.122). The relation between the process of appropriation and the ‘national idea’ is a more complex one, however.⁶ She argues that borrowing can be seen as a source of national consciousness and does not necessarily prevent the development of a self-confident nation. On the contrary, it might be a necessary condition for it. She emphasises that none of the early Russian liberal thinkers had a simplistic view of the process of assimilating foreign intellectual property. For Kovaleskii, the borrowing of concepts and ideas was a process that involved imitation and adaptation (*podrazhanie i prisposoblenie*). For the Russian liberals of the early twentieth century, such as Miliukov, assimilating foreign thought was equally seen as a way to realise a self-confident and original principle of national

⁶ For an excellent overview of the recent debate on, and the persistent elusiveness of, the Russian Idea cf. Bettina Siber, *Ruskaia Ideia obiasyvaet!?* Poisk russkoi identichnosti v obshchestvennykh diskussiiakh kontsa XX veka, Moscow: AIRO-XX 2002

consciousness. However, she points out that Miliukov added the condition that the results of the influence of foreign thought would depend on the general culture and the culture (pattern) of assimilation of society as a whole and in particular its elites. The level of the culture of assimilation is settled (*raspolagaietsa*) somewhere along the spectrum between blind copying and absolute isolation. The closer a culture of assimilation is to the 'golden middle' between the extreme poles, the more effective the influence of foreign experiences will be for the development of a nation and country (Zelezneva, 1999, p.123). The fact that Russian liberals developed a theory of (theoretical) assimilation would be evidence for the high level of their indigenous culture of appropriation and would disprove the view put forward by Soviet historians of political thought and more recent critics who regard these Russian liberals as mechanistic Westerners, propagating the blind import (*kopirovania*) of the Western experience (Zelezneva, 1999, p.123). She also indicates that an additional argument for the creative appropriation of Western political thought may lie in the way that Russian liberals used the Western experience for the elaboration of a Russian (liberal) model of societal transformation (Zelezneva, 1999, p.123). Yet, as other historians have pointed out, this model of reform failed to capture the imagination of the population and eventually foundered on recalcitrant social and political realities. Zelezneva retorts that the failure of the reforms after 1905 must be ascribed to the errors of individual politicians and their stereotypical application rather than to the entire model of transition (Zelezneva, 1999, p.124).

Her portrayal of Russian liberalism and of the constructive model of appropriation of Western thought is significant not so much with regard to whether or not the modes of intellectual 'borrowing' had been sufficiently sophisticated to produce a proper model of social and political evolution but rather as an indication that neither the early Russian liberals nor she herself believe that concepts and experiences gathered in the West lend themselves to simple mechanical transfer without any modification and re-interpretation. This might be a redundant point for any historically minded person. However, yet if it can be shown that such

modifications must extend to the core meanings and content of liberal ideas such as liberty, it would prove a powerful argument against the universalism of political theory as conceived by Western political philosophers.

In trying to define the parameters of an immutable centre of any liberal concept it would be helpful to examine the actual interaction between competing concepts in a particular historical situation and gauge, from the limits within which a pivotal idea such as liberty is viable, the validity of the claim that political liberalism is built on some concepts with an invariable content. Quite understandably in the Russian context, the idea of political equality as epitomised by the democratic principle has received a lot of attention from Russian historian and political philosophers. Given the democratic claims of the Communist ideology, the period of transition can easily be re-framed conceptually as a necessary re-conciliation of democracy and liberty.

Gadzhiev has devoted some efforts to an analysis of the problem of the compatibility of democracy and liberalism with Russian cultural and social conditions and, although his political position cannot be described as strictly liberal, his examination of the interrelations between the idea of democracy and Russia is relevant to the theoretical concern of the present study.

Gadzhiev begins by differentiating between liberalism and democracy in general terms. Although liberalism is often closely associated to democracy, not every democracy is strictly liberal. Liberalism, he notes, is based on the idea of the priority of recognition and self-value (*samotsennost*) of the individual and the legal framework for its freedoms. Democracy, however, privileges the idea of 'national' sovereignty and political equality of all citizens with the primacy of the will of the majority. So, while liberalism privileges freedom before equality, democracy espouses the direct opposite. However, in recent years, an organic conflation of both principles has emerged (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.109).

Liberalism has incorporated many of the ideas, principles and values of democracy. Originally founded on the idea of individuality, liberalism came to recognise the significance of the collective principle and the positive role of the state in social life. Liberalism has been permeated (pronizan) by social principles. This constant reformulation of liberalism under the pressures of social and political change moved Gadzhiev to postulate the possibility of a specific form of liberal political order for Russia. So, while liberalism as a philosophy or worldview (mirovozrenie) has encapsulated a range of core ideas, as a practical political programme it has undergone a constant process of revision and transformation (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.109). From here onwards he seems to use 'democracy' and 'liberalism' interchangeably and emphasises that democracy presupposes a set of cultural, legal and political conditions in order to function properly. Interestingly, his list of conditions coincides remarkably with Kniazeva's identification of cultural attributes that enabled the English liberal political order to work so admirably over the centuries. Gadzhiev cites tolerance, transparency, dialogue, critical deliberation, and an ability to compromise as the foundations of a democratic order. He adds that democracy also requires the legal recognition of political opposition as a legitimate partner in the political process, just as much as any viable democratic political order is embedded in a pluralistic view of spiritual (dukhovnye) values and societal associations, and rejects any totalitarian or monistic identification of the state with one party or one official ideology (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.111). Given this broad characterisation of the democratic ideal, it seems only logical for him to conclude that the most appropriate path for Russia is marked by the introduction of democracy rather than liberalism. Arguing that the meaning of democracy repeatedly altered over time (from the classical period to modernity), he concludes that it must be possible to carve out a specific meaning of democracy for Russia (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.112). Yet, the possibility of democracy in Russia depends on the avoidance of a simplistic incorporation of Western norms, principles and institutions. Referring to the experience of introducing democracy in Japan and the Far

East, he points to the importance of preserving the cultural values and the primacy of group interests or the interests of the nation. Democracy should not be identified exclusively with individual freedoms (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.113). Having juxtaposed liberalism and democracy and having then predicated the latter on a whole range of aspects of political culture which would normally be counted as components of a liberal orientation, he goes on to say that at the micro-level an inner (vnutrennaia) and deep (glubinaia) democracy has emerged on which the national political order can draw (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.113). Collective interests can promote the development of a necessary political consensus and would serve as an original guarantee for the adherence of citizens to such an arrangement. The dramatic side of the Russian transformation, he argues, can be understood as a divergence of the political structures on a macro- and micro-level. He concludes that Western forms of statehood are doomed to fail when imported into Russia, since they clash with the organic socio-cultural, political and religious traditions and mentalities that prevail in the country (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.114). For Gadzhiev, the consequence of such a clash of indigenous socio-cultural and political ideals with abstract democratic (Western) principles then is the need to search for the most appropriate form of organic combination between the Western principles of market economy, political democracy, and the rule of law (pravovoe gosudarstvo) and the traditional forms of Russian statehood and sociality. Herein lies the central task of liberal-democratic theorists. Commenting on the inherent limits of the market model for Russia, he points out that the success of any market economy depends, paradoxically, on a minimum level of support from collectivist institutions and traditions which are, so he believes, non-capitalistic in character. In trying to sketch out what such a composition of social and cultural traditions with democratic ideas of political participation could look like for Russia, he indicates that the insistence on the negative concept of freedom with its disregard for authority and statehood must inevitably lead to anarchy and chaos and that the Russian concept of authority must not be seen as inherently incompatible with democracy. In fact, he argues, freedom and

democracy must, in the absence of a strong Russian statehood, remain mere talk (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.115). This leads him to state that true liberty and individual right(s), regardless of the national, social, religious or any other convictions of the individual, by no means prohibit or contradict the idea and principle of statehood (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.115). Consequently, he believes that, given the social component of liberties, it makes little sense to speak of abstract or 'natural' (yestiestvennaia) freedoms if they can only exist in a framework (struktur) of authority, vertical and horizontal. His more political conclusions from this analysis of the relation between democracy and indigenous social and cultural conditions emphasise the importance of a 'constructive patriotism' (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.116) for the successful political transformation in Russia.

Although it could be argued that Gadzhiev's position is simply a theoretically unsophisticated rehashing of the Western communitarian position with a rather less benign culmination in his endorsement of strong Russian statehood and 'constructive patriotism', and that Gadzhiev seems naively oblivious to the political propensities of such patriotism in Russia past and present, his distinction between the abstract principle of democracy/liberalism and its concrete application reveals the more useful content of his thought for the purposes of the present argument. Others have argued that patriotism is simply a way of 'obscuring mass consciousness; that it is practically directed against the concept of liberalism; and (that) it propagates that the Western model (of liberalism) is imported' (Volkov, 1999, p.444). With the increasing popularity of Lebed in the 1996 presidential elections, a liberal-patriotic ideology took shape that should not be dismissed too easily (cf. Sogrin on 'national liberalism' in Sogrin, 1999, esp. pp.160-166).

Although many of Gadzhiev's views are simply normative in nature and do not receive any further theoretical justification, his crucial proposition seems to be that there exists a rift in Russian society between the democratic ideal lived and adhered to at the community level, which somehow acts as the seedbed of the prevailing cultural and social views of Russian

society, and democratic principles at the (national) macro-level. To work out the correct adjustment of both is the task of the political philosopher and Gadzhiev answers this call by suggesting that the notion of the nation as epitomised in Russian statehood can possibly act as a bridging link between the two levels – hence his ‘constructive patriotism’. This conclusion might appear to be more politically motivated than coherently justified, yet Gadzhiev’s insistence that democracy’s viability as a political order depends on pluralism, transparency and the acceptance of opposing religious, political and social views hints at the limits of prescriptive quality of state policies rather than simply suggesting that an overweening centrally enforced patriotism or Russian nationalism can (and ought to) connect micro- and macro-level. It still remains somewhat obscure on which elements of this inner and deep democracy which, he claims, persists at the basis of Russian (and Eastern) society, the democratic ideal on the superior level can draw (Gadzhiev, 1994, p.113).

However, if we compare his argument about the divergence of the democratic ideas on the micro- and macro-level with Kniazeva’s contention that the crux of liberal politics is the sustenance of maxims of political collaboration that are exogenous to political liberalism, his contribution becomes clearer. He draws attention to the fact that, besides being bolstered by indigenous notions of what constitutes democratic politics, democracy operates at various levels and the appropriation of Western political concepts, if it is to be successful, is essentially a process of reconciliation between the varying democratic ideals that obtain on a national and ‘local’ level. Gadzhiev then seems to assume that the political ideals that are indigenous in nature are somehow primordial and must thus act as benchmarks in the re-formulation of the national democratic ideal. Since he offers no theoretical back-up for this thesis of the primacy of the local forms of politics, his position moves dangerously close to a Slavophil argument.

Although he does not confront this charge head on, he hints at a way to avoid it by pointing out that Russian democracy inevitably must take into account the multiple religious,

social and moral views of its population. As much as he hopes that the indigenous notion of democratic politics will accommodate and has traditionally accommodated this diversity, this seems to be a pious hope rather than a fact of Russian social and political reality.

His argument reveals neatly the limits of the concept of appropriation of Western concepts of political liberalism. Postulating the primacy of Russian cultural and political concepts and attempting to derive the content of liberal politics from indigenous notions of democracy/liberalism must fail to produce liberalism proper. Gadzhiev's argument for 'constructive patriotism' amounts to a dismissal of any referential content as to what democracy could mean beyond localised traditional notions of it. Speaking in the terms that Selezneva used, his proposition is not appropriation but isolation while still utilising Western conceptual tools. His position does not fail so much then on the lack of referentiality of the terminology *per se* but on the missing normative justification for prioritising local notions of democracy. If the usage of concepts such as democracy is to make any sense, it has to bear a cross-cultural, possibly normative content, that goes beyond the solipsistic re-formulation of such ideas describing particular notions obtaining at the sub-national level. Slavophiles have notoriously been unable to give such a justification other than their insistence on the superiority of the Russian culture, and Gadzhiev would be open to a similar charge.

For our present concern this indicates the boundaries of conceptual re-definition, the point, as it were, where Western concepts become unrecognisable and would cease to act as references to universal norms and values. For those who take a radical particularist position, this should not be too bothersome. For a liberal, however, who wants to salvage a minimum of conceptual universalizability, it is deeply so. However, to suggest that Gadzhiev's position is implicitly Slavophil could merely be based on a caricature of his view. Yet, the particular construction of his argument, assuming the primacy of Russian cultural and political forms of life and interpreting them as democratic, opens him up to the charge of misconceiving Russian reality and neglecting, paradoxically, the effects that modernisation has had on these

democratic aspects of Russian local life. Any argument that posits the existence of local democracy as a regulatory concept for democracy at the national level must show that the supposedly democratic local forms of political organisation have remained intact throughout imperial modernisation and the destructive re-structuring undertaken under the Communist regime. This reiterates Zelezneva's idea that a constructive conceptual 'cross-fertilisation' between East and West very much depends on finding the 'golden middle' between what she calls 'isolation' and mere 'copying'.

While Gadshiev mentions that the normative foundations of democracy and liberalism are mutually exclusive, the former prioritising equality whereas the latter holds individual liberty as the most fundamental principle governing political order, his analysis of democracy in Russia and its future prospects neglects the complex interrelationship that has existed between the two concepts in Russia's past and present. In contrast to this portrayal of the democratic ideal, Pantin argues from a more sophisticated position when he considers the mutual relation between democracy and liberalism to be at the heart of the transformational problems of Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In contrast to the studies of Gadshiev which possess a marked geopolitical edge, Igor Konstantinovich Pantin's work is informed by a more philosophical impetus. Pantin has been editor of the most important Russian academic journal in political science *Polis* since 1991 and at present holds the position of Head of Section for History of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy for the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN). He previously taught at the Section ('Laboratory') for Comparative Politicalology at the same institution.

While Gadshiev operates with a simple juxtaposition of the two ideas and claims the incompatibility of an abstract ideal Western democracy with Russian political culture, Pantin argues that this incompatibility is merely a result of the antithetical re-construction of these two concepts. Emphasising that the success of the Russian transformation depends on the consideration of the rich traditions in Russia (Pantin, 1994, p.75), an equally important factor

for the completion of Russian transition is how and when Russia overcomes the antithetical understanding of liberalism and democracy. Seen this way, the future of Russian liberalism depends not only on how influential liberal views are amongst the wider Russian public but, more significantly, on the character of Russian democracy (Pantin, 1994, p.76). Democracy thus can facilitate the evolution of liberal values or hamper it.

Pantin stresses that this interaction does not occur in a cultural vacuum but that the past experiences of the population influence decisively the choices people make with regard to the extent of personal liberties they are prepared to tolerate. Given that Russian culture appears to be predisposed to prefer collectivism rather than individualism, the transformational process and the infusion and evolution of liberal values and norms in Russia is necessarily a fundamentally cultural process (Pantin, 1994, p.77), not simply a question of the introduction of liberal political institutions and practices. Certain factors require careful consideration in developing new political institutions, and many of these factors did not, and will not, exactly facilitate the spread of liberal values in Russia. Pantin mentions the traditionally strong stance of the state which rules out a *tabula rasa* transformation along libertarian lines. Liberal governance in Russia, he argues, has failed to develop because the necessary cultural ingredients such as personal initiative and the idea of (individual) self-determination have not existed. Consequently, the drama of Russian history, according to Pantin, consists in the fact that democratic and liberal impulses came to collide rather than to complement each other (Pantin, 1994, p.80).

This is a view that appears to command a broad consensus amongst Russian historians of political thought (cf. Lebedev, esp. pp.114-115). Under this confrontation the two ideologies deformed into mutually exclusive forms of political thought, with democracy being conceived of as precluding personal liberties, whereas liberals saw in democracy a potential danger for individual rights and freedoms that still awaited being properly established in Russia. While Russian democrats radicalised and their political ideas adopted a Plebeian and

destructive edge (Pantin, 1994, p.80), liberals overemphasised the necessity of preserving the existing political order and increasingly aligned themselves with the governing (bureaucratic) elite. This division between liberal and democratic thought was exacerbated by the problem of serfdom and the destitution of the peasantry, which contributed to the appeal of utopian forms of socialism (Pantin, 1994, p.81). As mentioned above, Pantin argues that the main mistake of the Russian liberals prior to 1917 was their inability to understand that the notion of autonomy must be combined with a minimum of economic and legal self-determination for the population. This would necessitate a stance in opposition to the government's hesitant and often self-contradictory policies. Since liberals saw the problem of constitutionalism as the most pressing one, they neglected the urgent economic and social difficulties of the population (Pantin, 1994, p.81).

Whether this is a correct portrayal of late nineteenth century Russian political thought can be doubted, given that the Kadets recognised the need for land reform and 'neo-liberals' such as Soloviev developed a deep philosophical understanding for the interrelation of economic, social and political freedoms (cf. Sizemskaja, 1999, pp.209-216; Novikova/Sizemskaja; Novikova/Sizemskaja, *Tri Modeli*, esp. pp.218-232, cf. also Walicki, 1992, esp. chapter on Soloviev, pp.165-212)

In a discerning examination of the formation of what he calls 'democratism', Pantin attempts to describe how the political space in Russia acquired a configuration that was inimical to liberal thought. He identifies three aspects of 'democratism' which contributed to the capacity of this line of political thought to dominate Russian public consciousness in the second half of the nineteenth century and still, subliminally, defines Russia's conceptions of 'narod' even today. Firstly, the interaction of Bolsheviks and 'Narodniki' appears to have been far more intense and complex than hitherto assumed. Secondly, despite sharing a host of social objectives, 'Narodniki' and social-democrats differed fundamentally in their political impetus. Pantin's interpretation of democratism as a profoundly apolitical movement broadly

corresponds with Walicki's characterisation of the populist movement as anti-capitalist yet rejecting political struggle (Walicki, 1979, pp.222-235). Pantin reiterates this interpretation when he counts as one of the main characteristics of Russian democratism its utter indifference towards the form of any future state formations (*gosudarstvenno ustroistva*), such political ideas being perceived as running counter to the interests of the Russian people (Pantin, 1994, p.87). Basing their hopes for reform of the country upon a radical change in economic relations alone meant that Narodniki as well as Bolsheviki excluded any moral and political factors from their conceptions of change which could have influenced or determined the historical path of Russia in directions and ways more conducive to liberal ideas (Pantin, 1994 p.87). The popularity of this approach proved disastrous for the idea of democracy in Russia, since democracy came to be synonymous with the economic liberation of the lower strata of Russian society and eventually shaped the peculiar understanding of the term 'narod'/people as being analogous to the lower orders of society in opposition to the Westernised (politicised) elements of Russian society. It is easy to see what the implications of such a *pars pro toto* interpretation of the term 'people' or 'country' were for the notion of national sovereignty and minority rights. Despite its alleged non-political drift, democratism pre-structured the political space in the sense that the Narodniki's discreditation of 'routine' politics prepared the ground for a narrowing of the political agenda to economic liberation of the lower classes. Identifying these parts of society with the 'nation' *per se* reduced entitlements for political participation just as it de-legitimised any diversion from the overriding objective of restructuring the socio-economic relations in the country. That the Bolsheviki proved most adept at exploiting these reductionist notions of politics and democracy, partly because they were, in contrast to the Narodniki, well aware of the *political* implications of the economic reforms as well as of the primacy of politics (despite their acclamation of the priority of land reform), was merely evidence of the naivety and immaturity of the (non)political views of the Narodniki.

The consequences for liberal political thought are immense. Besides the implications of the popularity and particular internal structure of democratic thought in Russia for a liberal programme of political and social reforms, the most profound ramifications were, and still are, theoretical in nature. For liberals the democratic interpretation of 'narod' and liberty meant that central notions of liberal doctrine had been distorted beyond recognition and also impaired its chances to be integrated into a coherent liberal reform agenda. It reveals the semantic problems with which liberals have grappled, and still experience, in conveying a specifically liberal notion of political institutions and individual freedoms in general. More significantly, the concepts of sovereignty and nation predetermine the form of politics that is to be established. Rights and liberties traditionally have found their guarantees in a notion of sovereignty directed against arbitrary overbearing and oppressive rulers. If these guarantees take constitutional form they presuppose a reference to the idea of a sovereign nation, while the latter determines the boundaries of the polity.

In his book on Russian democracy and national sovereignty, Kozyrevaia supplements Pantin's picture of mutual exclusivity with a portrayal of more conciliatory elements. Her work focuses on the notion of 'narodovlastie' which Russian liberals developed at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. She maintains that for Russian constitutionalism and for adherents of the doctrine of 'inalienable natural rights', a conception of national sovereignty was integral (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.141). The liberal conception differed sharply, however, from the democrats' understanding of 'narodovlastie' insofar as liberals sought to base their account of national sovereignty and democracy on the principles of individualism and the autonomy of the individual. Russian liberals, according to Kozyrevaia, went so far as to claim the indivisibility of the doctrines of democratic participation and liberalism. Well known is Struve's position for whom a liberal Russian political order was the primary aim, yet democracy was the means for accomplishing that aim (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.142). The reservations Russian liberals expressed regarding an unfettered majoritarian

political principle mirrored the misgivings of Western conservatives about the dangers of democratic caesarism (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.142). This led them to postulate the need for a guided transition to a free society, that guidance or tutelage being the prerogative of the enlightened educated (liberal) minority. The dilemma liberals faced, in acknowledging the danger of the rule of illiberal masses and the promulgation of democracy as means of achieving liberal politics, was how to determine the appropriate role of the state in the transformation. The state would have to become a protective shield against any potential anti-legality of Jacobin character, just as the political authorities would have to tame and contain themselves by introducing the separation of powers amongst the various governmental branches. Thus liberals emphasised the legal facets of political power. For Kozyrevaia this dilemma was exacerbated by the predominant view amongst Russian liberals that the creative potential of democracy could only be opened up by impregnating the new democratic institutions with the prevailing religious-moral principle of the Russian people (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.143) which had already proved helpful in sustaining elements of local self-government through the *zemstvo* movement. The continuity between these provincial and local reform experiences and the political reforms at the national level turned out to be a mainstay of the liberal model of transformation prior to 1905. Constitutionalism coupled with legalism and moderate reformism thus proved to be the most essential and enduring features of the political programme of Russian liberalism (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.89).

Although liberals thus made significant contributions to the concept of Russian national sovereignty and democracy, their views failed to gain widespread acceptance. Kozyrevaia stresses that such a reformist agenda would remain incomplete as long as the role of civil liberties and rights remained unspecified. Russian liberals thus had formulated a concept of civil society that, on the one hand, depended on a midwife role of the monarchy in bringing it into existence, reinforcing the activist role of the state, while on the other hand, they saw civil liberties as essential in inaugurating – and eventually mitigating the possible

excesses of – political modernisation, i.e. fully-fledged democracy. What gave Russian liberalism its conservative and etatist edge was the central role attributed to the authorities in the process of generating a viable civil society and the maintenance of legal guarantees and civil liberties. Since society was incapable of engendering a strong counterforce to autocracy, just as it proved powerless to provide guarantees against Jacobin notions of radical democracy, the moving force of any modernising attempt had to be the political authorities themselves. Hence most liberals would pin their hopes on the bureaucratic elite having or acquiring the necessary understanding of the necessity of political and social reforms as well as seeing the need to introduce constitutional checks to attenuate the worst dangers of an over-mighty state bureaucracy.

While Kozyrevaia paints a more sympathetic picture of the theoretical efforts of Russian liberals to develop a coherent concept of 'narodovlastie', the failure of the liberal's view of democracy to capture the imagination of the population remains, in her view, attributable to the prevalence of the radical democrat's interpretation of democracy as sketched by Pantin. Kozyrevaia's reconstruction of the liberal mould of the doctrine of 'narodovlastie' hints at something far more fundamentally at fault than the mere predominance of a competing view at variance with the liberal notion of democracy. It points to the conspicuous lack or underdevelopment of modernising agents in Russian society, or more moderately, to the fact that political and social modernisation initiated by the authorities would at some stage generate demands for the limitation of the inflated powers of the state. Enhanced political authority became the agent of modernisation and guardian of civil liberties at the same time as becoming the main impediment to successful democratisation. The only solution to this dilemma was to hope for the state to (self-)curtail its political powers subsequent to the nascence of a viable civil society. For Kozyrevaia, the central difficulty then was that civil society was neither formed in reality nor would it ever have resulted in or have been the result of genuinely independent associational activities (Kozyrevaia, 1998 p.89). The

ensuing conception of individualism was paternalistic in nature and etatist in origin. Political rights would then consequently be seen as derivative of, and subsequent to, civil liberties guaranteed by the state, a position that must have been seen as incompatible with the radical democrat's view of political participation and the low value they placed on the civil liberties, which liberals prized above all else.

As pointed out by many Russian historians, these deviations from the 'norm' of Western historical development had lasting effects on the theoretical model of liberal modernisation. In lieu of a developed civil society that entrenched civil liberties and acted as a counterbalance to autocratic powers, liberals entrusted the role of agent of modernisation to the state authorities who, at best, would only have a perfunctory interest in social and political reforms as long as these would alleviate the worst effects of capitalist development that had taken root in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century. The evolution of a viable Russian civil society thus depended on the willingness of the bureaucracy, hitherto working for an unconstrained autocratic regime, to accept constitutional checks on its power at the same time it introduced social and political reforms that would eventually lead to a fundamental transformation of the status and position of that elite. This utterly unrealistic strategy of liberal reform was additionally predicated on the assumption that the creation of a middle stratum of society with vested interests in legally circumscribed property relations would ipso facto be supportive of liberal values and ideas – position that has not only attracted some theoretical criticism (Karpovich) but can also muster little evidence in reality as shown by the evolution of oligarchic capitalism in Russia following the Gaidar reforms of 1992-93 (for Gaidar's position see his theoretically instructive work *Gossudarstvo i evolutsiia*, Moscow 1995).

Kozyrevaia and Pantin's arguments could be understood as having persuasive force only with regard to a possible liberal programme of reform, highlighting on the one hand the danger of anticipating a constructive role for the political authorities in introducing

constitutionalism and the rule of law, as well as in creating the legal parameters for civil associations, while on the other hand, the prevalence of the radical democrats' interpretation of the criteria of inclusion of the notion of the Russian nation and their idea of liberation as being solely economic in purpose, posited severe problems for liberal attempts to advance an inclusive, participatory, yet constitutionally constrained, form of democracy. Their more integrated account of civil political and social liberties and rights offered little ground for collaboration with the increasingly radicalised democratic camp. Yet, besides these points of practical importance for the liberal programme of political and social change, the theoretical implications are even more critical for the applicability of political liberalism in Russia. Kozyrevaia's argument about the mismatch of the sequence of historical evolution and the absence of modernising and liberalising agents in the Russian context accentuates the possible incongruity of the Western model of protracted and balanced political change (while in the course of it creating the bearers of future legal entitlements and political interests) with the Russian model of 'catch-up' modernisation. The answer to the question as to whether or not Russian political liberalism should be formulated along the 'tried and tested' lines of Western theoretical liberalism then lies in the extent to which this conception of Western liberal politics accurately reflects the historical process that occurred in the West and how relevant the contingent components of this historical process are to the basic benchmarks of liberal politics.

That the terminological confusion between liberalism and 'democratism' has fatefully been replicated under the conditions of the liberal reforms of the Gaidar team has been pointed out more recently in an article by Sogrin. The appropriation of the democratic idea by the Communist ideology might still prove one of the most difficult stumbling blocs for any liberal political reform programme that presupposes the recognition of civil liberties and a meaningful inclusive conception of citizenship – this being at least the simplistic Western view of the prospects for Russian liberal politics. Yet, Sogrin argues, the simultaneous

inception of liberalisation and democratisation under Gorbachev led to a fateful 'marriage between the terms', a theoretical and ideological simplification where the democratic progress of Russia was perceived as merely involving an assertion of principles, such as private property, market economy, individualism, competition. These aspects were taken to mean the self-sufficient basis for democracy, whereas they in practice represented liberal values and failed to engender democracy and social justice (Sogrin, 1999, p.152-153). Russians were thus forced to learn the lessons of the past once more, realising, firstly, that individual interests do not equate to the general interest, and secondly, that the relationship between democracy and individual freedoms is not as simple and straightforward as radical liberals have taken it to be. Their programme of reform would promulgate a form of economic determinism where private property and economic freedoms (realised within a market economy) could act as the main conditions and guarantees for democracy (Sogrin, 1999, p.156).

The glaring social and economic inequity produced by these reforms highlights, according to Sogrin the insufficiency of the liberal's view of equality as being the equality of initial opportunities. The results of the reforms have shown the importance of taking into account that starting places are different (Sogrin, 1999, pp.156-157), something that belongs to the canon of liberal thinking, at least since the idea of positive liberty was accepted as an integral and complementary part to political liberalism in its negative mould. The remoteness, Sogrin argues, of Russia from the socio-economic situation of the West (possessing a strong middle stratum of society and a minimum of social equality) has thus resulted in the utopian character of Russian radical liberalism and the slow reformulation and diversification of Russian liberalism into three distinct forms: national patriotic; social-democratic liberalism; and the now widely disgraced radical laissez-faire liberalism (Sogrin, 1999, pp.160-164). Besides reiterating the preconditions for political liberalism, such as economic liberalism, Sogrin's argument stresses once again the terminological confusion that Russian early liberals

were liable to create between democracy and liberal ideas. The catch-up reforms had once again failed on account of neglecting the historically evolved economic, political and social conditions in Russia (Sogrin, 1999, p157).

In summarising the previous two sub-sections it would be helpful to simultaneously categorise the positions with regard to their reference to universalism or particularism respectively. As has been mentioned before, such a categorisation does not do justice to the variety of approaches favoured often by one and the same author, or to the manifold objectives of the explanatory patterns employed by them. Most authors appear to strive to transcend the dichotomies that dominated past debates, and references to Westernism and Slavophilism are incidental or fulfil a descriptive role rather than employed as characterisations of the authors' theoretical positions. Yet, since the objective of the present study is to examine the extent to which a universalist version of political liberalism might be upheld in any shape or form, such a categorisation may be critical to any evaluation of the arguments for and against Western political liberalism.

The section started with a survey of those positions that understand liberalism as a cultural phenomenon rather than as a contingent or deliberate result of historical development. Such positions accentuate the apolitical nature of liberal politics, as opposed to any political conception of societal agreements. Kniazeva's position could be taken as supporting a universalist or particularist view of liberal politics, depending on the existence of those liberal values of tolerance, mutual acceptance, and strict adherence to established arrangements facilitating the exchange of political views within a stable constitutional framework in Russia. Whether or not the evolution and sustenance of such 'liberal' values are likely to come about in Russia is of less theoretical concern here than the question of whether or not the components of the political arrangement mentioned above can be coherently thought of as *a-political* in nature. Although this leads us far beyond the intentions of Kniazeva's argument, her position can be taken to be indicative of a pointedly non-political view of liberal politics, a

notion of politics whose thrust would not necessarily, if theoretically viable at all, be directed at an invalidation of universalist positions *per se*. Since a culturally sensitive view of the preconditions of liberal politics would not be incompatible with a universalist version of liberalism. Evidently, dissociating liberal politics from culturally conditioned values such as tolerance and respect does not suggest the utter incompatibility of political liberalism with such principles but only that political liberalism is parasitic upon their existence. To conclude that Russian political liberalism is something impossible to achieve in the foreseeable future because the aforementioned values are absent in Russian culture is then something akin to committing a category mistake.

The weakness of this position would, however, be that the apolitical character of political arrangements such as constitutionalism, simply growing out of pre-existing cultural values, would have to be shown. Ironically, this is less alien to political liberalism in its Rawlsian universalist mould than might first appear to be the case. Once the ultimate political value is being identified as societal stability which facilitates co-operation or, in a Hobbesian sense, mere survival, then a view of liberal politics ensues that is founded unavoidably on the prior existence of tolerance and established procedures of decision-making, possibly cast in a constitutional mould. Or, as Rawls put it, comprehensive doctrines could be supportive of a political conception of justice with ensuing implications for the pre-existing form of political institutions (that, surprisingly enough, look pretty much like the political institutions of Rawls' homeland).

Yet, this argument rests, just like the Rawlsian hope of fashioning political consensus on the basis of comprehensive doctrines, on a misconception of what the political character of *cultural* values could be. Tolerance and mutual respect might underpin already existing political arrangements but cannot play a creative role in defining the nature of the political arrangements. Hobbes understood this well when he argued that the quest for survival can induce people to seek the protection of a powerful authority, yet it need not determine the

internal structure of this political authority as distinct from ensuring the sustenance of such a structure. Similarly, tolerance and mutual respect might generate a concern that any political regime ought to incorporate these values into the list of valuable maxims of governing, yet neither of these precepts says anything to the effect that *only liberal* political arrangements can be seen as ideally protective of these values. It is important to note, that such a position must not count constitutionalism as a liberal political arrangement in this regard. Yet, this certainly strays too far from the moderate historically-minded position of Kniazeva. She does not set out to explain whether or not constitutionalism is *constitutive* of political liberalism or belongs to the essential ingredients of such. Her argument more modestly reiterates the need for a contextual approach in explaining the viability of the liberal political order in England in contrast to the failure of past attempts to establish such an order in Russia. And we should let it stand as such for we shall return to a stronger reformulation of such an apolitical view of the preconditions of liberalism later in the thesis.

While Pantin's position shifts the focus of the debate more to the usage and meanings of concepts that have competed in Russian consciousness, it emphasises, on one hand, the importance of cultural receptivity to Western concepts and ideas, and on the other hand, argues that public discourse and consciousness can acquire pre-figurations that prove inimical to liberal ideas in general. Both arguments are fundamentally prioritising cultural conditions in explaining the failure of liberal ideas to develop deep roots in Russia. Concepts can acquire connotations that turn out to be ultimately incompatible with the meaning they gained in their original decidedly liberal frame of reference. Depending on whether or not these concepts are pivotal for the notion of liberal politics in general, they might inhibit the emergence of a liberal political order. Pantin's arguments highlight the significance of configurations of public consciousness in Russia for the attractiveness of liberal politics to a wider population. The predominance of the doctrine of 'democratism' with its reductionist notions of the nation and liberty inhibits liberal political ideas from taking root not least due to the danger of sheer

in- or mis-comprehension by the wider public. The ideas of liberty and nation have become imbued with meanings that are contradictory to any liberal interpretation of them. Pantin's point then is helpful in illuminating the extent to which the applicability of these concepts depend on a conducive discursive climate. Liberty does not equal liberty, while the Russian usage of concepts of nation and national liberation can be far removed from Western semantic practices.

The theoretically critical point here is that the meanings conveyed by political concepts are in part products of the interrelations that exist within particular discursive contexts. It then depends on the scale of this context to determine whether these meanings acquire universal, or retain a solely particular, referentiality. A whole range of positions are conceivable here. One might adopt a universalist contextualist position on the grounds that political theory as discursive formation is regulated by strict rules of logic and plausibility that ought to be intelligible to anybody possessing a certain minimum level of rationality, independent of socialisation, cultural influences and upbringing, a position that, as it were, posits political theory as a coherent and self-contained conversation. Such a position may not appear defensible, given the tendency for most contemporary political philosophy to deduce specific formations of political institutions from a set of general precepts. This seems to locate political theory firmly in the particularity of time and space. Yet, it is easy to see that more recent political theory of this type represents a departure from the Kantian position that would adequately be described by the universalist contextualist position sketched above. Contemporary political philosophers may no longer want to share the metaphysical assumptions that have been so fundamental to the Kantian construction, yet this also opens them up to the charge that their universalism now requires different anchoring.

In contrast, by linking the context that engenders the meaning of theoretical concepts to the cultural formation in which it was produced and/or reproduced, one arrives at a contextualist contention that can commit one either to a particularist or universalist position.

This will partly depend on which view one takes on the possibility of a general convergence or identity of world cultures.

Kozyrevaia's portrayal of the dilemma of liberals in the late Tsarist and post-Soviet period strictly speaking would fall into neither of the categories considered above. It is a position that draws its formidable power from somewhere else than by severing or knitting the link between political liberalism as a theoretical engagement and its social, political and cultural environment. Kozyrevaia draws attention to the fact that, in spite of all the changing content of theoretical concepts and ideas, there seems to be an invariant sequence in historical development that conditions the evolution of liberal politics. And this for the simple reason that liberal politics is a project that requires support and is not an inevitable result of history. Support however is synonymous with constructive agency, deliberate guided behaviour whose prerequisite must be an interest or urgency to act. In straightforward historical terms this is a call for a liberalising or modernising agent in society and Kozyrevaia's argument indicates that political liberalism must take into account the specific constellation that allows such an agent to emerge. Taken as a simply historical account, this may be understood as a plea for the historiographical reconstruction of political liberalism. Yet, by examining its theoretical implications it can be useful for an evaluation of what is missing in many contemporary versions of political liberalism. Kozyrevaia's account hints at the sequence of the emergence and interest-formulation of the various political actors and it appears to be necessary to assume that this sequence is not arbitrary. Western political theorists have long criticised the view that Western liberalism came into existence as a product of an application of some theoretical formulae. This criticism from a more generally historical perspective has received some elaboration in the insistence that civil society as a network of non-political, informal relations in Western societies evolved prior to, and represented a seedbed for, political liberalism. This concept of civil society is exactly the fertile ground that allows interests in a liberal political order to grow.

However, any entirely historical approach to political liberalism would be complementing political theory rather than represent a substantial critique of the efforts by political philosophers. The projects of historians of political thought who are trying to distil from historical events a plausible account of how liberal politics came about and the endeavours of political philosophers are thus distinct and complementary in their objectives and approaches. Yet, a different perspective emerges if historians' misgivings about a seemingly mechanistic portrayal of the evolution of liberal politics by political philosophers are taken as merely indicative of theoretical assumptions that are at work in political theory and are in need of further justification. Seen this way the absence of any reference to sequencing in the hypothetical reconstruction of liberal politics might be taken as implausible insofar as some concepts presuppose the existence (for practical interest formation) and/or a connotative stability (for hypothetical purposes) of others. One could thus transfer the communitarian critique of Kantian individualism onto the platform of interest formation and/or semantic conceptual relations by pointing to the fact that liberal politics is nurtured by ideas and interests that are growing out of specific political configurations which are perceived as being in themselves insufficient for the successful pursuit of these interests or ideas. One notorious candidate that possesses a semantic elusiveness if it is not embedded in a specific conceptual context is the idea of liberty. Pantin's analysis of the meaning of the term in the doctrine of 'democratism' shows that liberty can be conceived coherently without necessarily being inclusive and pre-eminently political in character. Inclusivity and the essentially political nature of liberty in the Western context appear then as normative assertions derived from the actual evolution of Western political liberalism, rather than as uncontested theoretically justifiable foundations on which to build on.

9. Liberalism, Culture and Civility

A convenient way into the complex problem of the relation between culture, liberalism and civility is provided by the argument Pantin presents in analysing the connection between liberalism and competing principles for ordering the public sphere, such as democracy or 'democratism' (as he refers to it), indicating that its connotations reach further than the mere idea of political participation. Analysing the relation between the democratic ideal and liberalism, he resorts to a notion of culture to explain the pre-eminence of the former over the latter. Every people, so Pantin contends, chooses and defines its own idea of freedom (i.e. the extent of political participation, eventually: democracy) in regard to the situation and the people's past experiences. The difficulty for Russia is that it possesses not just a different socio-economic set of conditions or different forms of political life in general, but a different type of culture (Pantin, 1994, p.77). This cultural type manifests itself, so Pantin maintains, in a paradigm of 'spiritual-value' (*dukhovnoie tsennost'*) nature. This means that for Russia, the key cultural terms are not individual in character but social or communal. According to Pantin, Russian culture could be called a primitive-collectivist type of culture (Pantin, 1994, p.77).

It undoubtedly conditions the chances of radical transformation, given the inertia of the cultural underlying paradigm and the public perception of the state as a location where the social 'we' is identical to the individual 'I'. Pantin concludes that under the given circumstances of a dominant collectivist culture, political liberalism only has a chance of becoming a central political orientation of the population if it adopts a strong democratic course. The fact that liberals traditionally have neglected the idea of social equality (and continue to do so) made it impossible to forge a pact between democratic and liberal forces. While examining the history of liberalism in Russia in comparison to Western political liberalism, Pantin notes that the latter progressed along what he calls a 'natural' path, whereas

Russia clearly departs from the norm in its historical evolution. The glaring despondency of the Russian peasantry and the problem of serfdom opened up the exploitation of this exigency for reforms by democrats and radicals, resulting early on in the crystallisation of two opposing political reform paths and ideas of political order, liberalism and democratism (Pantin, 1994, p.81). National consciousness adopted a simulacrum of this antagonistic constellation, where social liberation was conceived of as being opposed to individual liberation. Thus, the departure from the Western 'norm', so Pantin, is evidenced by the fact that in Russia no society (cultural notion) was generated which was capable of giving the liberal conception of freedom a real ideal and aim in practical politics (Pantin, 1994, p.81). In fact, Pantin argues, Russian liberals, in contrast to the Bolsheviki and the Narodniki, were unable to understand properly the problem of liberty as it presented itself in Russia (Pantin, 1994, p.81).

In Russia, so Pantin argues, freedom would not exist unless its idea was coupled with a minimum of economic and legal self-determination, thus incorporating a demand for the removal of the remaining privileges, such as serfdom, and a stance against autocracy. Liberals show(ed) little concern for these issues, in fact aligned themselves for too long with the autocratic government. Pantin remarks that the reason for this neglect of the question of social and political equality might have been the long-lasting illusion of liberals that only a concerted effort of the autocracy and the institutions of local self-government could bring about the constitutional political structure for Russia which liberals saw as indispensable for liberalising Russian governmental institutions (Pantin, 1994, p.82). Yet, more interestingly to our theoretical concern, Pantin exonerates Russian liberals for any neglect they have shown to the democratic ideals and ideas. He argues that blame should be allocated to the history of the country as being locked in a cultural division between higher and lower classes, as well as in the limited nature of the bounds (restrictions) of European civilisation applied to the growing force of Plebeian reinterpretation of political change and demands in Russia (Pantin, 1994, p.82). Pantin elaborates further on the idea of the incoherent or insufficient assimilation of

Western culture in Russia when he argues that, although the Russian nobility appropriated Western 'high culture' and developed it further, they had no feel for the societal ideals or connotations that came attached to these cultural forms, such as freedom and citizenship (Pantin, 1994, p.82). Pantin seems to suggest here that the assimilation of the various forms of social and political life of the West in Russia was characterised by a certain hollowness, an inability to transfer not only the empty shells of cultural and social ways of life but also their meaning and often political implications. The resulting weakness of the liberal idea in Russia reinforced the dominant role of the state in the process of modernisation.

Pantin goes on to argue that the difference between democrats and liberals extended to the sequencing of liberation. Contrary to the belief of Narodniki and Bolsheviki who constructed a link between the economic development of Russia and the subsequent possible political transformation, liberals emphasised the priority of political liberties. Yet, Russian cultural traditions inhibited a widespread acceptance of the reversed connection between prior political liberties and subsequent economic progress of society as understood by liberals (Pantin, 1994, p.85). For Pantin, then, the problem of Russian modernisation and liberation is the difficulty liberals have (had) in plausibly prioritising political over economic and social liberties in obverse dependency to the positions of radical democrats (Pantin, 1994, p.87). Although Russian culture would prohibit a concentration of liberating efforts on political freedoms, without them being accompanied by economic liberties, the specific emphasis on economic liberation is peculiar to Russia (Pantin, 1994, p.88) and has its cause in the long tradition of material deprivation and dependency of the majority of the population. Although Pantin's discussion of liberalism originates in an examination of the cross-fertilisation of liberalism and democratism in Russia, his ideas on the collectivist orientation of Russia's culture and its impact on the formulation of liberal ideas of modern society and reforms are relevant to the present discussion on account of his clearcut (if inaccurate) identification of the determinants of the particular shape and content of Russian political liberalism.

Pantin rests his explanation of the failure of political liberalism to succeed in Russia on a notion of culture being unreceptive to the central liberal concepts as they were formulated by Russian liberal theorists in the nineteenth century. Since Russia did not have the privilege of experiencing a 'normally' sequenced modernisation, the question emerged as to which forms of liberty to prioritise. Liberals emphasised political liberties that rang hollow in the ears of the majority of the Russian population when not supplemented by economic and social liberation. The increasing influence of democratism in Russia meant that the idea of liberation gradually shifted towards an increasingly economic reading and this in turn neatly concurred with the strongly collectivist hue of Russian culture and the role of the state in inaugurating industrial and social modernisation in the country. Besides the implications for political liberalism as a political programme that are of less interest for the present context, Pantin's views are relevant insofar as they present an intriguing analysis of the mutual influence of political ideas. Political liberalism in his account appears to be a cluster of ideas that need to be receptive to the present circumstances, as well as the prevailing culture. The latter conception remains very vague indeed in his account, but it can be surmised that he understands culture not as political culture in the strict sense of the term but as a conglomerate of often conflicting views on the social and political ideal. He singles out the mainly collectivist perspective of the Russian peasantry on self-determination and how this conflicted with a simplistic account of individual liberty. This interpretation seems to hint at irreconcilable differences between an imported, unreconstructed political liberalism and local views about the shape and objective of liberation. This would reinforce the necessity to look more closely at the forms and limits of the assimilation of political thought, something that will receive more attention later in the thesis.

In another article, Pantin provides a more distinct formulation of his view on the relation between culture and liberalism. He points out, along the lines of argument already sketched above, that the cultural type of Russian society, in which not the individual but the

society is the key regulatory concept, is not collectivist in the sense of a simple overemphasis on societal vis-à-vis individual concerns. The collectivist aspect of Russian culture finds its expression in concrete emanations of national, political and cultural aspects. And while any social and political activity originates not in the individual but in the authorities and the various social groups (in line with the direction of modernisation as being initiated from above), the interaction between individual and society is in fact a monologic one (Pantin, 1996, p.400). However, he stresses, in contrast to his previous thesis, that the adverse cultural milieu cannot explain the failure of liberalism as a political movement. Rather, he contends, it was the readiness and willingness of the so-called democratic camp to incorporate and reformulate the views that prevailed amongst the population into a more general idea of politics in a modernising polity (Pantin, 1996, p.403).

Also significant for the discussion is Pantin's argument that the Russian intelligentsia and enlightened gentry selectively assimilated forms of the Western social and political life without attaching to them the concomitant connotations that would have deep political implications, such as citizenship and freedom. This alerts us to the fact that the process of appropriation of foreign ideas and concepts can imply a 'hollowing out' of these imported ideas. Pantin does not elucidate this process in which the concepts are estranged from their original meaning further. But it could prove a crucial aspect exemplifying the extent to which political liberalism is forced to adapt itself not only to particular political circumstances but also to the vagaries of the intellectual receptivity of the prospective proponent of such political views. The adoption of singular components from the complex assortment of imported political views and concepts seems to be possible, yet at the same time it destroys the fabric of meaning that was assigned to the various elements in their original settings. How far the process of assimilating Western life styles amongst the nobility was accompanied by the intellectual appropriation of Western political thought can only be guessed here, yet

Pantin argues on an implicit level that both processes were structurally determined by the predominant culture and hence proceeded along similar lines.

It should be noted here that the question of the adaptability of core concepts of political liberalism bears on the problem of how and whether to define liberalism on the basis of including an invariable core of concepts and ideas (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.61). How far adaptability impacts on, or can be reconciled with the notion of, a distinguishable and invariable content of these concepts will have to be examined later.

In a similar vein, Kazban attempts to define the particularity of Russian liberalism as well as that of the West as being engendered by a culture which in the West stressed the importance of individual freedom (with John Locke as founding father) and private property. Liberalism, he argues takes its shape not from an abstract idea of freedom but from the specific practical solution it offered to the institutional and legal conditions of the provision and maintenance of liberty (Kazban, 1993, p.47-48). Constitutionalism thus emerges not only as the central idea of liberalism, but political liberalism is also by definition particular to time and space insofar as the specific formation of constitutional guarantees for individual freedom are conditioned by the situation of the country and the position of the liberal elite in the political system. For Kazban, Western political culture came to be dominated by political liberalism, whereas the relatively weak constitutional faction amongst Russian liberals never gained any decisive influence (Kazban, 1993, p.53-58).

Kniazeva similarly argues that the analysis of the evolution of Western political liberalism is instructive for an assessment of the failure of liberals in Russia to muster the critical support needed to implement their reforms. Besides the more practical implications of her historical examination of British liberalism for the applicability of liberal ideas in Russia, her conclusions are insightful for our present concern insofar as she identifies a notion of civility and tolerance as the core maxim of British politics. Despite the significance of the views of classical liberals and utilitarianism, the prevailing political culture of tolerance and

civility epitomised in England in the ideas of constitutionalism and parliamentarism can serve as an apt characterisation of the relation between opposition and government, resulting in the slow but steady emergence of political pluralism (Kniazeva, 2000, p.81). The avoidance of political polarisation and the drive towards a broad integration of all significant components of English society turned out to be the crucial conditions for societal and political stability over the centuries (Kniazeva, 2000, p.83). The main pillar of British liberalism, so Kniazeva contends, is the respect for differing opinions, as manifested in parliamentarism, and the spirit of political collaboration (Kniazeva, 2000, p.84). Seconded by the growing adherence of the government to the law, the polity acquired a remarkable level of stability and legitimacy (Kniazeva, 2000, p.85). She concludes that liberalism is not simply a libertarian doctrine but must be understood as the totality of intellectual, political and moral ideas which rest on the guarantee of freedom of the individual, which in turn create the ideal conditions for liberty's realisation. What seems significant to her in the English case is that respect for the rights of the individual was gradually accepted as the highest objective of societal development. The article ends with the rather vague remark that the success of Russian liberal reforms will depend on the use of the accumulated Western positive experience (Kniazeva, 2000, pp.84-85).

Kniazeva has offered a most intriguing account of Western liberalism. Although she accurately traces the pedigree of the idea of liberty in English history, she argues that any form of political liberalism, whether classical or utilitarian or the social liberalism of the late nineteenth century, is bolstered by or, in fact, inspired by a general political culture of tolerance and civility that finds its appropriate embodiment in restrained political competition, as epitomised in parliamentarism and constitutionalism⁷. She also emphasises the extent to which utilitarian liberals, in promoting their specific political programme of reform, continued to rely upon the more general idea of inclusion and stability favoured by ruling classes

(Kniazeva, 2000, pp.82-83). Although she does not surmise the fate of the Russian liberal reforms if these principles were absent or disregarded by liberals, her conclusion seems to point to the relevance of these ideas as a foundation for liberal politics, although they do not explicitly belong to the canon of liberal concepts and ideals.

From the presentation of these historical perspectives one might draw some tentative conclusions. Firstly, Pantin's argument reiterates the significance of an examination of the process of selective assimilation of foreign concepts and the possibility that in the course of appropriation they become stripped of their original meaning, which was a function of the specific role they played in a particular culture. Additionally, he draws attention to the fact that any political ideal operates in an intellectual environment which involves some interaction with ideas of politics reflecting rival views of social and political order, such as 'democratism'. A political liberalism that remains transfixed on an abstract idea of liberty and is unable to translate this abstraction into local political practice must eventually become sterile and will fail to marshal the support of the majority of the population. Kazban adds further weight to Pantin's argument by stressing the need for a re-formulation of liberalism to take into account the local conditions, thus interpreting liberalism as a specific response to the question of how to guarantee the rights and liberties of the individual in modern conditions. Political liberalism thus necessarily acquires a particularistic hue, albeit still dedicated to the promotion of individual liberty.

In contrast to their views, Kniazeva's position appears to be more radical. She points out that the various forms of political liberalism that emerged in England over the last two hundred years would have been inconceivable in practical terms unless supported by a more general framework of political principles that was invariably at work and provided a considerable stability of the polity as a whole. The political programme of liberals seems to have been in various ways parasitic on these maxims of tolerance for contrary viewpoints and

⁷ She refers here to the rule of law and the adherence of the government to the rule of law, not to a particular

to have benefited from the already existing political structures of parliamentarism and constitutionalism that were not necessarily intrinsic to a view of liberal politics. Political liberalism thus appears as a range of historically varying views of the ideal society that feeds upon the stability of politics in general. The 'survival' of the political order under the onslaught of strong libertarian views under Margaret Thatcher might be an exemplification of the resilience and necessity of these political foundations. Whether political liberalism is detachable from the ideas of constitutionalism and parliamentarism is questionable. Yet, Kniazeva's point on the significance of a political culture of civility is indicative of the presuppositions of political liberalism in England in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Pantin and Kazban's positions sketched above share a specific perspective on political liberalism insofar as they criticise the supposed inadequacies of Russian liberalism on the grounds of either its unresponsiveness to the cultural and political environment in which it operated or the misguided abstraction of its central concepts. Only Kniazeva points out that there might be additional features extraneous to the core concepts of political liberalism that sustain a given political culture and which made and still make it resistant to the most vicious attempts at social and political laissez-faire politics. This position implies that the objective of any policy should be the sustenance of an already existing and functioning political culture, a point that would resonate well with some more conservative views of modern politics (cf. Cahoon, Oakeshott, and Kapustin's position as sketched in chapter 11).

10. Liberalism as Civilisation

To regard liberalism as a form of civilisation would at first glance strike many Western political theorists as odd. Political theory in the West derives much of its impetus from Kantian metaphysics which successfully cleansed political philosophy of its historical context and made it into a free standing theoretical operation, to be conducted at any time and, if compliant with some basic logical rules, at any place in the world. The only crucial condition Kant imposed on philosophising was that it could only be successfully undertaken as being part of the modern world, i.e. as an integral part of the project of Enlightenment. To retrospectively de-contextualise even the works of those political theorists who lived prior to Kant and knew little about the idea of human progress as epitomised in the idea of Enlightenment, led to the significant criticism of this approach by Skinner, Pocock and others who emphasised the historical environment as engendering the specific meaning of them in their particular historical environment. How much Skinner and Pocock's insights were results of the excesses of these de-contextualised interpretations or, more likely, of the decision of most political philosophy after the First World War to discard the metaphysical baggage of Kantian philosophy is still a story that needs to be written. Yet, Skinner and Pocock were by no means the only scholars whom the picture of political philosophy stripped off its historical context would strike as odd. Powerful criticisms have been formulated by MacIntyre and Rorty offering alternative readings of the history of political philosophy which incorporated an awareness of the loss of teleological foundations (and justifications) in political theory in the twentieth century.

However, neither historians of political thought nor philosophers who have been critical of the de-teleological (or de-ontological, for that matter) mould of political theory in the West have felt tempted to interpret political liberalism as a civilisational formation, something that extends the conceptual boundaries of political culture or even culture in

general. Western political theorists may have been reluctant to develop this interpretative route, perhaps because it is littered with the corpses of the dinosaurs of civilisational historiography. To share the fate of Spengler and Toynbee may not be exactly appealing. Russian historiography and political philosophy does not share the experience of the Spenglerian doomsday history and the ridicule and eventual oblivion into which it fell.

For Russians to view the world as being divided along civilisational lines is a familiar perspective. The notion of the Russian nation as a guardian of the civilised world withstanding the continuous onslaughts of the barbarian peoples from the East has been and still is a popular topos of Russian historiography. It suffices to cast a brief glance at the speeches of Russian politicians (and not just mavericks of the political scene in Russia) to realise that various concoctions of the remnants of this missionary and civilising story are still alive and kicking in Russia today. For Russian philosophy and historiography this is not simply a matter of one interpretative paradigm amongst others. The resurgence of what could be called the 'civilisational' historiography and interpretation of Russian political, social life and culture is part of the story of recapturing the philosophical and historiographical heritage of Russia after the collapse of Communism. It is, in effect, the exchange of one paradigm for another and it seems appropriate before embarking on an examination of the merits of this civilisational approach for political theory to review a critical appraisal of it by a Russian historian.

Shelokhaiev is best known for his works on Russian liberalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In an article for the journal 'Obnovlenie Rossii' he examines the intentions and objectives of post-Communist Russian historiography. Now liberated from any imposed ideological interpretation, Shelokhaiev finds Russian historians at fault for uncritically replacing one explanatory paradigm with another. What Russian historians think possesses some novelty, the civilisational approach, is merely adopted from Western historiography. He distinguishes between two approaches that command quite considerable influence amongst

Russian historians in the nineties. There is on one side the formational-classificational approach and, on the other, the civilisational theory of history. Both are, so Shelokhaiev contends, the fruits of Western rationalist thinking based on singular trajectories of universal development and societal progress (Shelokhaiev, 1997, p.123-124). However, the theoretical concern would be, so Shelokhaiev maintains, that, given that both approaches are now in advantageous positions because they receive 'political support' within the academic community, other explanatory patterns are disadvantaged and receive short shrift (Shelokhaiev, 1997, p.124). What he has in mind is illustrated when he explains why he believes both the formalist (structuralist) and the civilisational approach belong to the same Western arsenal of historiographical forms. At heart, the structuralist or Marxist perspective, as well as the civilisational historical perspective, are Eurocentric since the former comprehends history as being determined by deep underlying patterns that are essentially immutable and the latter prefers to see the history of civilisations as culminating in Western democracy (Shelokhaiev, 1997, p.124). A synthesis of both, already attempted by Russian historians at the end of the Soviet period, has failed to take root. But, Shelokhaiev argues, even this would not alleviate the more profound problem of exclusivity. What is needed is a balanced historical perspective, capable of accommodating the vast array of different paths to the present without predetermining the final destination of these various trajectories (Shelokhaiev, 1997, p.125). The alternative theoretical approach Shelokhaiev suggests is seeing societies through the prism of modernisation. Such a modernisation approach would be politically neutral and theoretically inclusive on the following counts. Firstly, it would be open to other concepts of a range of other approaches. It relates to them, as it were, in an ephemeral way and does not privilege any particular one. It, secondly, has a relativising impact on rival historiographical forms insofar as it recognises various justifications for any variants of historical processes, be they evolutionary, revolutionary or a combination of both. Thirdly, modernisation as an explanatory pattern of historical development does not favour a

synchronous or asynchronous evolution. This is of particular importance for Russian historiography since here modernisation adopted a different pace, was initiated at a different time and proceeded in accordance with a different logic to the West. Thus the asynchronous character of Russian transformation can explain the 'friction' that occurred during the simultaneous political, social and cultural changes. Fourthly, modernisation alerts the historian to the varying initial positions, the different realisations, and the processes of adaptation and cross-influence that take place in different regions of the world (Shelokhaiev, 1997, p.126-127).

What is relevant for present purposes is that Shelokhaiev conceives of the civilisational approach as an ultimately Western historical interpretation that privileges one particular destination of societal development, i.e. democracy, and is unable to appreciate the differing paces, and levels of synchronisation between the political, social and cultural transformative processes. In Shelokhaiev's analysis, then, the civilisational approach transmutes into a form of Western historiography that privileges the specifically Western outcome of transitions from traditional to modern societies, that is democracy as constitution of Western political societies. The interesting aspect of Shelokhaiev's analysis is what he consequently regards as features of this civilisational historical approach and what as resultant (universal) components of modern societies. While democracy is characterised as the telos of the civilisational theory of history, the market economy, civil society and the rule of law (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*) acquire the insignia of the modernisation approach (Shelokhaiev (1997), p.127). What is less clear is whether these aspects of modernity are any less teleological than the democratic principle, just as Shelokhaiev's differentiation between democracy and the features of modernity as belonging to differing interpretative patterns must obfuscate rather than clarify the interrelations between them. He may be right in favouring the modernisation approach on account of its overall neutrality with regard to the idea of democracy, yet, what he understandably objects to in the civilisational approach, the normative content of democracy

as a prescriptive principle of political order, is conventionally thought to be far from absent in any of those concepts which he enumerates as aspects of modernity. A historical interpretation that is based on an explication of the modernising processes in a society may very appropriately focus attention on the simultaneity of economic, political and social modernisation as a contingent quality of the Western form of modernisation, yet, this does not relieve any historian using this theoretical approach from explaining why civil society, the market economy and the idea of the *Rechtsstaat* should be descriptive historiographical categories rather than normative properties of Western societies and contain a teleological aspect insofar as they represent civilisational aspiration.

But can historiography answer any questions about the normative contents of social and political arrangements? History, after all, is the narration of 'how it came to be', the quintessentially 'is'. History must ultimately appear as a different category of intellectual enterprise to philosophy then, and thus the approach of many Russian historians interpreting Western liberalism as a civilisation may have descriptive, even explanatory, merits, but hardly crosses over into the terrain of justification. To attempt to vindicate social institutions by drawing on a story about 'how it came about' seems to commit a gross categorical mistake. But perhaps what is at fault here is our sense of the purpose and objective of political theory, of which the incompatibility between historiography and philosophy is a result. What if political theory was not narrowed down to a solely normative endeavour, a vindication of political formations as they ought to be, or as they have developed? What if political philosophy is to be taken as a broader and, at the same time, a more modest enterprise? Broader insofar as we try to enhance its aim from a mere vindication of political institutions to providing a portrait of the sense which the political world makes to us. More modest insofar as, since political theory is perhaps overburdened with a justification of political order on a universal level, we limit our endeavour to giving good reasons *why* we believe that liberal institutions are the proper response to the problems we encounter in the modern world.

This would clearly open up an opportunity for historical accounts to play a role in considering our response to the various situations in which we found ourselves. The metaphysical link between such a version of political theory and historiography turns out to be the choices political actors make. Just as their actions demand personal as well as public justification, so their actions can be rendered comprehensible to us only in a narrative context that constructs a connection between their motivation and their environment that requires a response. Oakeshott delivered a prime example of such a historicised political theory most poignantly in the last chapter of 'On Human Conduct'.

The advantages of such an alternative perspective on political theory will be outlined at a later stage. For the moment suffice to say that, within the limits of political theory as a philosophical project that encompasses the entirety of political behaviour and its emphasis on making sense of the conceptual tools we have to explain it, there is a place for a historical explication of how people came by certain political arrangements, not irrespective of any normative justification of the social institutions, but complementing this more conventional theoretical concern. Thus, to exclude the civilisational approach favoured by many Russian historians is to deprive us of a view which others have developed in order to make sense of the political order as it exists in the West.

It should be made clear from the outset that Russian usage of the concept of civilisation has long lost its more simplistic function as a theoretical vehicle for a vindication of Slavophilism. Above all, Akhiezer's conception of civilisation has had a formative influence, on Russian historiography. His work has spawned a methodological and theoretical debate amongst Russian historians about the merits of his concept and his reformulations of the civilisational concept for the idea of Russian statehood will be examined in greater detail later in this study. For the moment, the concern will lie more with what civilisation as a theoretical concept can say about political liberalism in East and West. Although the impact of Akhiezer's work is palpable in the work of other historians who use

his conceptual device, there is hardly anything approximating theoretical uniformity (Akhiezer, 1999). The focus of the following section will be on a selection of articles that attempt to understand political liberalism in the West as form of civilisation. To illustrate the great variety of interpretative vistas which the idea of civilisation permits, a view of political liberalism as civilisation will begin the exposition. Although a notion of political liberalism as a form of civilisation must strike Western political theorists as having only limited explanatory force, it has the advantage, in contrast to other civilisational theories, of being reconcilable with a strictly Western frame of reference.

In a contribution to a recent collection of articles, Yuchenkov outlines his idea of Western liberalism as an enumeration of various values that came to be associated with it - freedom, private property, laissez-faire, epistemological optimism as produced through the mechanism of the market economy, education and culture, democracy, legality (*pravo zakonnost'*), equality, inequality of wealth and income, peace, patriotism, freedom of movement, federalism, right to self-determination, protection of the environment, tolerance, and justice.

While Yuchenkov states that liberalism does not differ in its main objective from Communism (the free development of everyone is the condition for the free development of all, Yuchenkov, 2002, p.34), he indicates the significance that is attached to the differing methods used in accomplishing this goal. After considering von Mises' characterisation of Western liberalism as an ideology or doctrine about the mutual relations between the members of a society (Yuchenkov, 2002, p.37), he concludes that Western civilisation is founded on the enunciation of the principle within the state of the priority of individual rights and freedoms before all collective interests (Yuchenkov, 2002, p.38), while also representing the highest achievement of the freedom of the individual. He stresses that this characterisation departs from the conventional view of Western liberalism amongst Russian theorists and politicians as being founded solely on individualism as a self-contained truth (Yuchenkov,

2002, p.40). While the initial intentions of his article are didactic in nature, it also highlights the central role which liberalism has played in ensuring the survival of Western civilisation. Political liberalism thus becomes a doctrine with a clearly delimited purpose, and its justification resides in the urgent need of the West to find a solution to the problem of how to sustain a given social order in the face of danger of its dissolution (Yuchenkov, 2002, p.38 paraphrasing Kara-Murza). Liberalism here appears to be uniquely capable of ensuring the survival of Western civilisation and draws its justification from this fact.

The centrality of the idea of societal survival or reproduction is constantly reiterated in Akhiezer's many articles and monographs. It is clearly one of the most pivotal concepts in his theory of social orders. In an article on the specificity of Russian civilisation he writes:

'No civilisation is conceivable (nevozmozhno) without a defining measurement and a deep desire (stremlenie) for stability (and) survival (vyzhivaiemosti).' (Akhiezer, 1999, p.72).

This may strike a political theorist as resembling closely a Hobbesian idea of human nature, in which the mere survival is a motivation for action. Yet, Akhiezer's subject matter is civilisations not people and their reasons for acting. He offers a sociology of civilisational forms, rather than an explication of human behaviour. The missing link between human actions and the desired continuation of a given civilisation is provided by the cultural forms in which people live and from which they draw their reasons to act. Although the categories Akhiezer employs are mostly not concerned with the ideas of justification of political structures and human action, the link between cultural forms and human behaviour does play a prominent role in his theory. In the first volume of 'Rossiia: Kritika istoricheskovo opyta', he expounds the relation between culture and human activity thus:

'In history only those cultures, cultural forms and cultural values are preserved (sokhranilis') which orient the individual to the reproduction (vosproisvodstvo), preservation and integration of society. If a culture creates the basis for (its) preservation through the activities of the people historically composing the social fabric

(otnosheni), then (this culture) also preserves the social foundations of its existence. If a culture cannot provide this, then its mass social basis perishes, its social institutions collapse, which preserved (the culture), and protect (it) from the various dangers. Eventually, the dominant culture moves away into the background, conceding its place to other cultural forms. Culture and social relations are (the) two aspects of the reproductive human activities. (Akhiezer, 1997, p.55)

At the heart of any civilisation then lies the need for a reproduction of its cultural norms and precepts through people's actions. Without any interference from 'outside', any society would have a tendency towards holism and self-containment which is, however, undermined by economic and social processes that collide with the cultural norms inscribed into the social fabric of a given civilisation.

So far, this contributes no radically new perspectives on political liberalism. Akhiezer's theory of civilisations is of sociological persuasion, not political in nature. Yet, the picture attains a political twist when he outlines the reason for Russia's inability to produce a non-conflicting cultural norm that regulates society and is imbued, as it were, with the reproductive codes of Russian civilisation. Akhiezer identifies three main civilisational stages of historical development. Each one possesses its own behaviour-regulating code that ensures the long-term reproduction and survival of a given society. Traditional civilisation, firstly, is oriented towards the preservation of the given. It is a reinforcement of the existing, excluding any change in social relations and concerned primarily with how to ensure the survival of social relations in their current shape and form (Akhiezer, 1999, p.72). The third civilisation and its concomitant moral ideal is liberalism. It proffers a different notion of preservation, preferring to contemplate the survival of social relations in terms of constant change. In between the traditional and the liberal moral codes and civilisations operates a transitional form of morality whose real function and theoretical justification Akhiezer does not always clarify sufficiently. In fact it seems to have more of a regulatory role in the successful development of liberalism rather than a vindicable existence on its own. Akhiezer calls it utilitarianism and assigns to it the moral code of the utility principle, as a shorthand for

unfettered individualism, bracketed only by the boundaries of the idea of the necessity to preserve society (cf. Yarkova, 2002).

Utilitarianism, as understood by Akhiezer, seems to have a role to play in accommodating and fostering the often conflicting trajectories of modernisation which create the foundation for the liberal form of civilisation. It has thus more of an auxiliary role in bringing about the conditions for the subsequent civilisational form (cf. Akhiezer's account of moderate and developed utilitarianism in Akhiezer, 1997, esp. pp. 29-31). However it may be, Akhiezer's theory still possesses up to here a sociological edge that limits its usefulness for the purpose of this study. Yet, being a historian, he then sets out to explain the transfer from one civilisational model to another, from the traditional morality that asserts the primacy of absence of change, to the liberal morality which understand change as an integral part of preservation. In explaining this transformational process he has recourse to the political processes that have occurred in Russia and their deviation from those of the West. The particularity of Russian political history is revealed in the fact that social institutions have originated by and large in the activities of the state, or autocracy. An example, according to Akhiezer, would be the Orthodox Church. Prescribed by by royal decree from the emperor, the relations that ensued between autocracy and church were of mutual conditionality. While the autocracy drew part of its authority and public support from the Church, the Church was tied to the fate of the autocracy and never gained even relative independence. In contrast to the West, where the frictions between the papacy and the various regional (subsequently national) monarchies have been part and parcel of political events, the

'(s)pecificity of the Russian society consists in the fact that no corresponding mechanism of mutual permeation of the contrasting cultural layers develop in it, (inhibiting) the search for a synthesis between them, and thus eventually producing a rift in society. (Akhiezer, 1999, p.76).'

For political theorists one could rephrase Akhiezer's idea of a 'mechanism of mutually permeating cultural layers' as the inevitable development of a public sphere that would initially contain the mere utterances of justifications for the differing positions in the confrontation between church and state, and would eventually facilitate the more or less regulated exchange of opinions and usher in a framework of conflict regulation. Akhiezer's insight is that political confrontation engenders an infrastructure of dialogue, which contributes enormously to the smooth transition to a more dynamic cultural mode. In contrast to the emergence of liberal civilisation that is brought about by the creative overcoming of mere political confrontation, Russian society remains locked in a counterfeit simulacrum of dialogue.

'In the place of dialogue a rift took shape which can be understood as a reduction of dialogue, as its imitation. ... (T)he specificity of the development of the Russian society consists in the fact that the weakness of (this) societal dialogue on the level of the whole of society led to the substitution (*zamesheniiu*) of the existing vacuum with the majority of local dialogues creating a direct ground for mass disorganisation. (Akhiezer, 1999, p.80)

Akhiezer's account of the generation of liberal civilisation allows two main conclusions. Firstly, since each moral ideal imparts a distinct programme for reducing societal disorganisation, each value ideal must also contain a notion of what constitutes disorganisation and an orderly society. Akhiezer is not sufficiently explicit on this point but the implications are clear. Political institutions receive their justification in the broad historical (historiographical) sense from the value ideals that contain a view on conceptions of order and disorder. This means that the conventional objections raised against merely historical justifications of a given political order stand refuted in Akhiezer's case. The fact that certain political institutions exist cannot procure *per se* a tenable vindication of the desirability of their continued existence over time. They will rather be judged by the degree of correspondence that obtains between them and the value ideal that structures societal

consciousness at any particular time. This reveals the liberal content of Akhiezer's theory of social order insofar as it allows and elevates to the status of being worthy of survival those political structures which are sufficiently congruous with the value ideals existent in society. Akhiezer's theory thus does not privilege any singular form of political organisation or currently established morality.

The second significant insight that a political theorist can gain from Akhiezer's account of the ways in which Russian history has deviated from Western norms is that liberalism as a value system, for which a notion of constant change is an integral part of any concept of the possibility of survival of a given society, is the result of a peculiar (yet in the West generally obtaining) configuration of the political space. The presence of a political confrontation that ran so deep as to endanger Western societies necessitated the search for a viable form of institutionalising the dissenting voices and their non-coerced exchange. Creating a stable framework for the political confrontation was possible for Western societies because there existed an immense arsenal of ideas and concepts on how to proceed in the case of the strident opposition and political strife that had developed as a result of, on one hand, the urgency to tame the worst outbreaks of violence that endangered the very foundations of societies in the West and, on the other hand, the need to muster public support for a given political position. Hence, the absence of such a confrontational configuration in Russia led to the lack of urgency to foster the societal agents capable of building the political realm. The results have included underdeveloped societal relations and a crushing dominance and impotence of the state authorities as the concept of the weak institutionalised political power conveys.

Since Akhiezer formulated his theory in order to explain the oscillation of Russian society in history between the poles of the extreme and varying cultural modes of traditionalism and liberalism, his conceptualisation of the origin of Western liberalism must strike Western observers as an overly benign interpretation of the political and social

devastation that was inflicted upon Central and Western Europe in the wake of the Reformation. Yet, the main insight into the genesis of Western liberalism can be seen as a contribution, not only to the historiography of liberalism, but equally to political theory. Thus political philosophers must take seriously the idea that a liberal political order may well be the product of a peculiar political constellation that failed to materialise in other historical circumstances. Political theorists must also take into account the notion that the precepts of this liberal political culture are justifiable only in terms of the quest for social stability and the survival of societies. Akhiezer's theory reiterates the plausibility of the idea that the maxims which regulate the political life of Western societies, such as tolerance, mutual respect, and the institutions of civil society just as much as the concept of constitutionalism and the rule of law, are vindicable primarily by reference to the contributions they make to the stability of the political order itself. This does not have to remain the case infinitely. What underpins any preferable concept of political order at a given time is the degree of correspondence between the actual political structure instituted at a given time and how the population conceives of what constitutes order and disorder generally. The institutions of a capitalist market, though famously proclaimed by von Hayek as an ingenious form of spontaneous order and the means of sustaining such an order, appears thus incompatible with the notion of order harboured by the populace of a traditional society. In fact, it is likely to be understood there as profoundly and threateningly disorderly and hence unjustifiable.

In summarising the arguments of this section, I will attempt to draw more clearly the connecting lines between Akhiezer's theory of Russian history and Western political theory. Since there will be a later opportunities to criticise Akhiezer's historical account of Russian statehood, there is no need at this point to outline the criticism that Akhiezer's work must certainly evoke. On a positive note, Akhiezer's notion of the genesis of liberal political norms is valuable for political theory insofar as it emphasises the connection between political institutions and prevalent cultural norms. Yet, Akhiezer does not commit the fallacy of

positing a direct link between the two, that would create the grounds for a justification of political institutions out of their factual existence. Rather, political institutions are tied to cultural norms by fulfilling a certain purpose: to offer the best available *modus vivendi* for the diffusion of otherwise potentially destructive politically motivated confrontations between members of society. Hence the notion of survival or reproduction of a society as being central to Akhiezer's theory. The critical potential of this concept is made apparent by specifying the relation that obtains between political institutions and the cultural norms. Akhiezer's account of the political life growing out of certain notions of order and ideas on how to maintain this order enables us to see that, although liberal political institutions can lay claim to being imbued with such cultural norms as tolerance or respect, these precepts as well as the political institutions themselves are only conduits for mitigating disorder, purposive creations in the light of the danger which a Hobbesian 'war of all against all' would pose to the essential fabric of society. Both political institutions and societal norms are side-effects of conceptions of how best to ensure the survival of society under certain conditions. Modernity, so Akhiezer contends, has compelled Western political societies to recognise the need for institutionalising dissent and incorporating the possibility of constant revision of social and political institutions themselves if societies are to persevere under the onslaught of the globalising forces of capitalism and the idea of political participation.

Such a portrayal of the agents within society as the quest for reproduction and a notion of order is not dissimilar to the justificatory pattern for political order as expounded by Hobbes and so admirably elaborated by Oakeshott. Just as Hobbesian instrumental rationality chooses to establish an overriding authority for the simple reason that only such a creation can guarantee the survival of society (and not because the prospective citizens of the civitas desire to live under a Leviathan) so Akhiezer's political institutions do not derive a shred of vindication from the values of tolerance and mutual respect, but rather were selected for practical reasons as being the most feasible solution to the problem of constant political strife

that endangered the polity. Yet, just as purposive and limited as the reasons for selecting this particular set of institutions are, so limited are also the obligations of the citizens to approve or disapprove of the conditions laid out by the authority as prerequisite for communal life (Oakeshott, 1990, esp. pp.108-184 [On the Civil Condition]).

Liberalism for Akhiezer, then, is most appropriately a recognition of the need and capacity for constant revision and exchange of opinion. Ideas of freedom and right are conspicuously absent from this picture. Akhiezer's theory, insofar as he is concerned with the genesis of political institutions (or the failure of liberal political institutions in Russia), highlights the fundamental misunderstanding which lies at the heart of the view of liberal political institutions as being erected on the bedrock of individual freedom. Rather, it appears, in Akhiezer's view, that honouring the principle of individual liberty has historically been merely a side-effect of the need to mitigate and channel fundamental disagreement. Liberty thus emerges as a necessary ingredient for enabling societies to institute and sustain the indispensable momentum that modernity requires. Yet, within this scheme of things, it does not have to be a value in itself.

Where does this leave us with regard to the claim of political liberalism to universality and political theory more generally? If one took the conclusion to heart one would have to say that the intimate link between the concept(s) of liberty and political institutions appears to be cast into doubt. Paraphrasing Akhiezer's historical theory one could say that the West happens to value two notions of liberty, and that they may be instrumental to the survival of Western societies, yet that to vindicate political institutions as they currently exist in the West from a position which takes both notions of liberty to be *intrinsically* valuable is to disregard the indication that they are, just as the political institutions we live under, commitments we came to make in order to find a solution to the problem of pacifying the political strife that endangered the very fabric of society.

The question a political theorist faces is: are there any good reasons for selecting these two particular conceptions of liberty in justifying political institutions instead of any others? What must be left for the last section of this study is to sketch the fundamental differences in the conceptions of liberty that most contemporary political philosophers are happy to employ vis-à-vis a properly idealist notion of personal freedom. The claim of universality thus rests on a notion of liberty that not only originates in a particular historical constellation at a certain time in history, but which also mistakes the purpose of a pragmatic means adopted for the creation of societal peace for an intrinsic value. The negative and positive conceptions of liberty are historically determined, just as they came to be valued for good reasons, yet to implicate them subsequently into a general justification of political institutions is to over-extend their conceptual reach. Akhiezer's account of the crucial historical moments that decide the future of civilisations illuminates both the origin of the concepts of liberty as well as their limitation. They were vehicles for the accomplishment of societal aims, and this cannot confer universal intrinsic value upon them.

To argue that UC can rest on the value which liberty has for the maintenance of societal peace would reveal the potential of the concepts of liberty. Yet, this is an argument that has to consider the usefulness of liberty as it evolves in the particular moment and circumstances, rather than a universalism that is based on the universal credentials and applicability of the notions of liberty propounded.

Or, to put it Kantian terms and in line with the views of O'Neill, the argument for or against a negative and positive liberty, their appropriateness in certain circumstances, and the extent to which they play a role in determining the shape of political institutions, are arguments that appeal to practical, rather than theoretical reason.

11. Statehood, Russia and Historical Prerequisites of Liberalism

Aleksandr Akhiezer has over the years developed a highly elaborate theory of society that goes far beyond the remit of political theory. His is a theory of society that takes into account historical, social and wider discursive conditions. The result is a theory of Russian social and political history that has deep philosophical implications. Initially providing it with a distinctively sociological thrust, it has over the time been deliberately widened into a fully-fledged theory of politics, the Russian state and Russian cultural history. Although it has thus acquired a certain integrative explanatory power, it is clearly stronger when applied to questions of Russian history than when taken as a philosophy of mind or psychological theory, into which Akhiezer has recently reformulated it (Akhiezer, 2000). For our purposes I will focus on Akhiezer's theory of statehood that comprises his most famous conceptual tools: the theory of the 'raskol' (gap, fissure, fracture) and his concept of 'inversion jumps'. In a first part I will need to outline briefly his theory of statehood as he expounded it in his main work as well as in a monograph more recently published in collaboration with Il'in (Ili'in and Akhiezer, 1997) and a rather brief interpretation of the concept of 'open society' (Akhiezer and Yakovenko, 1997).

The second part will concentrate on the interaction between modernisation, history and Russian political traditions and the chances of liberal statehood as they emerge from the interplay of his concepts. A word of caution is, however, in order. Akhiezer's work has a genuinely historical thrust that, although reduced, is never wholly eliminated from his conception of statehood. The question must arise whether a theory that is historical in its main focus can be of any benefit to political theory (cf. Kaehne, 2002 and 2002a). The affirmative answer lies in the fact that Akhiezer's theory points to significant differences in Russian and Western statehood that would go unnoticed if only scrutinised with the habitually deployed concepts and foci of Western theory. The advantage of looking at the Russian state through

the conceptual lens of Akhiezer's concept of 'raskol' lies in the illumination it offers. It is a commonplace that the theories with which we approach a theme help to determine the picture we see. Akhiezer's theory of Russian statehood juxtaposed to Western state theory is a case in hand. Western political scientists have elaborated definitions of statehood, such as functionalism and organisation theory, which have been devised and refined in their application to Western states. Similarly the advice given to Russians after the collapse of the Soviet regime has been somewhat along the lines of Western conventional wisdom. There is, however, even among some Western theorists, a growing fear that the historical conditions of statehood might have a bigger impact than anticipated and than Western theory allows. The latest fashion in political science to speak of the concept of path dependency testifies to this change of heart. So I would contend that if we seriously want to examine the applicability of Western theoretical models of statehood to Russia, we must resubmit Western theories to a critical review and see if they can retain their explanatory force.

I

There can be no doubt that Akhiezer's theory of Russian history has been one of the most formidable contributions to the understanding of the Russian society and history in the last decade, whether from Russian or Western theorists. Although it has many veritable precursors and the main line of argument bears traces of similar concepts previously devised, Akhiezer's work is an original contribution to Russian historiography as well as to social theory. We will have to establish here how helpful his theory of Russian statehood is in explaining the notable differences between Russia and the West and how far these differences will prevent us from subsuming Russian statehood under the categories of Western political theory.

Akhiezer's key concepts revolve around the problem of constant societal disintegration that had repeatedly threatened to become irreversible in Russia. Although Akhiezer is reluctant to define this state of societal catastrophe more clearly, he does identify societal

collapse with some particular historical events in Russian history and thus implicitly points to some ingredients of such societal demise. For him the Russian revolutions as well as the collapse of the Soviet regime have brought Russia to the brink of collapse. Akhiezer does not characterise this state of collapse in either functionalist or historical terms where the state apparatus ceases to function properly, or to fulfil its most basic tasks. Neither does Akhiezer specify the state of collapse as society disintegrating under the onslaught of centrifugal forces, eventually leading to civil war. The reason Akhiezer does not provide such a characterisation of the 'breaking point' in functionalist terms is that his entire theory is built on the premise that Russian statehood is beyond this point of normalcy already. The Russian state historically has lingered in a position of unresponsiveness to societal developments or demands. Traditionally Russian state and society are seen as disconnected rather than possessing points of juncture. Akhiezer uses the term 'raskol' that, he thinks, most appropriately describes the relationship between state and society in Russia.

In line with his intended sociological focus, he embeds this concept into the tensions and contradictions of the Russian social fabric that are generated by the process of modernisation and the concomitant change of worldview. Although he avoids the intricacies of a history of mentality, his remarks intimate an underlying idea of Russian mentality, or worldview (*Weltanschauung*). However, for Akhiezer, there is nothing like an immutable Russian mentality or national character that forms and informs Russian history. This way he clearly distances himself from any interpretations of Russian history that deploy ideas of immutable components or elements, such as most prominently, the Slavophil conception of a national character. This makes Akhiezer's theory dynamic rather than static and equally renders it susceptible to re-formulations in the form of discourse theory, which he himself alludes to at times.

However, the concept of 'raskol' carries in itself a recognition of normalcy from which Russia has traditionally diverged. This normalcy as the polar opposite of 'raskol', remains

conceptually unexplored in Akhiezer's thought but still acts as a teleological corrective in the background. It could be described as a form of harmonious relationship between state and society where each one is allocated its proper function. What these functions are exactly is not clear but it must be assumed that they relate somehow to Akhiezer's idea of the sameness of discursive practices pertaining in each sphere. More specifically, he refers to the concurrence of worldviews amongst the political elite that embody the state and the population. The obliqueness in which the differentiation of functions and their particular content remains here reveals how far away Akhiezer's theory of statehood is located from Western political theory. He specifies neither purpose nor tasks of the state, nor any particular objective of state activities beyond 'integration'. Rather, his concept of statehood is premised on the desirable avoidance of societal collapse or total disintegration.

The unique side of this idea is revealed if and when it transpires to which extent this concept is responsive to the historical sequence of different emanations of statehood. By defining 'concurrence' or 'correspondence' of prevailing worldviews in society and state as the determining feature for the state's 'health', Akhiezer manages to make his theory susceptible to various ideas about the ideal state and society.⁸ This way the liberal conception of statehood gains a relativity that responds well to the Russian historical reality. However, Akhiezer's theory would not simply possess an openness but would rather be plainly irrelevant to the advantages which a liberal political regime may bring to the Russian polity if the liberal conception of statehood was just one amongst other equally valuable concepts of political order. Yet the relevance of Akhiezer's historical theory of statehood is re-established when proper focus is given to the effects and consequences of the modernisation process which he deems irreversible, though contradictory, in nature. In short, Akhiezer claims that the liberal conception of politics is uniquely prepared for the challenges of a modern society,

⁸ Akhiezer's theory often resembles the somewhat odd 'theory of congruence' formulated by the American political scientist Eckstein in which he assumed that political stability is a function of the congruity of authority patterns in state and society. Cf. Eckstein, 1998 and 1999a.

even if traces of pre-modern social attitudes and behavioural patterns are still discernible in the Russian polity. There is no need to detail his modernisation concept here beyond listing the most basic aspects that echo Kapustin's characterisation of it- secularisation, change of political attitudes: concept of authority, change of consciousness, tied in with industrialisation and participation in national wealth, nation(-state) as vehicle of politics, economics and social affairs.

From the perspective of Western political theory this suitability of liberalism to the conditions of modernity is a result of the potentially inclusive character of a liberal political order. To define the admissible boundaries and limits of this inclusion has very much been the essence of the project of liberal political theory since Rawls. It is to seek a solution to the problem as to how a political order can be established that meets the criteria of liberal convictions and at the same time leaves room for illiberal conceptions of politics and more 'fundamentalist' ideas on religion, society and the economy. Within this frame of mind a liberal conception of statehood possesses an openness and fluidity that other (illiberal) conceptions do not. For example, a minimalist legal regulatory framework may fulfil these criteria. Yet, Akhiezer's account of liberal statehood differs considerably from Western attempts to carve out a liberal political order out of the whole range of political convictions when this often contains illiberal components that would (rationally) conflict with the condition of modernity under which societies exist. For Akhiezer, liberal outlooks and political views are shaped and informed profoundly by the modernising forces that Russian politics often attempted to neglect or counteract. Liberalism as a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) is effectively and ultimately the only form of consciousness that responds to modernity appropriately and thus prepares people for the difficulties ahead.

For Akhiezer, although Russian society might at present and for the foreseeable future be characterised by the presence of various mutually contradictory worldviews that originate in pre-modern as well as modern conditions of life, liberalism exclusively is capable of

appropriately corresponding to this *conditio moderna*. Although Akhiezer does not conceptually frame this idea of liberalism any further, it clearly functions as a telos of societal development in conjunction with his idea of the congruity of worldviews obtaining between state and society. His theory of liberal statehood thus does not accord with the most fundamental assumption of the Western liberal project since it presumes a unique concordance of liberal convictions within modern societies. For Akhiezer, liberalism is a mode of thought that approximates the real world as it represents itself after the process of modernisation in Europe. Now, remnants of the precursors to liberal worldviews may still linger on even in Western Europe, but Russia, so Akhiezer argues, is particularly afflicted by the simultaneity of existing divergent worldviews.

Against the backdrop of normalcy, in which some remainder of Westernism might still have persisted, Akhiezer accounts for the inconsistencies of Russian statehood by providing an insightful narrative of the Russian political order for which the concept of 'raskol' is central. Akhiezer maintains that Russian society has been in a state of fracture or fissure, which the state has been unable to bridge. While the outer poles of the spectrum of societal concepts are extremes between which Russian society and the desired political order have oscillated unremittingly, Russia has, in effect, found herself unable to establish, let alone to sustain, a lasting harmonious relationship between state and society. Akhiezer now locates the problem of Russian society in its inability to respond mitigatingly to this constant oscillation. The state as well as society endeavour to counter the swing from one polar extreme to the other with mainly inappropriate measures that eventually reinforce this movement to the brink of societal collapse. So, Akhiezer's conception of statehood is particularly adept when it comes to describing the interaction between state and society that repeatedly endangers the most basic and necessary integration of Russian society. In order to understand the full force of the theory we need to look at the differing worldviews that, according to Akhiezer, shape the dualistic poles.

He terms them 'syncretistic' and 'liberal'. The former relates to the historical period untouched by modernisation whereas the latter would refer to the mode of thought most compatible with the modern world. Pre-modern consciousness is undifferentiating, subsuming the object or 'the other' under the subject or 'the self'. In terms of belonging, a pre-modern mind fuses subject and object, or, in (pre)political terms, as Akhiezer puts it, the 'local activities are taken for the whole' (Il'in, 1997, p.260f). In Russian history this form of consciousness finds its expression in the particular communal form of living called the 'veche' (Il'in, 1997, p.254). This has been the traditionally preferred formation of Russian society which under pressure from modernising forces, gives way to a bifurcated form of societal consciousness: 'sobornost' and authoritarianism. Herein lies the origin of the Russian state and its peculiar detachment from society. While 'sobornost' is little more than the false pretence, or reflection of the desire, to live under the conditions of the 'veche' that has long gone, the state starts off as an appendage of a society that appears to be able to dispense with the state's functions. This renders the state constantly reactive rather than proactive. In this picture there is little room for a political order as an overarching arena of political competition, or for the institutionalisation of the process of decision-making, reflecting society's diverse norms and ideals.

On the contrary, the Russian state evolved out of a necessity to integrate a country in order to make it governable by the imperial rulers. It was the exigencies of political rule exercised by the Emperor rather than the growing need for (self-) organisation by society that, in the Russian context, led to the development of state institutions. Whether this particular historical narrative is true or not, the role attributed to the state illuminates neatly the (alleged) redundancy of political institutions and their subsequent failure to gain acceptance by the populace, or sufficient legitimacy. In order to overcome this 'redundancy', the state with its associated political institutions had to cast itself in the role of integrator so that it was perceived to be combining the particular parts into a whole, in accordance with the

dominating worldview. This had at least two consequences: any political order that could be comprehended as resting on a particular view of society rather than a comprehensive, all-embracing one, lost acceptance amongst the population. This resulted in a constant drive of the state (and the political rulers) to mimic the allegedly prevalent social and political attitudes of the population at large. On the other side, however, since the state would constantly have to promote a comprehensive political doctrine that concurred with the population's worldview, this meant, subsequent to the process of modernisation, nothing other than suppressing the resultant diversity in social and political outlooks. Consequently, the state became coercive in advancing and imposing a view of political order that corresponded less and less to reality.

For the present purposes there are two aspects that seem important in this picture. First, Akhiezer seems to re-affirm the narrative propounded by Westernists that state institutions in the Russian context have no origin in societal developments. And second, the state as an appendage used for the purpose of retention of power is somehow bound to become oppressive.

From here it is a small step to Akhiezer's second fundamental concept: the inversion jumps. Under the condition of a chronic schism between society and state as well as between the intellectual elite and the majority of the populace, political institutions can muster the most basic support only if they adhere to a vision of Russian society that concurs with the syncretistic worldview believed to be prevalent amongst the population at large. With the growing complexity of society, as a result of the modernisation process which gathered more and more pace in the nineteenth century, the political elite navigated itself into a virtual no-win situation. The failure of the reforms of the 1860s testified to the predicament. To radically modernise the country could have resulted in potential alienation of the masses, whereas foregoing social and political reforms would be tantamount to stifling the urgently needed transformations that were necessary to meet the demands of a modern society. Once the

failure of the reforms became obvious and the Russian government back-tracked on them, intellectual energies were redirected into devising a way out of this dilemma. A solution was found in a political hybrid that would reconcile a syncretistic worldview with the demands of modernity - a modern illusion that was a classic form of *pars pro toto*. For Akhiezer, herein lies the power of the Russian formulation of Communism. But Communism also produced in itself the germs of its own demise: the adherence to a syncretistic utopia was after all a carefully crafted and 'scientifically deduced' lie for the sake of gluing together diametrically opposed societal elements, namely an eventually highly complex modern society with the accompanying dynamics and a pre-modern *Weltanschauung* that propagated a societal idyll based on a false pretence of ancient Russian traditions.

Whether the state embarked on reforms in the 1860s, or forged a unity of contrasting principles under Communism, it would always find itself in a position of opposition to one or another part of Russian society. In order to regain the confidence of the populace it engaged in abrupt U-turns which were bound to frustrate the supporters of the policy previously pursued. Since the country was repeatedly driven to the brink of collapse, the state's reversals of policy were only mirroring the vigour with which it had implemented the previous political direction eventually leading to what Akhiezer called 'inversion jumps'. Exemplifying this with the events of the February revolution, he writes:

'The driving force in the revolution was inversion- in this case, opposition to extreme forms of authoritarianism and the triumph of an ideal associated with localism, that is, with maximal organisational atomisation of society on the basis of barter relations and autarky.' (Akhiezer, 1996, p.61f)

In total, Akhiezer presents us here with two theories rolled into one. Firstly, he defines the Russian state as a promoter of a conception of ideal society which it subsequently imposes coercively on the polity. This conception might rest on a political ideal that in a modern society necessarily, unless liberal in character, abrogates any articulation of alternative

political values opposed to the one officially promulgated. It thus bears the seeds of discontent and eventual negation in itself. For Akhiezer any conception of politics that is not liberal has produced and always will produce the same effect: taking Russia to the brink of societal collapse. At the core acts a somewhat vague correspondence theory that postulates a harmonious relationship between state and society as the ultimate ideal for the Russian society (similar to Eckstein, 1998). This congruity is accomplished when both spheres, the political order as well as society at large, are penetrated and ruled by the same worldview, be it liberal or syncretistic. Russian history has continually failed to be in such a condition ever since the forces of modernisation were deliberately unleashed by Peter I's reforms. Political rulers have repeatedly either tried to remould society according to the ideals embraced by them, or propagated an ideal of political order that coincided with the values and norms allegedly held by this section of Russian society that was perceived to epitomise the Russian nation: the peasantry and their communal form of organisation.

Secondly, however, Akhiezer also puts forward an idea of liberalism that is at odds with the notion of a liberal political order as Western political theory has developed it. Although Akhiezer does not seem to be aware of it, he implicitly juxtaposes liberalism to the Soviet experience, which in his opinion was a peculiar combination of two contrasting worldviews. Communism endeavoured to reconstruct a syncretism in a complex society. This amounted to nothing less than a synthesis of mutually exclusive notions of societal ideals: wedding local association with statehood, hence something akin to aspiring to create a political order that would be de-statist as well as political.

'The state ideology [of communism] bore a hybrid character, consisting of two strata, whose sources were cultures of different super-civilisations. This was not syncretism, but its imitation. The ideology of Bolshevism was a refined form of pseudo-syncretism. It united the spontaneous view of the whole of society as fraternity (*bratstvo*), the community (*obshchina*) and the refined ideological construction of professionals [here: *intelligentsia*]' (Il'in, 1997, p. 265)

It is easy to infer from this inconsistency of the Soviet order that this experiment carried within itself the destructive forces which ultimately would bring it down. Soviet political order was a critique of the liberal order insofar as it purported to be pre-political, but in fact it had to acknowledge the need for coercive political authority in order to keep in check those parts of society that begged to disagree with this modern reincarnation of the 'veche'.

For present purposes, Akhiezer's notion of liberalism is particularly useful. Undoubtedly his interpretation of Russian history as a collision between different worldviews leading repeatedly to societal collapse has been able to muster much support (Panarin, 1998). What is of particular interest, however, is how and why Akhiezer's conception of a Russian liberal political order differs from the one stipulated by Western political theorists. For Akhiezer, the liberal state is integrating in purpose and character and he elaborates on this proposition by characterising the liberal state as first and foremost a legal framework. So far he is broadly in line with Western political theory. Yet, a notion of the state as merely a regulatory framework is discordant with his claim that liberalism is a worldview. In fact, he characterises it at times as a form of civilisation. The core of this contradiction thus resides in the fact that a political order as a minimal regulatory framework is of a different categorical remit than liberalism as civilisational or cultural outlook. Someone who finds a political order appealing which is founded on the idea of the rule of law and the state as disinterested regulator of human affairs would qualify as a liberal according to Akhiezer's notion of liberal state order. With regard to various other matters of social and political affairs that can be subsumed under the category of civilisational attitudes this person must, in order to qualify as a liberal, expound equally liberal views.

Yet, the Western project of liberal politics has exactly identified the problem of liberal politics as one of what to do when civilisations tend to espouse illiberal or non-liberal views yet require the creation of a liberal political framework in which disputes can be settled peacefully. In other words, the dilemma consists in the distinctiveness of political and

civilisational orders. Cultures, taken as by and large congruent with the Russian idea of civilisation, may be hostile to liberal political arrangements. The question is how to establish a reliable political framework which (nearly) all, even non-liberals, find reasonable and attractive to participate in. Akhiezer's notion of statehood appears viable only if everybody endorses liberal views in the entire range of his attitudes and sentiments. This clearly renders the liberal project as such meaningless and reveals that Akhiezer disregards his own findings: modern societies live under conditions of complexity that prohibit the concurrence of all views on forms and rules of social organisation.

Clearly this contradiction is an upshot of his attempt to combine a sociological analysis of Russian history with a notion of an ideal state order. Akhiezer proceeds from the assumption that under the conditions of modernity the highly fractured polity requires the state as an integrator. In fact any disregard for the high complexity of modern life in Russia which finds its way into the particular structure of state institutions would only stand in continuity with the Russian history of discordance between mass consciousness and political order.

Nevertheless, Akhiezer's account of Russian statehood translates into a strong suggestion for a viable exit strategy from the dilemmas that continually beset Russia in her history. Akhiezer identifies the concurrence of worldviews reflected both in political institutions and their resultant policies and in society's beliefs and norms as the component critical for accomplishing political peace and prosperity. On the other hand, he makes clear that he is sceptical as to when Russia will achieve this state of concurrence. The liberal political camp still appears negligibly small in Russia and few have completely discarded the illusion of a Russia united again on the soil of communal bliss that allegedly existed there until Peter I pushed his country into the wider world.

II

Akhiezer's theory of statehood presents us with a valuable new perspective but also poses some problems that mainly result from his attempt to amalgamate two different theoretical categories. Attention will first be given to the accomplishments that can be of use to the further consideration of Russian statehood and any effort to evaluate the extent to which Western state theory is applicable to this particular case.

Akhiezer asserts that it would be possible to define a norm of statehood and claims that Russia has historically deviated from this norm. This standard of statehood develops out of his understanding of the relationship between society and the state and how this relationship had been distorted in Russian history due to misconceived societal ideals.

There can be no doubt that this notion of a harmonious relationship that is based on the congruence of worldviews in society places him in a long tradition of Russian thinkers and also echoes the convictions of many politically informed Western publics. It is noteworthy, however, that his conception of liberalism as a political as well as a more general worldview distances him from those Russian thinkers who conceived of liberalism in a narrower manner, mainly as a form of legal framework and political freedoms. The sociological origins of Akhiezer's theoretical approach ensure that this particularly political (formal) perspective remains out of sight for him. The drive of his theory originates in a different source. He emphasises again and again that Russia must find a solution to the question of 'raskol' or schism that has afflicted Russian history for centuries. The prevention of societal schism is the most important task for the political institutions and this can only be achieved if they are imbued, as it were, with a similar view of political and social affairs, a similar understanding of the world and the position of the individual in this world. This is hardly translatable into concrete patterns of political institutions and competences but it does point to an aspect that, I believe, is unjustly underestimated in Western political theory. Akhiezer's point about the perennial societal schism that has afflicted Russia reveals the intricacy of the necessary

congruence of the most basic ideas and norms prior to the establishment of state institutions. It should be clear that Akhiezer's attempt to analyse the conditionality of liberal institutions in the Russian context mirrors the theoretical efforts of such distinguished Western political philosophers as Rawls. Akhiezer's point powerfully reiterates the problem that Western political theory has tried to come to terms with: how can a political order and state institutions be stable when operating in an environment which lacks agreed basic norms and convictions. Akhiezer's argument goes in fact even further, doubting that it is possible to deduce a political arrangement when faced with incongruous and conflicting views on the world. This calls into question the attempts of Western political theorists to isolate something like a political sphere, i.e. developing a viable political order which, according to Akhiezer, is nevertheless bound to be grounded in the wider social environment. Akhiezer's thesis questions artificially drawn boundaries and emphasises the complexity and embeddedness of human interaction and views thereby tying political thinking in with the entirety of human thought. He resists the temptation to conveniently isolate different spheres of thought in order to either block non-political views from the process of generating a political order or de-politicise this process altogether (cf. Gray, 1995). Both are not viable options for the evolution of liberal politics in Akhiezer's theory of liberal statehood. In his view, political orders reflect the entire range of convictions and norms that a society happens to hold; any attempt to segregate neatly encircled spheres, be they political, social or cultural, is to deny society the richness of traditions which are vital in forging a political order capable of bridging the societal schism that afflicts Russia.

A second significant aspect of Akhiezer's theory of statehood, originating in a historical account of the relationship between state and society in Russia, lies in his insistence that the state as a particular organisational form of society is, or ought to, be the bearer and promoter of the prevalent culture. Since his notion of culture is cast in the typically Russian framework of the concept of civilisation and thus exceeds the narrower Western notion of

political culture, it has a significance that goes beyond the similar Western view that liberal regimes require a liberal political culture to survive in the long run.

This directs attention to another aspect of Akhiezer's theory where he diverges from a Western understanding of the state-society nexus. His civilisational approach assumes a notion of harmony or congruence that postulates far more than the absence of abject chaos and disorganisation. Although the prevention of disorganisation may be an immediate remedy for Russia's problems, a situation of complete congruence between state and society would only prevail under the conditions of comprehensive absence of conflict. Akhiezer's theory of state-society relationship rests on a notion of wholeness that resembles suspiciously the pre-modern syncretistic worldview. It seems difficult to accommodate in his conceptual framework any notion of constructive political conflict or competition. His fairly elementary portrayal of a peaceful modern society that rests on analogous attitudes, values and norms in the political as well as wider social sphere appears to still carry some traces of the same illusory worldview which Akhiezer characterised as pre-modern. This point becomes clearer when he refers to the inability of Russian state and society to speak the same language. Political articulations by state officials, so Akhiezer argues, have traditionally acquired new meaning when they crossed the chasm between them. Elaborating on this argument he writes:

'The transfer of meaning in a split society (*raskolotoe obshchestvo*) develops on the boundaries of the schismatic (sub-)cultures, of the socio-cultural groups. New meaning is formed now even between the meanings. Yet the direction of meanings is simultaneously the direction of the programme of reproduction. This means that the transfer of meanings inevitably leads to a dislocation (*sdvig*) of content in the reproductive activities, to a change of reproductive relations (...), to the formation of specific socio-cultural associations which embody and reproduce the schism.' (Il'in, 1997, p.248)

This way the Russian state faces two potential dangers. Either it does not recognise the existing diversity that exists within society, imposes a view of politics which does not acknowledge this diversity and becomes inevitably coercive. Or, despite the political order

being organised in accord with the principles of diversity and honouring the complexity of modern Russian society, 'various self-ascertaining elements of society oppose the state and disorganise and destroy it' (Il'in, 1997, p.282). The historical parallel is indubitable. Society and, in particular the Russian intelligentsia, has often defined its political stance vis-à-vis the state as one of opposition. The intelligentsia has traditionally drawn a great deal of its *raison d'être* from such an antithetical stance vis-à-vis the state (Gessen, 1997, p.167f).

Yet, there can be no doubt that Akhiezer would insist that the necessity for a liberal political order in Russia finds its justification in the fact that life is highly fragmented and that any non-liberal state order would be bound to invariably neglect this fact and therefore aggravate the disorganisation and the chasm that lingered between Russian society and its political institutions. Here lies the normative content of his theory of a liberal political order. In order to ensure the survival of Russian society in whatever form, Akhiezer suggests, the state ought to readjust itself along broadly liberal conceptions of politics. His conception of 'raskol' determines the extent to which his theorisation of a Russian liberal political order adopts this normative content. This represents also a remarkable difference to Western political theory insofar as the latter has, in its drive to universalise any justification of political order, tried to transcend any historical reference. The obliteration of the historical context as a viable component of political theory (which many more conservative Western political theorists have come more recently to re-appreciate) has often been seen as a guarantor for universalisability of their conceptions.

The question which Akhiezer's theory of statehood poses is this: Does the significance of the historical context that Akhiezer elucidated for the Russian case impact on the applicability of Western liberal theory? There appear to be at least two possibilities here. Either Western liberal thought already possesses a historical component that is universal in character and concordant with Russian particularities. In this case we would have to focus on the question of the universal character of this historical specification and explain how it

concurr with the Russian political order. Or, alternatively, as Western political theory has succeeded in eliminating any historical reference for the sake of universalisability, the applicability of it depends to a large extent either on the re-incorporation of a historical component or on the insignificance of the concrete historical conditions that Akhiezer have specified. It should have become apparent from the argument so far presented that the de-historisation of Western political theory can be considered a fundamental detriment to, rather than augmenting, its scope of applicability.

12. Modernity and Political Liberalism

The attempt to understand liberty as a solution to a particular political constellation and to gauge the usefulness of the principle of personal freedom in history is necessarily bound up with understanding the circumstances of its emergence. Without a sense of the reasons and underlying motivations of those who advocated the enhancement of individual liberty in a particular situation, there is little hope of being able to support this in situations similarly structured. Historians can delineate the intellectual context that contributed to the genesis of a particular idea and its specific significance as it comes to capture people's imaginations and possibly the political agenda of countries. Yet, what is left to the political theorist is to determine the coherence of the emanations of political thinking. What appears at first glance as a modest task quickly turns out to combine historical and philosophical skills. It may be true that *multae viae ducunt Romam*, but the Russian political theorist Kapustin has certainly developed over the last years one of the most insightful and profound approaches to the problem. Boris Gureevich Kapustin was born in Sverdlovsk in 1951 but moved to Moscow in 1968 where he studied at the Institute for International Relations. He subsequently served in the Soviet Army as a conscript and was stationed in Syria during his service. Having left the army in 1976 he enrolled as a philosophy student at the Moscow State University and showed particular interest in the heuristic significance of the category 'formation' for historical analysis. Following his graduation in 1979 he worked at the philosophical faculty of the Lumumba University and became interested in Western Marxism as it evolved in the Frankfurt School. The 'glasnost' era confronted him with new problems and questions and he worked at the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on the politico-philosophical dimension of the 'New Political Thought' as propagated by Mikhail Gorbachev. His studies focused on the chances of reconciling political rationalism and idealistic orientations as epitomised in the Communist doctrine and he spent his

sabbatical leave in 1984/85 at the London School for Economics. In 1992 he was employed by the Gorbachev Foundation. His work resulted in the publication of his doctoral thesis *Global Problems of International Societal Development* in 1991. He is currently prorector of the Moscow School for Social and Economic Sciences. He was several times in receipt of various funding from the Soros Foundation through the Institute for Open Society.

His starting point is the what he calls the 'problem of modernity'. His book 'Modernity as a Problem of Political Theory' (1998) notes the difficulty in defining modernity: Being not simply synonymous with the notion of the 'present time' (seichastnost'), the term describes rather a problem of life, a problem of vital importance for human beings and peoples (zhiznenniaia problema) (Kapustin, 1998, p.14). Vitality could be paraphrased here as existence, or existential. As with any existential or cultural problem, Kapustin writes, the problem of modernity is not simply eliminated when a solution has been found (Kapustin, 1998, p.15). Rather one can learn to live with a problem, by defining its aspects and trying to cope with its effects. Kapustin then dismisses the possibility of defining the concept of modernity in an affirmative way. It must seem impossible, he argues, to ascertain the various types of institutions, procedures, and norms that would altogether constitute the modernity of a given society. What is feasible, however, is to define modernity in a functional and contextual manner – functional insofar as the purpose of dealing with the problem of modernity can be described for a given society, and contextual insofar as the problem of modernity manifests itself in a specific cultural-historical context (Kapustin, 1998, p.16).

With these positions (attained), Kapustin writes,

'...one can consider the modernity or non-modernity of any institutions, procedures and norms, in particular those that the dominating ideology in Russia and the West unreservedly considers as modern features such as the market and representative democracy etc. (Kapustin, 1998, p.16).

After examining a series of different approaches to the concept of modernity, Kapustin settles for a surprisingly vague definition. He remarks that the problem of modernity is the problem of how to constitute order through, or on the basis of, the 'absolute independence' of the individual (Kapustin, 1998, p.24). Characterising this definition further, he notes that such a concept of modernity necessarily affects everybody. Hence it is not as elitist as the idea of Enlightenment could be understood to be. To live in and with modernity is a challenge that everybody faces (Kapustin, 1998, p.24-25). The crucial aspect is introduced into this definition of modernity when Kapustin denies that there is any singular interpretation of modernity that can claim authority (in addition to 'avtoritetnyi' Kapustin uses the adjective 'istinnyi' which relates to the Russian idea of eternal 'truth'. Kapustin, 1998, p.28). Kapustin reiterates in this context the existential aspect of the problem of modernity. We will return later to the implications this has for the understanding of the post-Communist, transformational process in Russia. For the moment the concern lies with the consequences which such a contextualisation would have for the idea of political liberalism. Kapustin has repeatedly over the years attempted to outline a definition of political liberalism, that leaves enough room for combining Russian cultural particularities and traditions with liberalism, and, at the same time, is sufficiently specific in excluding non-liberal views from a coherent definition of what constitutes a liberal political order. In an early article he sketches a preliminary concept of modernity and dismisses two conventional ways of defining liberalism- firstly, to define it by ascribing to political liberalism a core arsenal of views and concepts, and secondly, through ascertaining a canon of views advocated by what are believed to be beyond doubt liberal thinkers. Kapustin criticises the first attempt as potentially too restrictive and, simultaneously, as insufficiently differentiating. Liberal concepts belong to the conceptual repertoire of many conservative thinkers too. In fact, many notions that are pivotal to an understanding of liberal political thought have been coined by political thinkers who expressed concern about their societies' drift into further liberalisation. On the other hand, the

second approach, so Kapustin argues, is highly arbitrary insofar as it assumes a convergence of interpretations that does not appear likely to materialise any time soon (Kapustin, 1996, p.49). Rather, Kapustin goes on, political liberalism may be seen as the only sufficient conceptualisation of the problem of modernity. As it incorporates a 'methodological recognition of the freedom of the individual' as an orientating (Archimedean) point, the lines along which it can be distinguished from non-liberal thought, whether conservative, nationalist, or Communist, are circumscribed by this idea of the centrality of the individual (Kapustin, 1996, p.50). Note that Kapustin does not describe individualism as a value that 'trumps' any other. His portrayal of political liberalism retains an element of flexibility in any ranking of values on account of its reference to a problem to whose solution liberalism is thought to be contributory.

Kapustin then distinguishes three 'basic types' of politico-philosophical idea of liberalism: gnoseological, ontological as well as technological (cf. also Kapustin, 1994). This typology allows him to ascribe the different historical stages in the development of the idea of liberty to the enlisted types. The typology does not represent the particularity of the cognitive processes but rather exemplifies distinct views about human activities (Kapustin, 1996, p.52). The gnoseological type of liberalism considers the activities of individuals as reflecting their understanding of some basic principles in virtue of which individuals develop the willingness and readiness to an ordered communal life (*uporiadochennyi sovместnyi zhizn'*, Kapustin, 1996, p.53). The political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke most closely embody the gnoseological view. In contrast to this, the ontological type of liberalism postulates that those basic activities of human beings which assist in creating the institutions or collaboration and communal life are (based on) the reciprocity between people. Hegel's notion of civil society represents the most radical interpretation of ontological liberal thought, so Kapustin argues (Kapustin, 1996, p.53). The most interesting difference of these two types of politico-philosophical liberalism from the third, technological, view consists in understanding the

activities of people as channelling and regulating the unavoidable conflict of interests in view of the inevitable scarcity of resources and the absence of a shared definition of the good.

This typology may be contestable but it allows Kapustin to describe the different stages in the theoretical formation of liberal political thought. The invariant factor in this model is the multitude of different activities people engage in, whereas liberalism is a theoretical attempt to make sense of them in widely varying circumstances and under the auspices of the slow modification of interpretative 'paradigms'.⁹ Kapustin is aware that this typology shifts the definitional focus of political liberalism from the form and justification of political institutions to the question of how a social order that already exists can be preserved, having already provided the foundation for individual freedom to come into existence. Most importantly, individualism receives part of its persuasive force for modernity from the role it ascribes to human beings as agents of the political processes which underpin modernity (Kapustin, 1996, p.54).

That Kapustin is highly sympathetic to this latter, technological view of liberalism becomes apparent in a later article in which he elaborates upon his earlier efforts to define liberalism. In a paper published in the proceedings of a conference on Russian liberalism, he outlines the problems faced by theorists in attempting to fix the content of political liberalism. He argues that liberalism has a highly relational character insofar as the circumstances and the environment determine the nature of the argument put forward (Kapustin, 1999, p.40). An example would be the unrestrained individualism of the Russian reform period that undermined the very conditions of personal freedom in the economic and political sphere. Furthermore, anything that can be said about liberalism, Kapustin argues, relates somehow to its cultural-historically defined views, eventually affirming the non-repeatability of the liberal 'experiment' whose essence consists in finding a solution to the problem of a reasonable connection between order and individual freedom in a given situation (ibid.). The lack of any

external criteria of what represents a (liberal) solution to the problem of modernity does not signify an element of arbitrariness in the selection process. Kapustin adds that, within the immense diversity of answers given to the problem, there exist 'algorithms of liberal activities' that define the character and the fundamental parameters of the solution to the problem. These algorithms represent the perennial themes of liberal political thought. Adopting Gray's enumeration of the core concepts of liberalism, Kapustin mentions individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism (Kapustin, 1999, p.51). The upshot of this reluctance to define liberalism in terms of substantial principles or to identify its core idea among a cluster of immutable principles or concepts allows Kapustin to refuse to accept any standardisation of liberal political thought along the outlines of Western political liberalism. In fact, it permits an understanding of liberalism as a continuous process of problem-solving, the problem in this case being the preservation of ordered social life. The parallel to Akhiezer's account of civilisations, as invariably calibrating themselves around ideas that seem to ensure the survival of communal life, is apparent here. Although Kapustin does not share Akhiezer's theory of the structure and dynamics of social life that either assist or impede the preferred form of social life, both assign priority or special emphasis to the necessity of societal survival and reproduction.

Kapustin also believes that this allows him to examine the problem of Russian liberalism as being immanently alien to the 'spiritual material' (*dukhovnyi*) and the socio-economic realities in Russia. Whereas the attempts to define political liberalism by one or another of its central ideas or concepts presupposes the notion of a single proper definition of liberalism, most of the various philosophical-methodological characterisations of liberalism (be they Hegelian, Kantian or Utilitarian) stand in 'radical negation' to each other (Kapustin, 1999, p.44). His approach therefore works from an assumption that liberalism is an irreducibly diverse theoretical enterprise, a position that should be sufficiently evident given

⁹ Kapustin compares the cultural problem of modernity as being overcome rather than solved to Kuhn's idea of

the perennial problems of identifying a core of immutable liberal positions (similar cf. Gaus, 2000). Kapustin is aware that with this approach he is in good company with some prominent Western critics of the Enlightenment tradition of political thought. Referring to Rorty and Gray, however, he rebuts the notion of the liberal tradition of political thought as being entirely contingent upon Western historical experiences. He maintains that liberalism, as a valuable form of political thought, must have the capacity to distinguish itself from other political theories. The existential twist in Kapustin's argument resides exactly here, when he notes that political liberalism possesses delimiting capacities on account of its *relevance* for political life and hence for the survival of the polity (Kapustin, 1999, p.49). The significance of the collapse of the Communist experiment is nowhere as obvious as in this anchoring of political liberalism in the societal purpose that any political thought invariably has.

In other words, if political liberalism as it emanated in the West is contingent upon the very historical circumstances that existed there, then this contingent character of liberalism must not be taken to be synonymous with arbitrariness. In a politico-theoretical framework, contingency does not beget relativism, as the disastrous failure of communism to effectively cope with modernity has shown. Whether this refusal to endorse a radically relativist position stems more from the desperate hope that Russia will one day attain a similar political order, or is theoretically motivated, is hard to ascertain in the cases of both Kapustin and Akhiezer's theories. The fact remains that, by virtue of anchoring the evaluation of a given political order in the degree to which it creatively responds to the challenges of modernity, Kapustin has introduced a criterion for the vindication of political thought that effectively undermines relativism in its most radical form. His approach equally incorporates into the assessment procedure a moment of flexibility that allows the constant revision essential to any political order which must accommodate features of modern social and political life. But is his idea of political liberalism sufficiently prescriptive? Does it not allow many of the norms which are

scientific progress by the substitution of an old paradigm by a new one. Kapustin, 1998, p.15

thought to be intrinsic to political liberalism to be left wayside? Does it, in fact, provide any guidance in situations where values conflict and prioritising judgements is required? Is Kapustin's formula not theoretically empty to the degree of being superfluous?

Kapustin denies that connecting political thought with modernity produces a definition of political liberalism that is void of any differentiating potential. His starting point for demonstrating that his idea of political liberalism possesses a (albeit diminished) prescriptive component is to point to those aspects of societal life that have emerged over the last centuries which are essential to the survival of social orders. He identifies three different elements of modern life exclusively congruous with liberalism and at the same time engendered by the problems of modern life. Firstly, states are necessarily committed to some principle of inclusivity and equality embodied in the ideas of equal value of every individual and equality before the law. Secondly, he notes that in the absence of a common idea of the good the only plausible alternative appears to be to grant the freedom to everybody to define and find their own notion of personal fulfilment. And thirdly, in absence of a common idea of this sort, the natural way of developing a social order evidences the agreement between the citizens, symbolised by the idea of the social contract (Kapustin, 1999, p.53). Eliminating those moral and ethical norms that collide with reality allows the evolution of the (political and social) institutions of the contemporary world (ibid.). This, so Kapustin argues, encapsulates the critical-emancipatory potential of the liberal ideology (utopiia). From the perspective of a political theorist, the promulgation of these three aspects of modern life smacks of an inadmissible conflation of normative and descriptive elements. A further clarification of the real intent and content of Kapustin's normative argument is still required. The inner mechanism through which modernity 'selects' those moral norms that coincide with liberal worldviews is explained by Kapustin in another extended article in which he uses the metaphor of an 'experiment' to elucidate this process.

In this article, Kapustin gives probably the most thorough formulation of his idea of the critical connection between modernity and liberal political thought. Kapustin is aware that the theoretical territory he has to examine is demarcated by the more or less deterministic perception of the relation between history and ideas. If Kapustin wants to show persuasively that liberalism as political idea is the outcome of a contingent historical constellation yet inevitably the only feasible response to modernity, he needs to sever the link between actual history and the liberal idea as a formative force in history and subsequently to reconstruct it philosophically.

His solution to this problem appears to be to assign a 'constructivist' potential to the liberal idea. Constructivism in this context for Kapustin designates a conceptualising capacity to the idea of liberty, yet not a formative one in the sense that the liberal ideology would 'make' history. He writes:

'In this sense the liberal idea is not potent enough to create a liberal-democratic society, just as Marxism-Leninism cannot create a totalitarian-Communist society. The 'constructivist' function of the (liberal) idea manifests something else. A conflict can arise within society that is not solved and regulated through the preservation of its participants (in their) former socio-cultural definition. 'Constructivism' necessarily must mean in this case that the new idea of society consists 'merely' in the assistance to the conflicting parties to find their new definition and to contemplate the possibility of their new dimensions of their existence, by virtue of which they can 'process' and institutionalise the conflict in order to obtain security and the realisation of their interests.' (Kapustin, 1995, p.127)

Yet, to limit the constructive potential of the liberal idea to the assistance it can provide to social and political forces in envisaging their future societal roles and positions in a future liberal political structure is to neglect the role the liberal idea can play in the transformational process itself. This is where Kapustin's picture departs from Western political theory in the Rawlsian mould, which refuses to acknowledge that the vision of a future society and the outline of the path that is adopted towards it are two sides of the same coin.

'The liberal idea is (also) constructive in the sense that the realisation of the possibility (of transformation) does not provide the immanent logic of the socio-cultural processes and requires the mediating role of the (liberal) idea.' (Kapustin, 1995, p.127)

But note that Kapustin's picture is still far from adopting an entirely deterministic tone in which ideas would predetermine the outcome of historical process. Most appropriately, he refers to Hegel in demarcating the difference between a deterministic historiography and his theoretical intentions.

'The 'constructivist' idea as an expression of the possibility and the project of a new social integrity as a vision (vzgliad) of existing forces and interests is transcendent to their current (nalishnyi- available, ready) existence insofar as they, using a Hegelian phrase, 'remain at the mercy of their spontaneity'. (ibid.)

This idea cannot generate the participants of the conflict, but it manifests their self-consciousness. He sums up the part the liberal idea plays in the development of a modern political order in three points. Firstly, the liberal idea assists in the identification of the central conflict. Secondly, it presents it to society and thirdly, it provides the ideological forms and the formulae of political mobilisation for the realisation of the project of societal preservation.

So far, Kapustin has outlined a notion of liberalism as a concept that carries in itself the formulation of the problem the social and political players face as well as the ways in which it can be overcome. The integrity of this conceptualisation runs more along Hegelian lines and sets Kapustin's theory of liberalism off from Neo-Kantian formulations, such as Rawls', which charges practical reason with the task of discovering (or even creating, in earlier versions) the political conception of justice, i.e. a political consensus. Kapustin's approach implies that liberty as the essence of this future political consensus must somehow be thought of as being inherent to the workings of this practical reason (the path towards a political arrangement). Rawls rejected this interpretation on the grounds of its metaphysical requirements which seemed to him to be unfeasible. Yet, the upshot is that liberty must be perceived as a political value, rather than a metaphysical idea with co-ordinating potential.

Rawls thus has to recover liberty's 'creative' potential by constructing a whole edifice of reasons that make it, politically, desirable for political players across a range of different comprehensive doctrines. Returning to Kapustin, he has now to show whether or not the idea of liberty can have the co-ordinating function it has had in other historical contexts.

Posing the question of the applicability of liberalism, with Russia in the frame of whether or not certain conditions thought to be requisite for the existence of a liberal political order can prevail in Russia's present and future, can only, so Kapustin remarks correctly, lead to utter tautology. Identifying the liberal idea with the features of a specific theoretical and practical model of transformation and associating it with empirical circumstances that call for the realisation of this model rids the idea of liberty of its creative potential. Two logically similar, but ideologically contradictory, positions ensue. Either, so one could argue, Russia possesses a socio-economic and politico-cultural genotype that is principally alien to liberalism, or, on the other hand, one would argue, that if Russia were to acquire a liberal political order 'within her social and cultural fabric there must be reproduced those empirical circumstances which are considered to be decisive for the development of that model of liberalism' (Kapustin, 1995, p.128). This essentially was the position of the Gaidar reform team, which set out to 'form a middle class' through privatisation, to imitate the corresponding liberal political institutions, and to create a self-regulating market economy (Kapustin, 1995, p.129). Yet, so Kapustin argues, this led to the paradox that

'the absence of the empirical circumstances made it impossible to identify those social subjects that desired the transformation. Consequently, one once again had to set hopes on the state, which was little else but a euphemism for the 'bureaucracy.' (Kapustin, 1995, p.129)

This succinctly sums up why most attempts at liberal reform in Russian history, when modelled on the Western model, acquire this ideological edge. Kapustin's alternative account of what liberalism is must then reveal the problem(atique) that lay at the very origins of

Western liberalism. As has been mentioned already with reference to other articles, he considers this to be a question of societal survival or reproduction under the conditions of individuality. After dismissing Hobbes' account of the creation of a political order by resting the social contract on instrumental rationality, he returns to characterise the decisively liberal response to the problem of how to retain and promote a viable social fabric on the basis of individualism and individual interests. He uses the metaphor of an experiment to describe the emanation of the liberal idea within a society. The meaning of this experiment lies in orientating the search for that political order within whose parameters the central liberal task can be accomplished:

‘...the socialisation of private individuals and private interests through the provision of their maximally possible and minimally guaranteed freedoms.’ (Kapustin, 1995, p.138)

Yet, Kapustin notes that just as the imitation of the Western experiment would not lead to Russian liberalism, so it seems that Russia lacks all or almost all conditions which allowed the West to channel the liberating drive towards private advantage into economic interests and fruitful economic development. He refers to Easton's criteria, which in his view must be present and in a stable relation for a successful implementation of the liberal idea. First, a definition of the cultural-ethical identity of the social group under consideration, the question as to who constitutes the ‘we’. Second, the constitutional and institutional structures of the regime, i.e. a definition of the rules and procedures (constitution). And third, a determination of the distribution of (political and economic) resources. None of the above, so Kapustin argues, are existent in Russia at the moment, in spite of their being crucial for a transcendence of the mere individualised economic interest. (Kapustin, 1995, pp.140-141). Correspondingly, the tripartite structure of politics can be described as ‘qualities’ of people: the first one relates to virtue and honour, the second to reason, and the third one represents interest or motivation. Now, for Kapustin, the complexity of the liberal experiment consists in the interrelation of (1)

to (3), their causal nexus as well as their different 'rhythms' of evolution. He abandons Hegelian grounds now by claiming that the stability of a cultural identity, Easton's (1), must exist prior to settling the distribution of political power and determining the structure of political authority (Kapustin, 1995, p.140). This leaves the polity in its quest to determine Easton's (1) to (3), relying on one factor only: the private interest of individuals – a primacy that has no parallel in Western political history. The sheer lack of theoretical conceptualisation of the transformational processes, i.e. the unfolding relations between all three aspects, amongst liberal intellectuals during the first post-Communist decade thus contributed to the fatal primacy of private interests as something like a default position for any reform programme (Kapustin, 1995, p.141). To carve out a sensible conceptualisation of how (1) to (3) should and could relate in the Russian context must be preceded then by a critique of the 'key notions' of the 'liberal idea' in the nineties. Kapustin pans out three different concepts of the nature of the post-Communist society. First, there is the 'philosophical-historical' interpretation of the exit from communism perceiving it as a process of overcoming the 'particularity' of Russia and rejoining the path of Western Europe.

Kapustin calls this a synthesis of the positivistic evolutionism that prevailed in the nineteenth century with the (deterministic) historicism of Marxist persuasion which conditions the 'vulgar' progressivism and imitative character of Russian liberalism (Kapustin, 1995, p.142). This view is neatly summed up by saying that it rejects the possibility of there being two 'liberal experiments'. A second notion of Russian transformation takes the view that the 'natural historical laws' are economic in nature and universal. This view represents, so Kapustin maintains, the quintessence of vulgar economism and its fixation on only those manifestations that evidence these economic laws. This is the in-built distortion which prohibits it from conceptualising those social and political conditions that make those 'economic laws' appear so 'natural' (*yestestvenno-istoricheskie*) (Kapustin, 1995, p.143). The dilemma of the proponents of the (universal) economic view of liberalism is that they have to

show that those moral-cultural and institutional factors which provide the basis for Western liberalism exist in Russian, or, alternatively, if they do not exist, how to create them (ibid.).

The third view is of the structuralist-sociological conviction. It contends that if the social structures of Western (modern) societies and those of the Russian society were in principle similar and the Western societies are democratic, then Russia will eventually come to be democratic too. This view assumes a linear, one-directional causal connection between social structure and the resultant political order. The advantage is that, if true, the role of (liberal) ideology would be reduced, so Kapustin contends, and it would provide a legitimation for a temporary authoritarian regime assisting the transformational process in Russia by creating the socio-economic preconditions for a liberal political structure. Dismissing this proposition by pointing to the market as being by nature a spontaneous rather than devised order, Kapustin goes on to emphasise that the error of most of the formulations of liberal reform lies in their disregard for the sequence in which the content of the three aspects mentioned above must be determined. In fact, Kapustin argues, liberals repeatedly abstract from the definition of identity of the polity that is most fundamental to the evolution of liberal political institutions (p.145). Yet, as long as the identity of the polity and the basic procedures of political and economic distribution are in question, the regime cannot legitimise itself through its effectiveness in relation to the market: it simply cannot act effectively in market reforms, as long as the identity of the polity and the manner of resource distribution are not determined (ibid.). A temporary order obtains between the three aspects that cannot be ignored.

Thus Kapustin concludes that a coherent and specific formulation of the relations between the three components of liberal societies must be found for Russia. The picture is further complicated by the fact that the Russian state has lost much of its independence and has been 'appropriated' or 'colonised' by private interests. The question is which factors can induce the powerful economic (and synonymous with that: political) elite, to produce a

workable compromise which stabilises their relations and produces a willingness on their part to observe the arrangement installed (Kapustin, 1995, p.158). Rousseau's critique of Hobbes, so Kapustin argues, has convincingly shown that private interests cannot conjure up a common interest, or to put it differently, citizenship cannot be the automatic outcome of individualism. Kapustin concludes that the logic of equilibrium that would bring about the political compromise must be somewhat contingent on the specific circumstances. The difficulty is to how institutionalise the contingent contours of the political solution. What remains, according to Kapustin, is to reveal the boundaries of the liberal experiment by reference to the various requirements of a liberal order: how to obtain a sufficient effectiveness while not disrupting the influence 'from below' on elitist groups in the extremely weak Russian civil society (Kapustin, 1995, p.159).

To do this, Kapustin eventually returns to Hegel and his idea of the constructive conflict between private and common interests. There is little guidance in figuring out how private interests can generate a common interest but Hegel's idea of the mutuality that is involved in private competition may be of use when taken as relating to the conditions that must be fulfilled for a realisation of private interests in the first place (Kapustin, 1995, p.160). And, although this may indicate the possibility of the transformation of private interests into general interests, Kapustin leaves it here without even outlining at least the normative task that still beckons. His argument is persuasive on the general analysis of the conceptual fallacies of previous liberal theorisations of Russian transformations, yet his conclusions seem of only tentative quality as long as he refrains from sketching the possible path to a liberal political order that takes into account the need for an appropriate ranking of the three aspects which Kapustin borrows from Easton, as well as what the role of liberty in the process of determining the sequence or temporal ranking of the three aspects could possibly be.

Thus he fails to fill the gap between the constructivist view of political liberalism and the normative work which he believes is necessary to ascertain the proper historical definition

of the identity of the polity, the distributive criteria, and the political structures that cast these definitions into a constitutional framework providing the resources for legitimation. Kapustin's argument thus remains critical with regard to the history of the liberal idea in Russia, yet he misses an opportunity to undertake the normative work required himself. His approach, however, will allow us to draw some important conclusions.

There is first the relevance of the Western historical experience that is indispensable for Russian political liberalism. The critique of Russian liberal reforms reveals that the crucial mistake has been a lack of conceptualisation of the preconditions for individualistic gain and interest satisfaction and this, in turn, intimates that the sequencing of the three aspects of liberal politics as manifested in Western political history is not merely ephemeral or fortuitous but significant. This asserts, if not the primacy of a historiographical reconstruction of political liberalism, at least the nature of liberalism as a historical phenomenon. 'Historical' here, however, is quite a blunt expression. Kapustin's notion of a liberal political order as an 'experiment' conveys the historical aspect of it far better. It connotes a situation of a polity in continuous search for the correct definition of its own identity and the appropriate political formations to express this current level of self-consciousness. The idea of political liberalism as an 'experiment' also incorporates a sufficient flexibility that reflects the constant change which represents a challenge to a received notion of identity. This, however, remains mainly a descriptive exercise as long as the framework in which the transformation (or erstwhile/initial formation) of the political space can be theorised as a transition from private to common interest. Kapustin believes that this must be the proper location for Hegel's analysis of the interrelation between the private and the public, as it is disclosed through the instruments of civil society.

Dismissing a Hobbesian argument that rests on instrumental rationality as being insufficient for generating a common identity, he pins his hopes on the translation of private interests into a common good as exemplified in Hegel's view of civil society. Yet, without

specifying the role that liberty (and the idea of liberty) plays in Hegel's portrayal of the emergence of liberal society and how this can eradicate the mistakes of the reform-minded economism of present day Russian liberals, it remains an empty shell awaiting further elaboration. It seems crucial then in tackling the issue to clarify the exact link that relates the constructivist function of the liberal idea (in its normative content) with the specific formulation of the answers to the three Eastonian questions. Kapustin did not venture into this territory any further, but we must.

A brief summary of Kapustin's argument will help us to sharpen the focus for the argument that remains to be made. However, a note of caution is in order. It should be stressed for reasons of fairness that the way Kapustin's argument has been arranged in the present exposition does not correspond necessarily either with his theoretical intentions or with the order in which he wrote the articles that have been selected for the present purpose. I have, to a certain degree, given his arguments a pointedness and at times extrapolated a conclusion from them that Kapustin would not necessarily have endorsed or, indeed, have seen as a plausible conclusion from his argument in the first place. The justification for this lies in the potential uses which Kapustin's arguments have for the present purpose and which go further than he has explicitly recognised.

To start with, Kapustin's position with regard to a definition of liberalism was sketched. He expounded his views in a series of articles, which have drawn some criticism on account of their alleged vagueness. He argued that liberalism must be seen as a problem of modernity which is intricately linked with two norms of societal life: the preservation of an existing order and the accommodation of the paramount propensity of modern life towards individualism. Kapustin seems to assume that both ideas represent norms from which it is admissible to reason to a definition of political liberalism. The advantages and disadvantages are apparent. Although critics have rejected Kapustin's notion of liberalism as too vague, this opacity does in fact introduce a flexibility to his approach that pays off when it comes to the

analysis of the liberal idea in Russian history. Yet, the most serious disadvantage is that Kapustin needs to show why modernity is inextricably linked with a general idea of individualism and the sustenance of an existing social order as a normative principle. The exact relation between individualism and personal liberty remains oblique in Kapustin's picture. Moreover, why should the preservation of an existing social order *per se* be prioritised over the enhancement of personal liberty? It should be noted, however, that Kapustin's picture does not concur with a strict conservative hierarchy of norms in which the preservation of the existing order assumes a position overriding all other societal maxims. Kapustin reasons from a position of modernity which, inevitably, rests on a high degree of individuality and the aspiration to individual freedom.

Yet, as Kapustin makes clear in his criticism of the Russian reforms under Gaidar, individualism describes a wide field of social orientations, not least the excessive economic liberalism that came to be so synonymous with greed and unfettered individualism during the first post-Communist decade in Russia, something Kapustin characterises as an erroneous conception of liberalism and consequently repudiates as being incompatible with Russian social and political circumstances and the requirements of a post-Communist society.

Here lies the strength of his conceptual critique of a liberalism that disregards its own historical conditionality. Kapustin accurately condemns the libertarianism that underpinned the Gaidarian reform efforts as presumptuous insofar as it thought of itself as creating its own prerequisites and assumed that the ideal of liberalism was readily transferable to any particular place and time. Kapustin appropriately points to the conditions that are to be fulfilled for economic liberty to take root. His argument for the primacy of a notion of political identity and procedures for the distribution of political and social resources neatly parallels the fundamental criticism by Margaret Canovan of the lack of theoretical attention to the preconditions of Western liberal theorising (Canovan, 1996). Yet, Kapustin does not argue for a better awareness of the preconditions of liberal political theory. His point on the required

temporal order of historical conditions for liberalism amounts to more. It is not so much a theoretical point as one resulting from historical retrospection. And the connection between theorising a liberal political order in Russia and the ramifications of this historical introspection are far from clear. If modernity is characterised adequately by the ascendancy of individualism and this introduces additional features into the fabric of existing societies which simultaneously threaten to disrupt them, then clearly Kapustin must show what the implications for the theory of Russian liberalism are. The normative work which is required here must amount to nothing less than an assessment of the extent to which individualism and its proper content may be compatible with the Russian social environment. Or, alternatively, one would have to evaluate the indispensability of individualism as a behaviour regulating principle for Russia as a modern society. Is a modern society conceivable without the Western idea of individualism?

The metaphor of political liberalism as an 'experiment' carries some explanatory weight. It has several advantages. First, it acknowledges a flexibility that must obtain in the relation between the 'purified' idea of liberty and the social and political conditions which need to accommodate this idea. It rejects the subjugation of politics to abstract philosophical concepts and thus reflects adequately the constant need for revision that ensues in the process of theory impacting on reality. Second it recognises the possibility of failure and urges any theory to identify the criteria for identifying and analysing such failure. Kapustin assigns this to the idea of societal stability, yet I can see no argument for it. He thus leaves himself open to the charge of arbitrarily prioritising the idea of societal preservation over, say, rampant economic individualism, which, despite his remarks on it being de-contextualised and hence representing a deviation from the historical norm (extrapolated from the West), might still be taken as an ultimate destination in conducting the liberal experiment.

Kapustin explores the link between modernity and individualism to some degree in his book 'Modernity as a Subject-Matter of Political Theory' (1998). There he also offers a

thorough critique of the transitology literature that has been so popular amongst Russian liberal reformers around the Gaidar team. Although Kapustin's position does not become entirely clear, he nevertheless manages to marshal some impressive theoretical arguments for what he calls a cultural theory of modernity vis-à-vis the a-cultural perspective favoured by transitologists in both West and East. The distinction he draws between cultural and a-cultural theories fairly neatly correspond to other, more common distinctions drawn in Western literature, such as those between communitarianism and universalist liberalism. His intention is to sketch the variations in explanations of modernity through the cultural and the a-cultural lens, respectively. Since he favours a cultural approach to the question of modernity, the crucial point is whether or not modernity is inextricably linked in his conception with (Western) democracy and how he would construct this link – or, as he puts it himself, 'how and why does the process of transformation occur from 'particularism' to 'universalism'?' (Kapustin, 1998, p.134). Characterising the two different theoretical approaches he notes that culturalist theories (henceforth: CTs) attempt to explain modernity in cultural categories, whereas a-culturalist theories (henceforth: ATs) conceive of modernity as being neutral to cultural background conditions and as universal insofar as it comprises an invariable core of processes, such as industrialisation, secularisation, democratisation and the prioritisation of scientific rationality (Kapustin, 1998, p.80). Kapustin points out that proponents of ATs have often criticised a caricature of CTs instead of engaging with the more complex issues that a fulsome CT raises. By no means, so Kapustin contends, do adherents of CTs ignore the constantly occurring institutional change in societies. What CT and AT protagonists really disagree on is the concept of human agency and to what extent and how human actions are formative in bringing about the changes that contribute to modern forms of life. For Kapustin, this touches upon the crucial question of human freedom and how to theorise it. 'If human beings are free then to which extent can they be (seen) in relation to (the cultural symbols) that generate the fabric of their culture' (Kapustin, 1998, p.82). CTs and ATs also differ in the

interpretation of societal change, insofar as the former understands it as growing out of, and ultimately explicable in reference to, the cultural conditions, whereas AT espouses a view of human actions that understands them as being 'directed towards' something. Kapustin remarks that this idea of human actions as contributing to a certain 'project' is part and parcel of any AT, whereas CTs refuse to accept any trajectory of modernity (Kapustin, 1998, p.85).

In other words, for CTs

'modernisation is a historically conditioned evolution in which the form of reason is liberating itself from its 'own monologue' and develops the capacity to question, criticise and transform the personal foundations which were hitherto seen as natural and self-evident' (Kapustin, 1998, pp.87-88).

For Kapustin, adherents of CTs can offer the more plausible explanation of the transformation of reason that sustains the social and political changes leading to modernity. Advocates of CT do not have to assume a free-floating, independently motivated reason triggering modernising processes, but can ground modernity in the cultural conditions that develop gradually in changing societies. This equally allows them to dispose of the assumption of the intentionality of modernity, comprehending it as a process unfolding according to human design (Kapustin, 1998, p.90). Two terms, however, permit Kapustin to characterise the role of reason in the transformation of societies. Modern reason is necessary and tragic: necessary because people must live under conditions of modernity and thus the disintegration of pre-modern conditions of living is inevitable. This necessity is grounded in the human condition which is 'to live with the problems and contradiction (of the modern world) and never achieve a final solution' (Kapustin, 1998, p.91). In effect it means the end of the 'ontological unity of the world' that characterises all pre-modern societies. From now on,

'reason is necessary because people need to do something unprecedented, for their former history, (that is) to produce the foundations (moral and political) of their own society (obzhezhitie) without reference to authorities. Reason must (adopt the role) of

law-giver because of the problematisation of the (common) good, since the interpretations of the norms cannot be limited by authorities anymore.’ (Kapustin, 1998, p.91)

Adherents of ATs now work with three presuppositions that allow them to assert that these foundations of modern life can be procured by strict adherence to the correct methods of reasoning, which are in turn universal. Firstly, Kapustin writes, they must assume that the subject of reasoning is not connected with the object matter of his reasoning, that somehow he will be able to adopt an external position to the object considered. Herein lie the origins of the claim of objectivity. Secondly, any (disinterested) observer must be able to relate the object to his own idea of perfection. And thirdly, the capacity to reason must per definitio be understood as being universal, not depending or conditioned by cultural environments. Kapustin calls the third presupposition of AT the ‘deepest foundation of any ‘project’ driven thought and social-engineering approach to reality’ (Kapustin, 1998, p.93) which is reflected in the ideology of the liberal-democratic reformers of the nineties.

Since Kapustin accepts the human condition as a fair and reliable description of the modern predicament, he would have to sketch an alternative notion of reason that is capable of generating a societal agreement as well as reaches beyond the possibly narrow cultural boundaries, i.e. can appear plausible to extraneous reason without resorting to the idea of a universal reason. As he expounds the theoretical dilemma:

‘reason that acknowledges its historical (conditionality) deprives itself of its self-sufficiency.’ (Kapustin, 1998, p.95)

Kantian and Lockean conceptions of reasons seem to be inapplicable, the former for its metaphysical assumptions, the latter for its theological suppositions. (Protestantism would indeed cut very little ice in Russia.) In contrast to these two ideas of reason, and perhaps not surprisingly, the Hegelian construction of reason is likely to be more amenable to Kapustin’s

purposes, not least because it offers a unique incorporation of historical and universal features. While the Hegelian Absolute Spirit is somehow fused with the historical context, it still asserts the possibility of an objective morality. Kapustin does not seem to think that Hegel's theoretical construct is wholly convincing, but he outlines two plausible interpretations. Either one thinks of (Hegelian) reason as being identifiable with one cultural context only, repressing/contradicting any others, or modern (Hegelian) reason 'suppresses the 'otherness' and originality within its own context' (Kapustin, 1998, p.97). He appears to be inclined to formulate a position in keeping with the second interpretation and argues that since 'truth' has undoubtedly become unachievable, and insofar as

'truth as a possibility and a reality of societal life does not reside in reason but in experimentally generating interaction between reasons, what is possible is only political reason, hence the reasonability of reason is revealed only in the success of the experiment of free interaction of autonomous reasons ... and insofar as truth is only interaction of different reasons, the real reason appears only as democratic reason or reason of democracy.' (Kapustin, 1998, pp.97-98)

Kapustin deviates here from the Hegelian construct insofar as he pushes the experimental aspect of human interaction into the foreground. His move might be justifiable by reference to the implausibility of Hegel's idea of the Absolute Spirit, yet his perspective also discards – along with the notion of externality or independent criteria for judging – the socially sustained reason. Although he endeavours to salvage this link, his solution appears to be assertive rather than grounded. He writes:

'(Since) the reasonability (of reason) does not consist in reason as such but in its capacity to be communicated with other types of reasons, recognising its autonomy, ...this reason is (only) realised highly contextually and experimentally.' (Kapustin, 1998, p.97)

Yet, in order to maintain an open relation between modernity, the ensuing political institutions and their cultural environment, he still has some explaining to do as to how our conception of

Western political institutions as the modern institutions came about. For him, it is a story of mistaken identity, where the once successful political procedures offering a (temporary) solution to the modern experiment acquired an 'ontological status' that was ill-suited to such tentative framework of merely purposive character. As modern institutions become identified with modernity itself, they lose their 'problematic' aspect, and hence the creative component in the understanding of modernity as problem is suppressed and societal stagnation ensues. Modernity, in fact, adopts the very features of its predecessor, traditional societal arrangements that are frozen in time and unquestionable (Kapustin, 1998, p.109). Paraphrasing Laclau, Kapustin calls this conversion of the outcome of the modern question into the alleged universal conditions of its preservation, the trivialisation that seeks to avoid to problematise again and again the relation between modernity and its institutions that are thought to be augmenting the political dilemma. Kapustin encapsulates this issue in the following way:

'not what freedom is or how it can be accomplished, but how do 'free institutions' function, that is those institutions that are considered to be free irrespective of them providing liberty as it is currently understood and how people understand it today. This is... the 'trivialisation' of modernity.' (Kapustin, 1998, p.109)

To recover the real meaning and creative force of modernity one would have to 'overcome its monologic (character) and assert its right to determine (zakonodatel'stvovat')' (Kapustin, 1998, p.110) the response of a certain polity to the modern dilemma. Kapustin thus sees the underlying and unifying feature of modernity in its irreducible plurality of opinions, or, in the disappearance of a singular public reason. Given the impermissibility to postulate the superiority of one particular reason over others, the political space must inevitably embrace a minimum of democratic procedures in order to allow the necessary recognition of other opinions and their equal status, as well as to facilitate the free and unhampered exchange of opinions so that an agreement can be reached. However, Kapustin qualifies this picture

considerably when he points out that 'democracy' here does not mean representative democracy of the West.

The open-endedness of the modern challenge would be curtailed by preordaining its outcome as being fashioned after the Western model. We may have good reasons to advocate representative democracy and a capitalist market democracy in certain circumstances, yet one has to recognise on the one hand their particularity, i.e. that both are instruments formulated and established under particular historical conditions and, on the other hand, that pre-empting the outcome of the search for the most appropriate response to modernity in different historical circumstances is tantamount to the logical error of identifying modernity with the contingent responses people have given to it. It diminishes its creative potential and would amount to what Oakshott called, 'the transfer of the abridgements' of the complex traditions of politics. The issue of democratic institutions reflects the theoretical depth of CTs. As Kapustin writes in the course of a thorough critique of AT and transitological views, democracy for CT is not one of the components of the constellation of modernity but rather an indication of the level of non-coerced interaction between a plurality of traditions (Kapustin, 1995, p.143).

Democracy as formulated and institutionalised in a certain historical context is thus the manner in which it was deemed to be capable of dealing with the irreducible diversity of opinions. Yet, Kapustin makes clear that the term democracy relates to a moral and spiritual (*dukhovnaia*) idea rather than being identifiable with a particular set of institutions. By proclaiming it as an ethical idea (Kapustin, 1995, p.144) Kapustin reveals his indebtedness to, and his unwillingness to foreclose, the rich Russian liberal philosophical tradition, which attempted to salvage the moral content of political arrangements in contrast to the 'cold', 'lifeless' and mechanistic notions of politics in the West. Soloviev's attempt to define law as an irreducible minimum of morality epitomises this period of liberal philosophy, just as it represents its eventual failure. Kapustin, perhaps inadvertently, produces a conflict between

the professed political character of modern institutions and the desire to rest them on culturally embedded moral maxims. Somehow, Kapustin does not seem to trust his demonologic politics. And perhaps his misgivings would be alleviated if he would analyse more clearly the moral implications and the moral input into the political arrangement that is considered the appropriate response to the disintegration of a unanimous public reason. Although this brief summary of Kapustin's concept of modernity sufficiently sketches the intricacies of the relationship between modernity and political institutions as he understands it, it still leaves us with the problem that in order to formulate an appropriate response to the modern dilemma, the cultural background that serves as a reservoir of possible answers needs to be intact to facilitate meaningful replies. What, however, if this is not the case? What, if Russia's problem is not so much her inability to finalise the answer, i.e. to forge the procedures that would enable Russians to reach a harmonious conclusion, but her lack of unequivocal cultural traditions? How much of a coherent social and cultural fabric is essential for drawing up an appropriate response? Is Akhiezer right to see the societal rift as the ultimate cause of Russia's disintegration? Does modernity overwhelm those societies that are in a state of cultural 'confusion', experiencing a loss of historical experience? The following chapter will look at theoretical views which attempt to reconcile Western concepts with the Russian political and social situation by construing it through the idea of chaos.

13. Political Theory- Liberalism, Chaos, and Anarchy

One of the most unyielding problems of liberalism is how to define it. Theorists in the West do not usually engage in attempts to determine the content of liberalism, mainly because the theoretical debate has a sufficient semantic and topical stability. So arguments revolve around certain themes that rarely have crosscutting potential. Although, say, a profound disagreement on the essence of liberalism may lie at the heart of the debate on the concept of justice in a liberal political order, no one would seriously recast the debate as a confrontation between varying definitions of liberalism or liberty. That liberalism is conceptually underdetermined is corroborated simply by looking at the various positions that liberals can adopt in different theoretical fields without ‘crossing swords’. Liberalism may be identified with such contrary positions as rationalism, and scepticism, and in fact it has even ‘found room for individualism and communitarianism’ (Gaus, 2000, p.193). The antinomic structure of liberalism may be of concern only to those who would like to construct a liberal theoretical edifice without any inherent tensions or contradictions. But while this may well turn out to be unrealistic on account of the various functions liberalism plays in modern society, from ideology and political doctrine to a coherent philosophy of ethics, Russian scholars have been particularly ‘bothered’ by the lack of a coherent definition of liberalism. The reasons for this seem clear. If there was a definition of liberalism that could command considerable theoretical support, what many Russians believe to be the pseudo-liberalism of the Gaidarian kind could be criticised and ‘unmasked’ as economically or politically motivated.

Additionally, the question as to whether or not Russia is susceptible to a liberal political order could be clarified once and for all. Finding a reliable definition of political liberalism, then, is part of the project by liberally minded scholars in Russia to recover the reputation of liberalism and dissociate it from the crude neo-liberalism that informed the reforms in the nineties.

A first precipitous impulse may well be to conceive of liberalism as a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview or, as Pustarnakov calls it, 'an emotional and intellectual 'landscape'. However, as he points out, the 'ingredients of liberalism are boundless then and a history of liberalism could not be written since [liberalism] would be indistinguishable from other directions of thought' (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.60). Far more promising seems to be to identify liberalism with an invariable core of ideas that somehow manifests its essence (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.60). Pustarnakov contrasts this idea with Kapustin's concept of liberalism as being identical with modernity (or the modern perspective). He notes that, for Kapustin, liberalism would necessarily encompass a whole variety of political and social philosophies, ranging from (modern) conservatism to socialism (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.61). Yet, the confusion recedes if liberalism is understood in its applicability to many different areas of theoretical concern. Liberalism, Pustarnakov writes, has its own philosophy, sociology and ethics. The adaptability of liberalism, however, would not mean that liberalism has no identifiable core conceptual arsenal. Evocative of Kapustin's 'experiment' metaphor, Pustarnakov argues that liberalism must be understood as a response to the socio-political and economic reality of Western Europe, while essential components of liberalism, political liberalism, economic liberalism as well as philosophical liberalism, have been formulated separately and 'have often been combined with non-liberal types of thought' (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.62). One could single out, Pustarnakov thinks, three different sources of liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine, and each of them was formulated in a particular theoretical context that necessarily impacted on the content of liberal thought. Economic liberalism grew out of the views of Adam Smith and the French proto-liberal physiocrats, political liberalism originates in the Enlightenment, while liberalism as philosophy combines elements of rationalism, empiricism and the French and English philosophy of the eighteenth century (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.63). The undertaking to define Russian liberalism is immeasurably more difficult since it involves the reflection in Russian political thought of the variety and complexity of the evolution of

Western liberalism. Pustarnakov suggests that an understanding of liberalism as passing through different stages in its historical formation may be helpful. He distinguishes between Western classical, post-classical and neo-classical liberalism, whereas Russia experienced only the manifestations of a 'para-liberalism' and a 'quasi-liberalism' due to strong influences of nihilism and the idea of 'narodnishestvo' (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.365). Russian liberalism in the pre-reform era was, though widespread, amalgamated with non-liberal tenets (often called bureaucratic or aristocratic liberalism) (Pustarnakov, 1996, p.362). The lack of concurrence of the historical stages in the development of political liberalism in the West and in Russia makes it all the more difficult to define a conceptual centre to which political liberalism as a theoretical debate gravitates. Pustarnakov's remarks on the need to understand liberalism as a doctrine that manifests itself in a variety of theoretical fields and as being explicable only in the context of these theoretical areas is well taken. Yet, he fails to draw any conclusion from that and seems to withdraw to a descriptive position, giving a historical account of Russian liberalism in all its deviation from Western liberalism. In the course of his article it becomes clear that he seems to identify political liberalism with constitutionalism, yet he leaves it unclear why the conceptual constituents of this notion, such as the idea of the rule of law, would represent the sole core of political liberalism.

The dissonance between the rise of political liberalism in the West and in Russia remains vague, however, because Pustarnakov does not clarify the contents of his threefold categorising scheme. What would para-liberalism mean with regard to the idea of constitutionalism? And how does this relate to the Western historical experience? Shelokhaiev has tried to cut through this jungle of different approaches, and believes that the main difference between Western and Russian liberalism lies in the incongruous development of civil society and liberal doctrine in Russia. While in the West the institutions of civil society have developed in step with the development of political liberalism, in Russia civil society remains incipient even to this day (Shelokhaiev, 1999, p.23). The liberal idea disseminated

through the intellectual Russian elite mainly at the time when the autocratic regime strengthened its grip on society, and in consequence liberalism became synchronous to the idea of democracy rather than to the notion of independent civil society. This constitutes, so Shelokhaiev argues, the specificity of Russian liberalism (Shelokhaiev, pp.24-25), and it had a long-lasting effect on the influence and shape of the idea of law in Russian liberal political philosophy. Paraphrasing Valitzko, Shelokhaiev notes that the particular character of Russian liberalism lies in its accentuation of the 'autonomy of law from politics, and of the logical and axiological priority of legal culture (Rechtskultur) from political freedom' (Shelokhaiev, 1999, p.25).

The particularity of Russian liberalism was thus a product, so Shelokhaiev argues along the same lines as Novikova and Sizemskaja's, of the amalgamation of the rather abstract-general idea of law that prevailed, and it was adopted from the West by the Russian humanitarian tradition. The ideal of *Recht* thus was combined with the principle of equality and societal justice and was recognised in the concept of civil society as the highest moral ideal (ibid.). Russian liberalism was thus de-politicised at the same time as it gained increasingly an ethical content. The parallel to the later development of dissident political thought such as that of Vaclav Havel are striking. Just as the problems of the concomitant delegitimation of politics afflict post-Communist dissident political positions, so did they prevent Russian liberals at the beginning of the twentieth century from creating and sustaining a sphere of politics that proved impermeable to moral precepts.

This de-politicisation of central liberal concepts and their impregnation with morality is often cited by Russian scholars as one of the main characteristics of Russian political thought, with its strong tendencies towards apolitical ethicism, the political thought of Soloviev and the inhibiting influence of Tolstoi are major examples of this. It seems the more imperative that political liberalism in Russia becomes capable of conceiving the political arena as less an upshot of ethical maxims and more as an outcome of political bargaining.

This indicates the important role a more Hobbesian account of the genesis of modern political order could come to play. Hobbes' instrumental rationality must seem a sobering contrast to the moral construction of politics, as envisaged by Soloviev and other Russian philosophers in the late nineteenth century.

Two Russian political philosophers have utilised the notions of instrumental rationality and societal chaos as vehicles for theorising a liberal political order in Russia. Although one of them approaches the topic from the angle of the theory of international relations, the parallels between them are instructive. However, both of them are dismissive of a strictly Hobbesian account of political order.

Kara-Murza is currently director of the Centre for Philosophical Research of Russian Reform at the Institute of Philosophy for the Academy of Sciences and co-president of the Moscow Liberal Foundation. In his article he begins with a critical review of Kapustin's argument that liberalism must somehow relate to modernity, if not be entirely identical with it. Kapustin posed the question as to how a political order is possible and remains stable if the main pillar of the social order would be individualism. Kara-Murza criticises the vague definition of individualism in Kapustin's approach. Individualism, so he points out, usually rests on a notion of atomism, whereas modernity allows and even demands a more encumbered view of the individual. Kara-Murza contrast the atomistic interpretation of the individual with the idea of personality (*lichnost'*) which includes a reference to the process of socialisation. To confuse, so Kara-Murza notes, individualism with personality 'is the main mistake in the realisation of liberal [thought]' in Russia (Kara-Murza, 1996, p.56). From here he can rephrase the question with which he believes liberalism is most concerned as something like this: How is a social order possible when it is not existent yet, or when it is under attack? The liberal response, so Kara-Murza argues, is that only the freedom of the individual (as personality) allows the preservation of social order under the conditions of modernity. Correlating the various seemingly liberal answers to the question of the conditions

of societal survival along the conceptual lines of chaos and order, Kara-Murza outlines three possible solutions.

First, the restorative approach where the restoration of absolute authority is conceived of as the only way to create and maintain a social order, as argued by Filmer. Second, the Hobbesian proposition that chaos is the result of the natural features of human beings, which thus necessitates a strong political authority. And third, the Lockean solution in which the provision of a private autonomous space for each individual results in a sustainable social order. Only the last, so Kara-Murza argues, represents a genuinely liberal solution to the problem. The Hobbesian argument fails on account of the impossibility of deducing liberal political institutions from presuppositions about human nature. If humans are indeed barbaric, then the emanating political order is very unlikely to look considerably less so. Kara-Murza argues that the Leviathan must be essentially illiberal, since its *raison d'être* is not the protection of individual freedoms. The fact that, in the English historical context, the Leviathan proved to be instrumental in the separation of the public and private space need not imply that that would be the case under Russian conditions too. The protection of an autonomous space for individual activities thus rests on the proclivities of the political culture in which the Leviathan operates, instead of being inculcated into its very essence. Kara-Murza notes that Russian liberalism thus can and must be explained without recourse to the Hobbesian monster. For him the main enemy of social order is not conservative restoration or even despotism, but 'like the enemy of all civilisational projects' chaos and barbarity. What at first seems a rather vague idea gains in conceptual shape as Kara-Murza further elaborates the role of individualism in the civilisational project of liberalism. He argues that only the idea of individual freedom would have the capacity to overcome chaos and barbarity. It has the capacity to neutralise the 'war of all against all' more successfully than any other form of social order since liberalism is inherently non-destructive insofar as it incorporates a view of socialisation that counters any Hobbesian solution that would rest on an idea of totalitarianism.

statehood (Kara-Murza, 1996, pp.57-58). The pivot of his theory is that any form of sociality can only be maintained by the development of personality as generating autonomous space and a *Rechtsstaat* protecting this individual sphere. Summarising the main tenets of liberalism he writes:

‘Preserving (uderschat’) sociality is not in the power of total(itarian) statehood (historically exhausted and being the source of disorder), but with the help of society’s power, the assignment of an autonomous space to personalities and the domination of the rule of law – these are the main tenets of liberalism. This leads to some important conclusions: Firstly, the archaic sociality, built on the principle of normative distribution, generally does not require anything in liberalism. ... Secondly, in a dynamically developing society in the situation when old regulatory (mechanisms) cease to fulfil their integrating function, the liberal solution in contrast (to the old mechanisms) can turn out to be singularly remedial for the social order. Thirdly, liberalism, entering ‘from without’, from an organic context into a context where it is not objectively required, often engenders a destructive individualism, inspiring a societal chaos. And finally, fourthly, if the old order already gives way (uzhe ne uderzhivaetsa), any attempts at rigid restoration (of the old order) lead only to bigger disintegration (razval). If the liberal securities are not socially ready, then sociality can turn out to be powerless in the face of the onslaught of the ‘new barbarity.’ (Kara-Murza, 1999, p.59)

Note Kara-Murza’s caution about any liberalism that is introduced ‘from outside’, something that resonates well with the anxieties of many scholars to define a specifically Russian form of liberalism and to prevent simple ‘copying’, as Zelezneva formulated it. For Kara-Murza then, liberalism resembles a strategy for containing the barbaric tendencies that are inherent in social life. Yet one of the main foes of any social order in modernity is unfettered individualism. It is worth quoting the following passage in full.

‘The temptation of arbitrary will is the most important problem which the classics of European liberal thought have considered. Furthermore: the importance and historical correctness (pravota) of liberalism was always determined not by the attractiveness of its moral presuppositions but by (its) real capacity to neutralise the ‘new barbarity’ which is an upshot (vyplesk) of unproductive individualism, and to direct the autonomous activities of human beings into a socially constructive course (ruslo). The task of liberalism thus became not the declaration of the freedom of individual in general but the protection of the freedom of personality, having achieved a certain level of development and having shown ... its civilisational status.’ (Kara-Murza, 1999, p.59)

Kara-Murza's conceptual framework is therefore composed of the idea of social order and its accompanying social fabric, the inherent propensity of human nature to destroy this fabric, and the attenuating impact liberalism has on this destructive side of human nature, on account of its wholesome notion of personality which mitigates the worst effects of unrestricted individualism. The criterion for evaluating the usefulness and justification of a liberal political order thus is the sustenance of social order itself. This is strikingly similar to the views of Kapustin and Akhiezer. All of them seem to favour a pragmatic approach to the problem of liberalism, which ascribes to liberal ideas a regulatory function in mitigating the worst excesses of modern social life. Evaluating liberalism from the perspective of modernity or civilisation, however, must assert the survival of the social system as the overriding criterion. This in turn means that Kara-Murza must postulate a certain conceptual distance between liberalism and the civilisational project in order to maintain the possibility of assessing liberalism in its effectiveness. In all their conceptual vagueness, however, Kara-Murza as well as Akhiezer and Kapustin seem to have no qualms in equating modernity with liberalism.

In another article Kara-Murza makes clear that his intellectual device of 'barbarity' has deeper historical roots in Russian political thought. He points to Pushkin, Struve and Chicherin as having equally conceived of barbarity as the main enemy of the social fabric while advocating individual liberties and rights as insufficient barriers against the encroachment of 'barbarity into politics' as such (Kara-Murza, 1996, p.370) but in need of being combined with the intention to preserve and strengthen the autonomous space of personality within the community. The picture of political liberalism that emerges, according to Kara-Murza, is one free from moralisation and 'very pragmatic'.

Yet, in face of the weakness of civil society in Russia, this had brought about the dependence of liberalism on the patronage of the state, in contrast to Western experience. However, positing the preservation of society as the main objective, so Kara-Murza

maintains, reveals the points of juncture between liberal political thought and the other 'political forces' which try to guarantee the protection of individual rights and freedoms' (Kara-Murza, 1996, p.371). And the position that assigns a strong role to the state thus unites early Slavophiles and liberals in the history of political thought in Russia. Although the association of liberal thought in Russia with 'the communal path' contributed to the failure of Russian political liberalism as a political movement at the beginning of the twentieth century to articulate a tenable position of individualism, the main reason for liberalism's inability to capture the imagination of the population was the Bolshevik's ability to pass off their own political programme as a uniquely workable combination of collectivism and individualism.

Kara-Murza characterises the liberal's dilemma and their position rather aptly when he says that liberals in the Russian context must resist 'chipping away' all value from the state and community and concentrate solely on preserving the autonomous space of the creative personality (*lichnost'*). For him, this represents a pragmatic version of Russian liberalism and its freedom from moralisation. The crux in differentiating Russian liberalism from Western liberalism appears for Kara-Murza to dwell in the extent to which liberalism represents a value system or promulgates ethical maxims.

Another account of a prospective liberal political order in Russia is formulated by Fedotova. Although hers is a theory that draws heavily on international relations theory, she sketches the main parallels between the notions of anarchy and chaos on the international scene and the situation of Russia in transition. In her account, anarchy is synonymous with the lack of norms and institutions for liberals, whereas it corresponds to a lack of central power for realists. What unites both notions of anarchy is that the identification and formulation of interests (of individual states or individuals themselves) is critical for overcoming the anarchic condition (Fedotova, 2000, pp.27-28). The emergence of shared interests is the main problem for Russia on the international stage as well as for its internal coherence. For realists the remedy is the establishment of a central power, i.e. an effective state apparatus. Otherwise

the societal relations disintegrate and individuals (or individual states in international relations theory, respectively) will have recourse to self-help, which is itself a form of anarchy. Since self-help does not inaugurate the formation of institutions, the question of identity and the formation of interests is paramount to extricating Russia from the anarchic state (Fedotova, 2000, p.29). Yet, Fedotova argues, there are good grounds for disputing, as radical liberals do, that, ultimately, self-help does not constitute a (rudimentary) form of self-organising co-operative behaviour. And, although more moderate liberals speak of the preference for stable institutionalisation, the incipient social co-operation might offer some ground for optimism.

Whatever the advantages of the different conceptions of self-help as rudimentary co-operational forms, the author indicates that self-help only generates a negative identification of interests, i.e. it fails to produce a minimum of connectivity that is essential for the generation of (mutual) responsibility (Fedotova, 2000, p.30). Identity is hence solely built on self-preservation. The problem then appears to be located in the transformation of individualistically orientated self-help into a common interest. Fedotova points to democracy as a mechanism to generate a common interest and the state, whose most important function it is to further agreements between those private interests, thus bringing about a stability that otherwise would require authoritarian means (ibid.). What is so instructive about the Western debate on international relations theory with regard to the Russian transition is that most Western observers do not realise how much the chances to overcome anarchy depend on the capacity of the international community (or the polity, hence Russia) to become a society resting on a form of sociality that so far has proved elusive (Fedotova, 2000, p.31). Complicating the situation in Russia is what Fedotova calls the anarchic consciousness of Russian society. The conventional reaction to politically generated injustice is revolt, rather than reform. For Russians this places (unrestricted, individualistic) volition (as the locus of concept of freedom) in a privileged position to alleviate the ills of society, often pushing the social structure of Russia to the brink of collapse (Fedotova, 2000, pp.31-32).

But Fedotova does not stop here. Instead she draws a distinction between anarchy and chaos that illuminates in turn two different concepts of order. As chaos can be understood as disorder in ubiquity, so anarchy can be perceived as a form of order. From here spring two versions of understanding order. On the one hand, order can be taken as

‘the unification of substance and action, the plan-ability (or predictability) of events and suppressing those that hinder the realisation of the selected ideals of order. The second [model obtains] if there are certain immutable principles of organisation that provide the foundation for the rights of the citizen, but attention is concentrated on the provision of its central regulatory meaning without any specific interests to the multifarious fluctuations that exist within society.’ (Fedotova, 2000, p.33)

These two models of order, one signifying an identity in kind and form, the other based on an insistence on the primacy of rules, can be translated to the problem of societal and international order. As Fedotova notes along the lines of an argument espoused by Bauman, overcoming the chaos and creating order rests on an idea of manageability that is deeply ingrained in the project of modernity. Yet, finding a solution to a problem may generate, so Fedotova argues, more and new problems, particularly given the possibility that irrational consequences might emerge from rational actions (Fedotova, 2000, p.33). The idea of Russian modernisation is therefore quite absurd when conceived as a result of rational actions and a model that is being planned (Fedotova, 2000, p.34). For Fedotova this form of order in the sense of re-creating the Western order in Russia with the immutable ingredients of democratic institutions then must appear to correspond to the first model. Yet, anarchy, so she argues, could also be perceived as a rejection of statehood in general, as contemplated in the notion of the ‘state of nature’ tradition. The question, however, then presents itself from a different perspective: are there any resources that will empower society to overcome anarchy? But since total anarchy as a rejection of any form of rule or rules, even those that are enshrined in social traditions and customs, does not exist, this exhibits the utopian character of anarchy as a theoretical model (Fedotova, 2000, p.36).

To understand anarchy not as a characteristic of social movements but as a state of society or its consciousness leads Fedotova to contemplate the connection between weak central power, the absence of the co-ordinates for federal and regional authorities, insufficient institutionalisation and the weakness of social institutions or their inadequate functionality, in short the loss of the structures of identity (Fedotova, 2000, p.37). Paraphrasing F. Wendt, Fedotova notes that the overcoming of anarchy in the international realm can either be accomplished by international government, or by the formation of those structures into which the identity and interests games develop.

‘This means that the pluralistic identity corresponding to the context of problems, in which it necessarily institutes itself, is also one of foreshortening of interpretation which permits people to unite on the ground of the concepts of citizenship and common interests side by side with private (interests).’ (Fedotova, 2000, pp.37-38)

Positing identity (*identichnost'*) as the foundation for institutions and interests, she contrasts the idea of the autonomous, instrumentally rational individual as pronounced by Western political theory and the individual living in anarchy who knows negative freedom but not autonomy, is dependent and limited in his instrumental rationality ‘insofar as he acts in a sea of chaos and (is) personally disintegrating’ (Fedotova, 2000, p.38). Since autonomy is recognised in the Russian context as a strategy of isolation, rather than self-determination, the problem of international disorder, just as much as the difficulty of societal breakdown, is epitomised in the central role of the relation to ‘the other’, the idea of mutuality as a ‘serious moral presupposition to co-operation, diminishing anarchy’ (Fedotova, 2000, p.38). ‘Singulars cannot create a society’ since they lack any notion of responsibility and identity (Fedotova, 2000, pp.38-39). Identity cannot be the product of the primary level of sociality that is concurrent with a form of adaptation, as Fedotova argues. In fact, if all other social forms are replaced by this minimum of conditions of survival, requesting adaptation and self-help, then

'all social systems are destroyed and are in a state of anarchy: the absence of effective central authority, the weakness and insufficiency of social institutions, norms and maxims, as well as the absence of the legality and needs in the legitimation of people's actions and the social structure' (Fedotova, 2000, p.39).

For Fedotova, the crucial question thus resides in the existence of identity, from which meaningful human actions flow and social structures and norms receive their legitimacy. Russia's crisis is one generated not simply by weak institutions and a powerless state but by the lack of defined identity. Identity, as she observes, determines (*zadat'sia*) not only power but the entirety of practices. As she notes in a slightly revised version of this article, the question of the role of the state inevitably arises, and while the external forms of order can assume the structure of democratic institutions, anarchy is not effectively overcome as long as no collective notions about the general values exist by which the polity would want to live (Fedotova, 1999, p.142). Just as international disorder and anarchy are replaced with order by recognising the 'significance of a collective idea (*znanie*) about the aims of activities and interests of each of the participants', so is the problem of societal disorder only soluble, not by developing democratic institutions but as the result of 'the presence of a social will to form an intersubjective knowledge and on this foundation identities and interests' (Fedotova, 1999, p.143). Democracy is thus incapable, in Fedotova's view, of engendering stable political order, so long as it does not foster the articulation of private interests. Summing up, she draws from this some strength for an argument in favour of a minimalist state.

'The essence of democratic transformation should consist of the diminution of the role of the state in the social system and the provision its activities in the form of well institutionalised practices and cultivated norms. Its shortage (or lack of compliance with this) leads to domination of coercion and wilfulness' (Fedotova, pp.143-144).

The notion of interest formation indicates how much Fedotova's account is indebted to Hegelian conceptions of the development of reciprocity and self-consciousness. The trouble

with her account is that she applies a multitude of different conceptual tools and has not always tested their compatibility.

Contrasting the development of an international society with the evolution of a stable political order in Russia rests very much on the degrees of rationality that can be ascribed to global players as well as individual human beings. Within the limits of a general comparison, this identification of the global and the national stages may be permissible. Where this reaches its limits is in the degree to which the processes of identity formation can be compared on the two different stages. For a state to operate successfully in the international arena it may be sufficient to display a more or less coherent idea of its interests, but this carries no intrinsic reference to the way this was generated. Strongly authoritarian regimes might just as successfully operate on the international stage though granting no democratic rights in the interest formulation, as democratic states that honour the right of the citizenry to participate in the formulation of national interests. What counts is not how a state arrives at the position it will pursue, but what its position in the wider international framework of interests is and what means exist to supply it with the necessary political force.

This is radically different to the 'identity' evolution of human beings. As philosophers have often noted, human beings go to extraordinary lengths to eradicate internal inconsistencies in their views. Not that everyone is equally good at it, or that everyone devotes an equal amount of attention to this problem, but it certainly is an irreducible feature of human thought to consider contradictions between intellectual positions as ultimately unacceptable. Thus the idea that somehow a principle could override any other in the consideration of personal identity and interests without giving it much thought is quite preposterous. This does not mean that in certain circumstances people prioritise their interests and in the process of ranking them, some maxims may receive short shrift while others gain ascendancy. However, it does mean that even in situations where some precepts that are often thought indispensable to what constitutes a human being are not honoured, there will be good

reasons to override them and these reasons can be given. Whether they have the same appeal to everybody in the same circumstances is another matter.

In effect between the interest formulation that is carried out at the individual level and on the national stage differs in the amount of arbitrariness involved. Within a strongly authoritarian regime the interests may be a result of decision-making that involves an immense degree of capriciousness, whereas within any individual the extent to which identities and interests do not reflect good reasons appears driven rather than self-determined.

Still, Fedotova's approach offers a distinctive insight into the role of identity and interest formation in the evolution of a feasible social framework that displays some basic amount of required stability. Her argument that the rudimentary patterns of social co-operation evinced in the Russian economy after the failure of the liberal reforms do not produce the element of reciprocity that is needed for the development of social stability highlights the importance of individual self-consciousness and self-understanding for a stable social order. It goes without saying that such a self-consciousness does not necessarily have to adopt a liberal thrust. Although she characterises anarchy as the absence of any stable framework of co-operation that would in turn facilitate the development of identities, she ultimately advocates a minimum of state intervention and the mere protection of the incipient institutions of civil society. This is probably the location of her own liberal conviction. Yet, despite the conceptual confusion which occurs at times, her account of liberal politics and its prerequisites illuminates the crucial role of the processes of identity formation. And she rightly suggests that Russia's problem is first and foremost the fluidity and continuous shifts in its identity – something that will be conceptualised as heuristic radicalism in a later chapter.

Fedotova and Kara-Murza's use of the concept of chaos is reminiscent of the similar role the threat of societal disintegration plays in Kapustin and Akhiezer's social and political theory. In each case, their theorising seems to start from a concern for the existing social institutions. They differ in the significance they allocate to the preservation of the social and

political institutions. However, the difficulty in advocating such an approach to the definition of political liberalism lies exactly in the prioritisation of the various features of political liberalism. All of them are aware that a liberal political order is somehow related to the forces and/or results of modernisation. Each of them is searching for a unique answer to the question as to what extent liberal institutions or mass consciousness are the results of, or the prerequisite for, social and political modernisation. The different emphases they put on either the historical interconnectedness of liberalism as a political ideology and modernity or the interrelation between individualism and modernity may be rooted in their preferences for either a politico-theoretical or a historical approach. But what unites all of them is the fluidity and vagueness of the notion of modernity. Kapustin makes a point in not determining any reliable conception of modernity and draws some theoretical persuasive force from this. Yet, for all of them the notion of modernity remains highly opaque. Although the concept of 'catch-up' modernisation as a politically initiated process is used often enough, modernity as a product of modernisation or as a state of affairs possesses normative and descriptive features and none of the Russian scholars appear to be willing to part in their conceptualisations of liberalism from either a notion of modernity as a regulative idea, or a conception of modernity as a proper description of Russian and global reality.

Few Russian political theorists have ventured into the territory that occupies the dangerous ground between universalism and particularism exemplified in the idea of the primacy of cultural formation. This may have something to do with the fact that the concept of a primacy of cultural traditions only rarely loses its vagueness. For reasons of clear differentiation, we may want to define the notion of primacy as that which asserts the groundedness of political ideas in cultural traditions. Indigenous traditions would define and condition political ideas, reflecting not a normative construct but a descriptive one. Whether or not such a notion is feasible is not relevant for the time being, but there can be no doubt that adherents of strong particularism would be sympathetic to his argument. Defining this

position so strictly will allow us to characterise the views of the Russian philosopher Shapovalov, who has tried to articulate a universalist position that nevertheless retains important elements of strong particularism. In a way, he formulates, within a frame of reference more akin to Western political theory, what others have tried to do in starting their argument from a historically-minded position.

He starts by noting that his intentions are to elucidate the relations between power, social and cultural traditions, and societal opinion and views. The aim of his article is to find a way to conjoin liberal statehood with local cultural traditions that may be inimical to liberalism understood as a culturally significant perspective on human life. This juxtaposition between liberal statehood and cultural traditions motivates him to exclude first of all those foundations of liberal statehood that would be precluded *per definitio*. Hence he argues that any coercion exercised by state authorities is incompatible with liberal statehood. Yet, if coercion is diametrically opposed to effective state power, then it must be necessary to found political power on the prevalent moral and cultural traditions. Some relation between power, societal opinion and cultural traditions is thus indispensable (Shapovalov, 1995, p.107). He justifies this close connection by pointing to the impossibility of establishing and sustaining societal stability solely with the instruments of liberal statehood (legal institutions) and the inadmissibility of creating societal stability by force as being irreconcilable with the core idea of liberalism, freedom (Shapovalov, 1995, p.107 and pp.112-113). Political liberalism thus must be judged by its capacity to avoid running counter to its essence, the absence of coercion by state authorities in society.

The real question for Shapovalov is then to determine, not whether the state and the moral and cultural traditions are linked at all, but to what extent this link has to be forged in liberal societies in order to preserve stability. He discusses two different ways of constructing a relation between liberal values and cultural tradition whereby he does not distinguish them and, by conceptual sleight of hand, moves skilfully from one to the other, neglecting the

profound differences. He starts with an accurate sketch of the Lockean and Kantian positions which rest on the proposition that the value of the individual represents a value irrespective of his contingent features or characteristics. Human beings ought to be treated as ends in themselves, as Kant expressed this idea. Their specific belonging to ethnic groups, particular nations or social groupings is irrelevant for the determination of someone's value. The worth of a person is determined by virtue of his being human. Shapovalov now argues that there must be in every society a mechanism that asserts, recognises, and preserves this idea of the intrinsic value of human beings. If this were not to exist in a society, society would deprive itself of the very glue that binds it together.

The problem is that in the strictly Kantian perspective this mechanism must not evolve out of any interest formation, denying the principle its non-utilitarian content (Shapovalov, 1995, p.109). This is the point at which his argument slips from a Kantian position to the notion of the Absolute Good as formulated by Soloviev. Shapovalov seems to assume that both positions are roughly identical. Soloviev argued, so Shapovalov contends, that only the idea of the Absolute Good unites in itself this character of non-utility in its pure form. The Absolute Good (trans-utility, *sverkhutilitarnost'*) in turn is nothing else but the sphere of culture

'insofar as in its relationship to any other sphere it is determined not by the principle of 'we-them' but by the principle of relatedness (*otnesennost'*) to the absolute values of the good and humanity. This approach from the perspective of trans-utilitarian values equalises every person beyond their dependence on their concrete characteristics such as national or class belonging, capabilities, positions etc., while those are considered the end in the individual that universalism asserts in the capacity of the norm of intra-human relations. Cultural universalism supposes not self-interested relations to reality but the aspiration to view and include in it those (relations) that possess universal, generally human significance. (Shapovalov, 1995, p.110)

Shapovalov now declares the depths of the individual soul to be the seat of moral universalism, which is impregnable to national belonging and the imprints of the social environment. He writes

‘culture is universal since it forms an openness (otkrytost’) towards everyone else, yet its vicinity creates the possibility of looking at it with distance. Universalism is by no means cosmopolitanism, overlooking the differences between people, in particular, their national (differences), or attempting to obliterate similar differences. (Universalism) is the recognition of values, common to all people, irrespective of their differences. (Shapovalov, 1995, p.110)

Yet, Shapovalov emphasises that not all societal formations facilitate the development and sustenance of universal values. He expresses doubts about the compatibility of mass culture and commercialism with universalism. In fact, he believes that the former concur with the counterfeit form of universalism, a cosmopolitan worldview. He then attempts to re-construct the historical pedigree of universalism and points to the significance of Christianity for the successful ascendancy of universal values. Russia does not deviate from the norm here, as it incorporated the Byzantine tradition with the Christian doctrine. Although this is a valuable point as such, his argument then adopts a slightly more assertive tone, when he claims that Russian culture integrates these universal values (naturally) since it displays the features of a ‘supra’-ethnicity and ‘supra’nationality (Shapovalov, 1995, p.110).

His central argument so far has much to it. His point that any coercion initiated by political authorities must go against the very essence of liberalism may be motivated by an overemphasis of the liberal principle, but it seems legitimate to draw some persuasive force from such an argument for the claim that liberalism must be intimately connected to the prevailing cultural norms and traditions, unless it slides into the coercive ground. Reformulating this position in more Western terms, one could say that a liberal political order that is based on sheer disregard for any social and cultural norms appears inherently unjustifiable. Yet Shapovalov attempts then to forge a closer link between Russian culture and

political liberalism. In fact, one could describe his conceptual efforts as a venture in defining the validity of a 'cultural' liberalism. Except for his slightly overoptimistic views on the openness of Russian contemporary culture, which seem questionable, his intentions are quite legitimate. What should be a cause of theoretical concern here is the fact that his view rests on a conflation of cultural values and the Kantian principle of the categorical imperative which epitomises the idea of treating people as ends in themselves. Generally speaking, his points about the impossibility of founding a liberal political order on an utter disregard for cultural traditions and the danger that such attempts will result in societal disintegration are well placed. The particular manner in which Shapovalov constructs the link between morality as expressed in local cultural values and as displayed in universalism, however, raises some grave theoretical doubts.

The first misgiving would return to the Kantian argument and question whether such a link between moral traditions and morality as a universal maxim would indeed be necessary. Kant undoubtedly formulated the categorical imperative not as a complementary element of local moral traditions but tried instead to carve out a maxim for human behaviour that would provide a universal benchmark *in contrast* to the multitude of moral precepts that are, for one reason or another, prevalent in human behaviour. The specific way of deducing this formula indicates that its main feature, the aspect of universalizability, is exactly a function of the process of abstracting from the various constellations of locally predominating moral principles. Universalism is thus inseparable from the process of abstracting. To attempt to reduce the level of abstraction in Kantian universalism and tie it back into actually existing cultural formations may appear a laudable endeavour, albeit not a novel one given Soloviev's work, but it eliminates the prescriptive aspect of Kant's categorical imperative and must thus eventually fail.

Shapovalov acknowledges that a liberal political order must not privilege any particular ethical tradition (Shapovalov, 1995, p.111) Notwithstanding the philosophical

problems, his argument that Russian culture somehow either integrates closely with universalism or is uniquely advantageous to the values of universalism is not convincing in lieu of any sustained case for the openness of Russian culture. Although he formulates a valuable observation when pointing out that liberal politics would ideally be restricted to the instruments of the rule of law, and hence must rely to some extent on viable social relations regulated not so much by the formal principle of legality but by the ethical norms that permeate local cultures (insinuating the existence of what he calls a 'natural hierarchy' of authority), this obfuscates the issue of the relationship between them once more. The intractable problem in Western political theory has been to specify the exact extent to which political liberalism rests on or indeed reflects particular (Western) cultures and their norms for human interaction. The Kantian project is ill-conceived if taken as a project to outline the relations between local and universal norms. The latter draw on the idea of absolute normativity, while the former by definition are responses to particular needs and requirements of social life. It is not until Hegel that the idea of the categorical imperative acquires a historical mode, foreshadowing Soloviev's attempts.

On a more theoretical level, Western political liberalism would consider Shapovalov's approach as profoundly mistaken insofar as it accepts, in contrast to him, the irreducibility of the diversity of cultural norms and values and recognises the need to accommodate them in a mutually beneficial political order. The question on which Western theorists fundamentally disagree is whether or not, and if yes, which, cultural values can assume a creative role in the process of the formation of the required political order. Or, to put it into Rawlsian terms, which components, if any, of the comprehensive doctrines can contribute to the evolution and maintenance of the overlapping consensus. The magnitude of this problem may be illustrated most appropriately by Rawl's own partial retreat from his initial view.

If we were to continue to conceptualise the issue at stake here in the frame of reference of a simple juxtaposition of, and desirable fusion of, local moral norms and universal (liberal)

precepts we would also very soon be confronted with the problem as to which normative structure is to be preferred in the moment of conflict. If, as Shapovalov claims, liberalism needs to draw on existing moral principles since it cannot be all-encompassing and must not exceed the admissible minimum of coercion, then it remains unclear on which grounds the liberal political order can mitigate and regulate conflict between the diverse cultural traditions that undoubtedly exist within a modern polity such as Russia. There exists a tension in Shapovalov's theory with regard to his claim that Russian culture embraces heterogeneity and hence is compatible with universalism, and the idea that universalism is closely linked to, or dependent on, existing moral traditions. The crucial question is on which traditions does a liberal political order eventually draw in cases of conflict and the need for arbitration?

Political liberalism as constructed by Shapovalov would prove to be unable to give an answer to this question. It would equivocate between its own universal precepts and the multiple norms of local traditions. Akhiezer's characterisation of Russia's problems as rooted in the rift between society and state once more proves the appropriateness of his formulation. The juxtaposition of national cultural norms (be they universal or otherwise) and local traditions, rather than being a valuable contribution to the solution of a theoretical conundrum, aggravates Russia's seeming inability to adopt a political order regulated by principles of tolerance and mutual respect.

Part III

Political Theory, Universalism and Russia

14. What is the 'Russian Challenge' to Western Political Theory?

The previous chapter has attempted to sketch some valuable theoretical positions that have been articulated by Russian philosophers and historians in the debate on Russian liberalism during the nineties. Its purpose was twofold: to introduce Western observers to the conceptual framework of the Russian debate in its diversity and often confusing plurality, and, on the other hand, to prepare the ground for an attempt at synthesis. Before embarking on the latter, a brief summary seems to be in order.

Part II started with a promise: to delineate as much as possible the various theoretical positions alongside a framework of different conceptual approaches. The subcategories were taken to correspond either to a historical or to a politico-theoretical approach. Theorists have mainly couched the problem of Russian liberalism in the language of defining features or core ideas, whereas historians have preferred to speak of Russian liberalism as a historical phenomenon engendered by social and economic factors either present or absent for the various reasons in past and present. Both approaches permit a further sub-categorisation insofar as particularistic or universalistic conclusions could be drawn on the basis of either approach. In the course of the presentation of the debate, a core area of conceptual overlap seemed to crystallise. Whether liberalism is taken as a historical phenomenon or as a theoretical concept, it appears to be inexorably tied up with a notion of modernity and civilisation. While the latter concept has accommodated a whole range of different positions, mainly due to its definitional vagueness, Kapustin, Akhiezer, and others appear to have converged on remarkably similar understandings of modernity as a prerequisite for Russian liberalism. This is the more astonishing as their positions rest on different foundations and their conclusions diverge considerably. What follows will try to define, and subsequently to defend, more clearly this area of overlap and to cast it in conceptual terms that will allow us to draw conclusions which may be useful to the Western debate on political liberalism.

Chapter 8 in the second part started with a position that stressed the receptive capacities of a local culture for the chances of political liberalism (cf. Pantin, 1994 and 1996). It indicated that some central notions of the liberal doctrine required a favourable social and cultural context in which they can unfold their full and proper meaning. If such a conducive environment is absent, crucial ideas of political liberalism may be submitted to a re-interpretation and this might result in a distortion of content. Pantin's contribution lies in revealing the intricate connection that exists between the meaning of a term, the cultural conditions which alter its meaning, and the resultant distortion of the liberal doctrine if submitted to a different social and cultural context. Pantin's conclusions formulate some strong warnings against a mechanistic import of abstract terminology, a concern that he shares with a considerable number of Russian historians and theorists.

The emphasis must therefore lie on a constructive and flexible appropriation of the theory of a liberal political order, since its conceptual devices and tools necessarily operate in a context from which they cannot extricate themselves. Pantin's use of the term 'democratism' illustrates the extent to which the idea of liberty becomes, as it were, alienated from its Western meaning. This process of alienation is a prerequisite for it to be received into the new intellectual environment. A more dramatic fate, Pantin argues, would await those concepts which do not undergo this process of appropriation or are identified as being inimical to the appropriating context. In other words, some concepts make sense only when disembowelled, detached from their original intellectual context, whereas some other ideas struggle to make sense at all in contexts discordant with the original environment insofar as they have been supplanted by other concepts. The significance of social and economic liberty in the Russian context thus shifted the weight to an idea of liberation that inhibited political notions of freedom with its attendant conceptions of citizenship and independent civil

associations. Receptivity of the cultural and social context can therefore be listed as a prerequisite for liberal theorising and requires some further specification.

Pantin's argument hints at the discursive pre-conditions for concepts such as liberty, which in turn, in his view, are determined by the prevailing social and political conditions. This should hardly be anything new unless one takes this as an indication of the absence of any substantive core meaning of such concepts and the utter malleability of them by varying circumstances. Not even Pantin would endorse such a radical position. His argument seems to reiterate the need of a suitable re-formulation of the liberal creed under novel conditions (in face of the competing and prevalent 'democratic' viewpoint). However, what emerges quite certainly from Pantin's argument is the reluctance of the Russian intellectual environment to understand liberty as a solely political concept unadulterated by ideas of economic and social liberation. This de-politicisation of, or lack of receptivity to, the political dimension of liberty seems to be a recurrent theme of Russian political thought and has received quite extensive attention over the years.

On the scheme sketched above, Pantin's position would occupy a place in the category 'history', whereas its universalistic credentials depend on the interpretation of the capacity of political liberalism to re-cast the problem of personal freedom in political terms. If liberalism as a political doctrine were to 'succeed', i.e. adopt more political connotations, it could be able to re-frame the political debate in terms more analogous to Western conceptualisations. If it 'fails', i.e. remains associated almost exclusively with social and economic liberation, it would render liberty in its universal meaning a hollow concept, resonating only with that minor social stratum of Russian society which values political freedoms over economic and social ones. The parallels to the difficulties which the 'right-wing' electoral bloc 'Our Russia' as well as 'Yabloko' have experienced in trying to capture the imagination (and votes) of a broader Russian public are quite striking. The peculiar constellation of Russian pre-revolutionary and post-Communist politics, which somehow struggles to engender a viable

political sphere in its own right, is by no means unique within Eastern Europe and seems to have contributed to the continuing weakness of political liberalism across the region. Liberalism seems to require, more than other political ideas, a stable political arena that can accommodate the conflict of interests inevitably emerging in a modern society.

Political liberalism thus appears to be more dependent on a sustainable idea of the 'political' than its rivals. Whether this sustainability should therefore be enumerated under the essential requirements for liberal politics universally, and what shape and content it would have, has been elucidated to some degree by Kniazeva's argument. For her, historically, the 'political' in the West has been pre-structured by more general principles such as tolerance, mutual respect, and civility. These ideas provide a non-political regulation of the political space and the question is whether or not they privilege the introduction of liberal politics over others. In other words, how extraneous to political liberalism are these values and is a political liberal order feasible without them? There can be no doubt that tolerance and mutual respect and a basic degree of civility facilitate the emergence of *civilised* politics. Liberal politics, however, clearly amounts to more than this. In Rawlsian terms it is questionable whether the emerging overlapping consensus can be built on such a 'thin' foundation that would enable advocates of non-liberal comprehensive doctrines to agree to a political order which privileges liberal principles. So Kniazeva's argument unfolds the historical conditions of political liberalism, yet its possible universalistic thrust is undermined by the fact that the identified regulative principles for any prospective political order by no means leads to a liberal set of political institutions in a straightforward fashion. Tolerance, mutual respect and civility underdetermine the resultant political order. Insufficient though they are, they are still necessary components of political liberalism whereas they seem to be dispensable for political doctrines whose chances of persuasion are less favourable under the conditions of a transparent, critical political process.

Kniazeva's argument would therefore elucidate fairly clearly the limits of political liberalism under circumstances adverse to values such as tolerance and civility. It seems important to note in which respect exactly these values are contributory to liberal politics. They facilitate the unhindered exchange of views and opinions and precipitate the emergence of a stable framework for this exchange. In this sense they more generally contribute to the increase of rational procedure in political decision-making. This does not mean that all resources of irrationality are successfully eliminated if politics adopts a mainly regulated and procedural structure. It only renders the political sphere more accessible and more amenable to rationality. A liberal political outcome is by no means guaranteed but these values provide a stability for the political arena that can often tie the polity over the vagaries of social and economic transformations which are, at times, deeply affecting the political set-up of society.

Thus, while Pantin's argument indicates the discursive context of liberal politics, which can endanger and possibly eradicate even the very core of political liberalism, Kniazeva's position points to discursive stability as a prerequisite for liberalism. Not only the content counts but the conditions under which political views and opinions can freely be generated and exchanged. To identify liberalism with the preconditions for political discourse would be to negate the fact that many different political convictions can be accommodated in a political order solely based on the above-mentioned values and principles. And the 'thickness' of a liberal political order is a highly contentious issue amongst political theorists in the West. Yet, Kniazeva's contention suggests that a general framework facilitating the exchange is necessary for a civilised politics from which liberal political institutions can grow given time and favourable circumstances. Seen this way, Pantin and Kniazeva's arguments complement each other neatly, the former indicating the preconditions for viable politics in general, the latter explicating the semantic complexity of concepts and ideas as they gain a relation to the economic, social and cultural background that prevails at a certain time and place.

While Zelezneva's position reiterated the significance of a conceptual and theoretical appropriation of Western ideas in the Russian context and advocated the identification of a 'golden middle', Gadzhiev embarked on a more dangerous path in trying to specify the applicability of political liberalism in Russia as a function of ideals of democracy at a local and national level that are largely incongruous. In this thematic context the fate of liberalism depends pretty much on its capability to offer a feasible type of reconciliation between the two, and Gadzhiev singles out a strong statehood as the only conceivable vehicle for such a reconciliatory process. Despite the seemingly illiberal consequences of this suggestion (given that one inevitably has to disagree with him on the integrative abilities of the Russian idea in a multiethnic and multireligious environment), his argument hints at a different form of heterogeneity that rarely comes into view in Western political theory. In a quite general way, one could describe it as the divergence of ideals of politics prevailing at the local and national level. The adjective 'national' or 'supra-national' must be taken to refer to the intellectual corpus of an urban, educated elite, historically far more exposed to the reformist strategies of the autocratic, Communist and post-Communist regimes than the local, rural population. Whether such a divisive picture of Russian society is still plausible can appear questionable.

Yet, the valuable contribution of Gadzhiev's argument lies somewhere else. Although Western political theory operates with various accounts of irreducible heterogeneity as it is taken to obtain in any modern society, it paints quite a simplified, since spatially uninformed, picture of this irrecoverable plurality. The wide neglect of this further dimension of heterogeneity seems the more astonishing as the process of urbanisation, which lay at the heart of modernisation, inevitably produced at least temporarily a split over the ideals of politics as exemplified in the events of such magnitude as the French Revolution. The extent to which voting behaviour diverges between rural and urban centres in Western Europe should have motivated theorists to be more sensitive to this issue and possibly conceptualise it as an additional aspect of modern heterogeneity.

Yet, there is little evidence that Western political theorists take much notice of this problem, something that Russian historians may have been more susceptible to, given the recurrent attempts to impose reforms from above and the narrow social support base for them in Russian society. Quite evidently modernity in Russia had long been a feature of the urban centres, just as the Western life style appealed, and was only affordable, to a small educated elite. But why should the spatial dimension of the inevitable plurality of modern life matter? Would the way a liberal political order accommodates different political views and convictions not be neutral to spatial differentiation? After all, what counts in a Rawlsian construct of a political order would be the accessibility of the political arena to all political views regardless of their location.

Yet, Gadzhiev's discussion of the problem of divergent political ideals of democracy intimates something significant. Western political theory mainly proceeds from the basic assumption of a polity in which only a singular political level exists and which gives rise to the engagement in a debate for the best conceivable set of political institutions for this polity. What falls by the wayside is the fact that most polities contain multiple layers of political arenas, which may be related in terms of conflict, support or simply benign neglect. And, because political theory disregards this fact, it renders itself unable to divest itself of a generally national proclivity that has critically been appraised by thinkers such as Canovan (Canovan, 1996). This peculiar blindness, however, it has to be said, is only characteristic of the contractarian streak of Western political theory that seems to be incapable of incorporating the various levels of politics involved in the eventual emergence of a national political order (possibly with the notable exception of the work by Robert Nozick, 1971). Naturally, this is a different story for any republican view of politics which is premised on more localised notions of politics.

Still, Gadzhiev's account neatly reveals the inapplicability of Western political theory in the Russian context if reduced to a singular level of political engagement. Political ideas

and *ideals* need to be operationalisable not only in the framework of a pluralistic central political arena, but even more so as emanations of actually existing forms of politics that command various local spaces. In other words, a theory of a liberal political order must be able to cope with, and incorporate into its conceptualisation, a possibly entrenched and functioning form of non-liberal politics that pertains to a sub-national level and possibly works to the satisfaction of the local participants. This may tilt the balance in favour of these ideals that often draw their justification from their mere persistence over time. If the emergence of the 'political' out of the 'pre-political' is envisaged along the lines of the contractarian model, political philosophers must take account of the fact that some political ideals precede the nascent political arena on a national level, and hence, some participants are privileged cognitively over others.

A similar point has recently been made in conjunction with the Rawlsian contention that the veil of ignorance is an essential device to screen out presuppositions about political arrangements that could prove individually beneficial. This, however, seems questionable, firstly, in view of the fact that in reality politics is more likely to emerge as an outgrowth of a collision of existing sub-polities rather than out of a conflict of individualised political ideals. But, also, secondly, because some participants need to be heuristically privileged in order to find some future political arrangement agreeable. As Friedman has argued in an article on the South-African transition, under the patently obvious results of any prospective democratisation in the South African transition, any prior knowledge of the political contenders about future political positions facilitated a broad political compromise rather than inhibited a consensus (Friedman, 1998).

Gadzhiev's insistence on the divergence of political cultures between the local and the national level may have been framed in unhelpful language when taken as echoing a divide between East and West, yet his conceptual point about the incongruity between the democratic ideals at the various levels reveals a blind spot of Western political liberalism. If

we envisage the pre-political stage as an arena for the articulation of different political (comprehensive) worldviews, political theory has for too long assumed that these worldviews represent, as it were, *individually held* notions of the best political arrangement. Yet, in fact the pre-political may well be a conglomerate of *collectively held* ideas of ideal politics where some of these ideals have already passed the test of time. This introduces an entirely different dynamic into the theoretical picture, something more akin to Nozick's protective associations (Nozick, 1974, esp. pp.10-25 and passim), which make room for a more flexible account of politics growing out of incipient community kernels formed for a circumscribed purpose, rather than Rawls' disconnected individuals which enter into politics in the same way as they emerge from it, atomised and unrelated in terms of common experience and intellectual baggage.

For the theory of political liberalism Gadzhiev's position translates into a formidable problem. Emerging political orders, whether liberal or otherwise, can rarely be the product of an interactive process that comprises only individuals with values and norms that are individually constructed and held. In fact, many of those convictions with which prospective participants of a political order approach the 'bargaining table' have evolved in social contexts, have been discarded if deemed inappropriate and re-formulated when necessary, and thus can muster support that originates in shared lives and experiences, rather than support that rests on individual appreciation outside any communal context.

This does not mean that the privileged position from which these convictions are presented cannot be eroded and eventually eliminated by rational criticism. On the contrary, the openness of the 'pre-political' stage necessarily introduces an element of deliberation between those often contradictory norms and values when advanced by particular 'communities'. Deliberation, however, if it wants to acquire at least a minimum of legitimacy, requires the appeal to criteria that are ideally extraneous to any particular norms and values. The difficulty in finding this Archimedean point covers much of the history of political

thought and whether or not such a deliberative process can ever be 'successful' is another question. But it would be strange to assume that the 'pre-political' is mainly characterised by an entirely arbitrary selective process without any recourse to what would, in given circumstances, constitute a legitimate procedure of some rational merit.*

Gadzhiev's argument about the contrasting ideals of democracy prevailing on different levels illustrates how little use the particularism-universalism dichotomy is. Entrenched social traditions and customs may well receive part of their justification from the fact that they continue to be enacted through the actions of the participants who share these norms, yet to transfer this onto a national level is an entirely different matter. The main reason for this change of the justifying criteria for political arrangements is that local traditions may operate in an environment that often pose a low(er) level of contestation to them, whereas any national level has to take account the salient fact of modern societies, that is the existence of a bewildering array of often mutually exclusive doctrines and visions of the good life. This increases the extent to which any single custom and tradition becomes challenged and, hence, has to seek justification for its existence outside the frame of reference that is provided by the experience of shared lives. It has been notoriously difficult for political theorists to identify any such criterion on which the value of the continuation of a particular cultural or social tradition can be evaluated (cf. Kymlicka, 1995, and critical of his position Waldron, 1995).

This may offer us a novel perspective for our understanding of the ambitions and remit of universalism. Universalism and particularism may thus plausibly be ascribed to different levels of contestation, at variance mainly because the effects of modernity have impacted disparately upon the various layers and spaces of communal life. There may be spatial

* It is conceded that the ultimate form of arbitrary selection (gambling) can be seen as resting on some notion of legitimacy, insofar as it involves an element of fairness. But it requires a quite different mind-set to entrust what matters in your life to mere coincidence. In fact, few, if any, people would regard gambling as an acceptable way of decision-making. Throughout Western political theory, from Hobbes to Rawls, there is an understandable reluctance to allow individuals to make their most important choices in life on an utterly arbitrary basis. It would require that the selective process is to them as equally (un-)important as the outcome of this process. Hobbes even formulates the impossibility of going about one's choices with the mind of a gambler in a law of nature.

differentiation that could easily give the impression of an irreducible dichotomy within Russian society precipitated by the modernising autocratic reforms in the nineteenth century and by the forced industrialisation and urbanisation in the Soviet period. Although this supplies little argumentative force against basing any political order on the plurality of forms of life and values as an initial assumption or 'working hypothesis'; a conceptual fallacy is committed if one would assume that either the resultant political order on a national level or the traditions and norms prevailing on a local level have universal appeal and one would promote their extension as the only worthwhile form of life. Many Russian philosophers in the nineteenth century have been following this *pars pro toto* route, and even such enlightened and critical thinkers as Berdayev talked about the immutability of Russian peasant traditions. This does not mean that a liberal political order would not possess a proclivity to expansionism insofar as it demands the enhancement of choice. Yet, Gadhiev's attempt to locate one of the conditions for the bridge-building process in the primacy of local traditions is clearly at odds with the fact that once entered into a process of defining the best possible political structure for society these hitherto little contested traditions and norms are requested to expose their justificatory basis. A lack of belief in these justificatory resources may have induced Gadhiev to advocate a strong national statehood. The liberal credentials, however, fall by the wayside. Universalism and particularism thus appear as misconceptions that result from the extrapolation of one or the other form of political life, obtaining at different levels and in different locations.

The discussion then proceeded with a presentation of Kozyrevaia's position who problematised the relation between the state as initiator of the institutions of civil society which were supposed to play an active role in the restriction of the powers of the authorities and the regulation of society as a whole. The Russian problem has often been accurately described as a lack of independent social actors in the modernising process. She also illuminates in her work the intricate connection between the democratic principle and liberal

political thought that found its vehicle in the idea of narodovlastie. The historical analysis of Kozyrevaia must lead to the conclusion that, rather similar to Pantin's argument, the conceptual configuration of Russian political thought in conjunction with the pressing problems of mundane reality proved exceptionally hostile to abstract ideas of liberty. To take this, however, as sufficient evidence against the universalist position would be jumping the conclusion. It merely points to the incomplete appropriation of the conceptual tools in the Russian context and the futility to operate exclusively with abstract concepts. This raises the question once more to which extent ideas that are thought essential to political liberalism can be re-moulded and re-interpreted in a non-Western context. Is there an immutable core? Or are liberal positions really 'relational', as some theorists maintain (Szacki, 1995)?

The accounts of Kapustin and Akhiezer, politico-theoretical and historical in nature respectively, have offered us the chance to glimpse two coherent attempts at constructing a case for liberal political orders in the Russian environment. While Kapustin advances a clear theoretical argument in favour of political liberalism and in fact appears to think of it as the only feasible form of order for a modern Russian society, Akhiezer appears to adopt a more sceptical position. Kapustin declares modernity as being the determining factor that tilts the balance in favour of a liberal set of institutions. The universalist resonance seems palpable here as he constructs his argument roughly along Hannah Arendt's lines (Arendt, 1958). Philosophically he also formulates an interesting case for liberalism as a constantly shifting enterprise, a problem-solving endeavour, thereby denying it any clearly identifiable or immutable content of liberal principles. His universalism is thus formal rather than substantive – a position echoed in the work of other Russian scholars who are equally positively inclined towards liberalism yet have misgivings about its compatibility with Russian historical traditions.

Akhiezer's theme on the need for societal survival and the requisite social stability shifts attention to an entirely different aspect of political liberalism. It does not only pose an

ultimate end for the establishment of a political order but also questions the chances of the introduction of liberalism in a society whose internal rift has lacked the constructive capacity of Western political confrontations to create mediating political structures and institutions. Akhiezer also contends that Russian pluralism is of a different nature to the Western plurality of values and norms. The latter necessitates the search of a conflict-neutralising formula, the accommodation of mutually exclusive worldviews. Western pluralism thus stimulates the growth and development of institutions that assist in domesticating conflict. This is, so Akhiezer argues, not the case in Russia. The emergence of a pluralistic society in Russia has been accompanied not by an increase in tolerance and civil institutions that ameliorate the conflictive potential of the collision of disparate societal norms but by trends which aggravate further the already existing cleavage. Thus, while in the West pluralism provides the impetus for liberal statehood and tolerance, in Russia it strengthens societal ruptures.

Akhiezer has thus advanced an admirably sophisticated argument against the applicability of Western political liberalism. He has grounded his analysis of the viability of political liberalism on a historical account of the genesis and of the discordant effects of plurality in West and East. The crux seems to be that West and East differ in the creative impetus of societal plurality. Russian political culture rests no more or less than the West on confrontation in the political realm but it proves unable to translate this into a productive institutionalisation and thus to draw the destructive sting out of political conflict. Any defence of political liberalism must take notice of this strong argument.

In conclusion, a complex picture of Russian political liberalism emerges and in order to evaluate it efficiently it would be helpful to distinguish between the various leading questions. Political liberalism as it has come into focus here was neither taken to be a political movement or an ideology, nor was it equated in the present study with the manifestations of liberty in Russia's political, social, or economic life. Rather the study has been concerned to delineate the Russian debate on the chances of political liberalism and the various notions of a

political order as it would approximate in the Russian context what Western theorists would describe as liberal. Particular emphasis has been placed upon several semantic 'mismatches', that have been either a result of the distorting capacities of the social and economic reality in Russia in past and present, or alternatively, a function of the unsuccessful process of intellectual appropriation of Western concepts and ideas.

The study has thus paid little attention to question such as whether or not Russians currently enjoy a greater or smaller amount of liberty, what the prospects of political liberalism is in the terms of political science, or even which are the possible prerequisites of a liberal political order to be instituted in Russia. Rather the main objective was to identify and analyse the shortcomings, disruptions, and possible distortions in the process of intellectual appropriation. In order to make sense of this plethora of semantic levels and the complexity of interpretative processes, it is necessary to specify briefly the exact location of the present study in the bigger inquiry that relates to the applicability of Western political theory in the Russian context.

II

There can be no doubt that at the forefront of many theoretical considerations has been the question whether or not Russia can ever become a country of liberal persuasion and institutional structure. Many observers in East and West thus have tried to assess the chances Russia has to give itself a liberal political order and to create successfully a concomitant liberal political culture in the long term. While many scholars have set out from this very same impetus, their work diversifies instantly as they favour disparate approaches in their inquiries. The first problem is one of definition. 'Chto takoe liberalizm'? Borrowing a useful conceptualisation from Schöpflin (Schöpflin, 2001), one could say, that scholars identify liberalism either as a set of institutions, or as an assemblage of values and norms. Historically speaking, the former undoubtedly requires a shorter time for implementation than the latter,

and most observers are aware of the ostensible cleavage between the short and the long term, or between form and content (Schöpflin, 2001). Proceeding from this temporal dilemma, political scientists and theorists have more recently stressed the interconnections between the long dureé processes that relate to phenomena of political culture and the political institutions that appear to be implementable in a comparably short period of time. They argued that the way these political institutions operate is not detachable from the norms and values that are encoded in the political culture of a country. One reason for the failure of the economic reforms of the nineties in fact has been the relatively slow and protracted adjustment of the social and economic behaviour of the economic elites. From the perspective of political science, scholars sought to identify factors that would induce economic and political actors to adopt a more or less liberal framework for the regulation of their economic and political affairs.

On the side of political theory, scholars are in search of far more general aspects of human behaviour. Their objective is to detect good reasons for all prospective political actors of an existing or incipient polity to prefer liberal political institutions over non-liberal ones. The problem for political theorists has always been that they need to provide a compelling range of reasons that are sufficiently comprehensive insofar as the motifs for adopting a liberal order can differ considerably depending on the particular position and status of future citizens. The Russian case illuminates this dilemma very vividly. In the Russian reality, issues of liberty and rights matter fairly little to ordinary citizens. What is most on their minds is often mere survival and the procurement of the most basic subsistence. While the broader population may have some good reasons for preferring a liberal political order as long as it contributes to an improvement of the economic and social situation of the country, the members of the political and economic elites may have very few such reasons if a liberal order does not promote their own unimpeded enrichment or protect their economic accomplishments. The tools of political theory are thus comparatively blunt when tackling the

question of what good reasons there could be to institute a reliable and stable political order along liberal lines.

This might be interpreted as an indication of the futility of political theory in considering the chances of political liberalism in Russia. If this were so, political liberalism would only be able to play a very limited role something more akin to a mere conceptual toolbox for reformers. Since Russians have few incentives for supporting a liberal political order, it would then be once again up to the government to implement what it reasonably believes to be the best for the country: the rule of law, a market economy, and the procedures of democratic political representation. This has been the dominant approach over and over again for Russian reformers faced with the reluctance of the Russian population or with the formidable resistance of the managers of the former state monopolies in the economic sector to accept and assist in the creation of a liberal economy and viable liberal politics. Some very valuable contributions sketched in the chapters above have identified the fundamental mistake of all reforms as being the one-way relationship between political theory and the practical politics of reforms. They have pinpointed the fallacy to which reformers have succumbed in either using abstract concepts imported from the West and neglecting their unsuitability for the Russian social, political and economic environment, or in failing to embark on a sufficient re-interpretation, creative adaptation and appropriation of foreign concepts and ideas.

This point is not only pertinent for the fate of Russian reforms, something that the study is not centrally concerned with, but also for political theory. What the Russian debate most accurately teaches us is that political theory, if exercised as an interplay of abstract concepts, involves an illusion that can be fatal to the theoretical enterprise itself. Carrying out theoretical work on a purely abstract level may be suitable for Western political theory exactly because these abstractions are in fact representations of real political entities, manifested in Western political history, and are therefore not devoid of any referential capacity. Abstract theoretical work is thus less harmful in a Western context as long as this

assumed referential context exists. The danger lies in the absence of such, or the growing distance between abstract ideas and their real-life contexts in past and present. Or, once again, as Schöpflin puts it in discussing the ethnic assumptions Western political scientists make when talking about Eastern Europe:

‘What is not [perfectly legitimate] is the denial of this ethnic legacy, of the ethnic underpinning of our plausibility structures, as universalists do and then to take the next step, which is to equate their own particularisms with universal norms and then to impose these on other cultures. What takes place in these situations is an illicit conversion of the particular into the universal...’ (Schöpflin, p.112)

The reason why Western political philosophers can quite innocuously elevate the debate to such abstract levels may very well be because they do indeed share the ‘underpinnings of plausibility structures’, that is, certain philosophical traditions shared and constantly reinvigorated throughout the debate. It would be a red herring, however, to pursue this issue as a simple question of the structures of (universal) rationality. What is at stake here is not the structure of reasoning, but the meanings of the terms employed. This is the location of the enormous epistemic gap between East and West. Political theory is bound to make use of models and concepts that involve varying degrees of abstraction, yet if philosophers forget that these only make sense in shared (and constantly reinforced) intellectual environments, they risk losing the accessibility and openness of the debate to prospective participants who were hitherto positioned outside of it.

Russian philosophers may have become more accustomed to Western language and ways of thinking already. Yet, for Russian political theorists a simple adoption of the Western ideas does not suffice. What is needed is the re-construction of the linkage between theoretical concepts and the historical context in which they have evolved and made sense, and the similar (re-) construction of these ideas in the Russian context.

Seen from this perspective, political theory can thus resume its full function once it restores its awareness of the historical contextuality of the ideas employed. It can reasonably

restate the question as to why most political actors ought to prefer a liberal order over a non-liberal one. And it can attempt to identify the foundation in which political orders originate and from whence they are engendered. Bearing in mind this premise of contextuality, the historical account of the failures to institute political liberalism in Russian history can be reappraised. Why, under the given circumstances, have Russians not seen in liberalism a suitable alternative to autocratic or Bolshevist regimes? Why is liberalism still not a preferable choice for the majority of Russians? Historians may point out that what governs people's behaviour are short-term gains. And while this behavioural pattern can only be mitigated by the emergence of long standing and stable values and norms such as responsibility, moderation, and civility, the latter were conspicuously absent in Russian history and present. Compounding the problem for liberals currently in Russia is the widespread discredit into which liberalism has fallen subsequent to the failure of the neo-liberal market reforms that have been ostensibly associated with political liberalism. Alternatively, historians may argue that Russia lacks the institutional structures for a successful implementation of a liberal order. All these arguments are potentially the resources of particularism and have been advanced by Russian historians and philosophers before.

Where can we draw the connection between a historically minded political theory and Russian history of ideas? How do we usefully relate the insight into the historically sensitive character of theoretical concepts and ideas to our argument about political liberalism as construed in Western political theory? To accurately locate this point of juncture between political theory and historical consciousness requires us to return to the concept of agency and the idea of universalism which this thesis intended to defend. The following, concluding chapter will attempt to create a synthesis between the two parts of the work by reviewing the points made so far and trying to locate them in the overall scheme of argument.

15. Conclusion

The collapse of communism has brought about a welcome diversification of opinions and views amongst Russian political theorists. Only a few of these views have been presented here and the thesis has by no means laid any claim to paint an exhaustive picture of the varied and, at times, very exciting, debate on political liberalism in post-Communist Russia. Rather I have been selective in the range of thinkers whose works were discussed here. However, the criteria of selection were outlined at the outset. First of all, I narrowed this sketch of recent political theory to those Russian scholars who are active members of the academic community. This excluded valuable contributions to the Russian public debate by thinkers and politicians such as Yegor Gaidar and Igor Chubais. Some justification for this exclusion should lie in the fact that, although the views of Gaidar and others certainly merit some attention they rarely take the discussion any further by contributing theoretically challenging and novel approaches to the debate. Although Gaidar's *State and Evolution* (Gaidar, 1995) is noticeably motivated by the search for an overall theory that would explain the results of the Yeltsin reforms, his approach mainly utilizes older conceptual models that seem to have lost their purchasing power in political theory today. Others, such as Chubais (Chubais, 1998) are well versed in the theoretical debate on Russia, yet their contributions go little beyond the reiteration of known and tested conceptual models, or, worse, at times remain locked in preconceived and well rehearsed dichotomies of supposedly explanatory force.

It is undeniable, however, that there are significant contributions to the discussion about Russia's role in the world and its future desirable institutional set-up that originate in either a conservative worldview, often sustained by an Orthodox set of beliefs,⁶ or a communist revisionist ideology. This cluster of contributions has not received any thorough attention in this thesis. My conviction was that little that was written from those positions on

the right or the left* went beyond either simplistic propaganda or, which was more difficult to neglect, a certain dogmatic attitude that would often woefully clash with the open and ultimately revisable debate by Russian scholars who held broadly liberal or social-democratic convictions.

Although I do believe that Russian conservatism has plenty to offer to the debate on liberalism, it still seems to fail to escape from the dogmatic versions that rose out of the Orthodox religious community once released from the shackles of conformity. Perhaps there is a time for an initial reaffirmation of religious beliefs that may temporarily prove inimical to rational debate, just as there is some time to engage in an exchange of views facilitated by the a common acknowledgement of the fallibility of human opinion and belief. Yet, this is mere speculation, as things stand, with regard to the Russian public debate on liberalism and politics.

Thus, I have deliberately concentrated the review of the Russian debate about political liberalism to a field of thinkers who are broadly sympathetic to the basic tenets of liberalism (although they invariably disagreed on what these are) and those that have contributed to the annual conferences on the past and present of Russian political liberalism held in Moscow in the last decade.

The emerging picture of the Russian debate was still marked by a high variance of conceptual approaches and foci as well as an astounding diversity of conclusions. It may be tempting for Western observers to deny that the participants of the Russian debate had managed to produce *any* coherent discursive strategy or that they have identified a common field of inquiry and shared conceptual tools. Accordingly, there were some indications that the Russian community had a tendency to congeal around scholarly personalities and form schools, the most prominent of which may be initiated by Akhiezer's approach.

* While I use these political co-ordinates for convenience and in reference to political forces whose political views correspond roughly to the Western political spectrum, I am aware their are not so readily applicable in the Russian context.

Still, I have tried to identify certain significant fields of interest and dealt with them in separate chapters. This may not represent the most ideal or sophisticated solution to the problem of how to present the Russian debate, but, given the theoretical amorphousness of the discussion on political liberalism in Russia, it seemed the only workable one. I believe that this allowed me to portray the Russian debate in its incipient attempts of cohesiveness, just as this method would not neglect the high diversity of theoretical interests and approaches.

This concluding chapter will review the Russian contributions in the light of the theoretical aspiration of this thesis to identify a viable path towards a universal political liberalism. I believe that the Russian debate should encourage us to reframe some basic assumptions about political liberalism that have come to form the often unquestioned foundation of Western liberal political theory.

But prior to this brief summary, some methodological remarks are in order. The central claims of this thesis are theoretical in nature and cannot be inferred from the picture of the Russian debate. This is inevitably so, since the differences between West and East seem unbridgeable, impossible to translate into mutual relevance. However, what is methodologically admissible is that the arguments and points that have proven valuable in the Russian debate may be indicative of the shortcomings of Western political theory if, and only if, political liberalism aspires to become a universal discourse on the contours of liberal politics that are applicable to Russia, just as they are presumed to be of some validity for the West. My argument in favour of such an admittedly methodologically fragile connection between the Russian and Western debates on political theory has been that, although they have little direct relevance to each other insofar as they rarely address each other or the same audience, the significance and urgency of such a connection originates in the aspiration of political liberalism to have a universal appeal.

There can be no doubt that the categories of discussion in the Russian debate often appear radically different from those in which the West conventionally treats political

liberalism. However, the purpose of this exercise of relating two different debates to each other has been to reveal a new perspective on Western liberal political theory, facilitated by the sense of difference that such a differently structured and premised debate would evoke. I believe that besides raising awareness of the differences and increasing the chances of exchange, there are some aspects of Western liberal political philosophy that the Russian debate can illuminate in a helpful light and that can assist us in identifying and eventually eradicating some of the blind spots of Western liberalism. Some of these points may seem mundane, even banal to Western theorists, but others may reveal the very core of silent premises of Western liberal political theory and require us to think about some parts of the foundation of the theoretical exercise entirely anew.

I

The thesis has been motivated by a range of simple concerns with regard to the direction of liberal political theory. First of all, it seemed peculiar that more than a decade after the collapse of the communist regime in Russia, little of a common theoretical debate on political liberalism has emerged in which both Russian and Western scholars participate. Although Russians often hotly debate the chances of liberalism in their country, the debates amongst political theorists still seem largely separate from the West and disjointed to Western traditions of thought. While the linguistic barrier may account for some of this chasm between Western political theory and its Russian counterpart, it cannot be attributed wholly to this factor. After all, over the last ten years political science has managed to develop a vibrant and sustained dialogue between Russian and Western scholars.

Those Russian scholars who have actively participated in debates on Western political theory have often done so by joining Western scholars on their territory, debating questions of little relevance to Russia herself (cf. Kusmina, 1998). Another aspect that may account for this lack of involvement is Russia's different philosophical tradition, which has traditionally been

geared more towards continental philosophy in the Hegelian mould rather than the analytic strand favoured in the Anglo-American community of political theorists. Yet, as Kapustin and others have shown, the tradition of thought epitomised by Hobbes offers ample opportunity to get involved in a fruitful and common theoretical debate with particular relevance to Russia's problems.

The initial concern of this work has therefore been to increase the familiarity of Western scholars with the Russian discussion that has been going on for more than a decade now and to argue, initially on the simple grounds of curiosity, for a sustained interest of the Western theoretical community in the Russian contribution to liberal political theory. Yet, having established such a case for increased intellectual exchange, the question arose of what Western political theorists could in fact learn from looking at the Russian debate besides satisfying their curiosity. This led to the more serious second concern that this thesis tried to address.

Reviewing from a Western perspective the, at times, peculiar paths of Russian scholarly activity in the field of political philosophy or theory in the last decade, it appeared that Western political theory not only had not really tried to engage with Russian political theory itself, but also that it in fact had had very little to say on how political theory could contribute to understanding the Russian transformation at all. Although political scientists have, once again, quickly understood the immense challenge that the Russian post-communist dilemma posed to the preconceived conceptual modes and set about developing new conceptual tools together with their Russian colleagues, political theorists in the West have been notably silent on the post-communist world, with few notable exceptions. It seemed that Western political theory, while insisting on its claim to universality, had had little to say about the new developments in Eastern Europe. Political theory appeared to refuse to understand the new situations in post-communist countries specifically as challenges to the preconceived modes of thought that political science (inevitably, given the state of Sovietology and its

patently wrong predictions) had understood. This lack of awareness hinted at something fundamentally amiss in Western political theory: a practical refusal to acknowledge that actual political developments of such magnitude as the collapse of the communist world could bear upon the directions of Western political theory beyond the rushed conclusion/assumption that the disappearance of its longstanding rival, communism, from the list of political alternatives would inevitably confirm the viability of, and for some even provide the ultimate justification for, political liberalism.

A few (for example Ackerman) have understood that the collapse of the communist regimes meant opening an (unwelcome) testing ground for political liberalism and that liberalism had entered a series of trials in which its claims would have to be verified without recourse to extraneous benchmarks. Yet, surveying the former communist world more than ten years after Gorbachev left office, political theory ought to be less complacent about its own credentials. Particularly disturbing is the fact that, though universalism was and still is a hotly debated and vibrant project for political theory, there were only a few attempts to reconstitute the link between political liberalism and the particular dilemmas of post-communist transformation. Political theory had successfully, so it seemed, woven a tight cocoon around itself isolating itself from the questions that the often turbulent political development in Eastern Europe would throw up. The particular problem this posed for a theorist who deals with Russia is that while such an isolation of political theory from the practical context may be widely accepted in established liberal democracies whose biggest challenge is to identify an ideal formula for redistributing national wealth, in Russia and in some post-communist countries that are still locked in the no-mans land between semi-authoritarianism and renewed dictatorial regimes, the problem is one of constituting politics itself. While in the West the emergence of political consensus is discussed in view of the distributive ramifications which the various shapes of such hypothetical pre-political agreement have, in Russia the question of 're-inventing politics' (Tismaneanu) is of utmost

urgency and practical importance. While the conclusions of Western political theorists in the form of political institutions deliver some recommendations for re-adjusting an existing liberal arrangement, Russian theorists grapple with the problem of what liberalism could actually mean in their country. Russians need to forge a viable answer to the question of the essence of liberalism, while the divergent answers Western political theorists give to this results in different ideas on the acceptable degree of personal liberty and equality of their citizens.

In short, Russia does not (yet) have the privilege to conduct a theoretical debate on political liberalism that is somehow detached from the real circumstances of politics. Liberalism in Russia concerns the very foundations of the polity because these foundations are up for grabs and not settled in their broad parameters (cf. the recent discussion on the applicability of political theory to the Northern Ireland question in Little, 2003). This is not to advocate that Russian political liberalism can be constituted by following a (Western) blueprint. Rather, the dilemma that Russia faces is that liberalism may well turn out to be a series of contingent choices, as Oakeshott once described it. But the fact that liberalism is not the product of a social or cultural automatism that is invariably at work in history does not mean that we have no business trying to define what liberalism in Russia may possibly look like. Yet, this strikes at the heart of the universality claim of liberal political theory and it was this problem that informed the agenda for this thesis.

If Western liberal political theory were to continue to have universal credentials it would have to renew and, possibly restructure its claims to be of relevance to political systems across the world. And surely, this would be unequivocally endorsed by Western political theorists when it comes to discussing Western political institutions. No one amongst the diverse ranks of political theorists would deny that theory matters to public debates on the shape and content of policies and institutions, even though many would disagree over the degree to which this is so. Consequently, the notion that there could be a debate that

anticipated its validity to be of universal character but had little or no applicability or significance to Russia must appear untenable.

I have tried to suggest throughout the work that this strange *modus vivendi* within Western political theory may have come about because it has achieved, on the one hand, a remarkably stable political consensus (despite all the public disputes that rage about apparently inexorable differences in their societies or amongst various communities) and, on the other hand, a considerable terminological and conceptual consensus in the discursive strategies and procedures of political theory, something that is lacking both between the Western and Russian debates as well as often even amongst Russian scholars themselves. There can be no doubt that this touches upon the fundamental problem of rationality and the extent to which rational thought can account for convergence of meaning and the coherence of discourse. I probably need to note here that although this problem motivates many of the theoretical considerations in this thesis, this is not the place to advocate any particular philosophical doctrine on the nature of rationality or any view as to the extent to which rationality structures and possibly predetermines the outcome of scholarly debates.

I have, however, indicated that the apparent lack of relevance of Western liberal political theory to the exigencies of Russian transformation and the lack of connection to the parallel Russian theoretical debate is problematic, especially in view of liberalism's claim to universality.

In brief, I have argued that constructing politics from the angle of instrumental rationality alone, or by utilising the concept of rational agents operating in contexts void of conflicts amongst values and ethical principles without reference to specific circumstances that determine the outcome of deliberation, is undermining the universality claim rather than assisting in rebuilding its credentials. In short, building viable political universalism hinges on taking seriously the particular contexts in which political liberalism is defended, rejected or, ultimately, practised.

I believe that this presents us with a strong case for a theoretical as well as a discursive strategy for re-constituting universal political liberalism. And this leads us to the conclusions that the material of the thesis may be able to sustain.

II

It may be helpful to distinguish between the theoretical and the discursive claims of the thesis. While the latter would relate directly to the travails of political theory, the former would have purchase power in political theory only as a contextual argument as opposed to an argument of theoretical stringency. Let me outline the discursive claim first.

If we accept that the way in which we can possibly construe Russian political liberalism in a post-communist era matters to the outcome of our debate on the form and content of the universality claim of political liberalism, then we must consider whether or how far the Russian debate on political liberalism that has continued for more than a decade relates to this Western dispute. The contextual or discursive claim I have put forward is that, if political liberalism aspires to be universal, it must demonstrate its relevance to the Russian case of (re-)building viable liberal politics. Such a demonstration must, at one point or another, address the concepts and ideas that Russians have developed in order to think about liberal politics. To conduct a debate and try to reinvigorate its significance for Russia without relating it to the discussion that the political participants (in our case political theorists) lead appears self-defeating.

On the back of this proposition I have argued that, crucially, political theory is a debate whose outcomes (determining the framework of universality) are determined by its inputs. Or, to put it differently, universalism appears to be a feature of the (constantly reviewed and readjusted) degree of inclusiveness of the debate, a thought that must motivate us to seek to take account of, and eventually to integrate, the issues raised by the specific Russian discussions on political liberalism into the broader Western debates. My argument

was that, following this advice, not despite but because of the peculiar conceptual proclivities of the Russian debate, the chances of universalism increase since it enhances the references to particular contexts. This argument would naturally call for a philosophical (or discursive) vindication, something that I cannot provide here. Instead I have argued implicitly by adopting MacIntyre's framework of epistemological crises in political thought and pointed to the constructive potential of challenging established modes of thought when alien theories of truth are recognised as valuable (MacIntyre, 1996). In a similar vein, Skinner's theory of systems of belief ought to warn us about the pitfalls of constructing conclusive and conflict-free discursive environments in which the inputs are kept to a manageable minimum. As an alternative, I have pointed to the fact that universalism as a discursive consensus is likely to be premised on conceptual and terminological convergence, while the meanings of terms are themselves a result of intellectual exchange and debate rather than being fixed in advance. In fact, it has been suggested previously that the UC may ideally be re-constructed through a politico-theoretical *Begriffsgeschichte* (Koselleck). Several Western scholars have pointed to the conducive and perhaps pivotal part which a shared historical narrative can play in the reconstruction of the necessary components of universal political liberalism. On the Russian side, scholars have preferred to articulate the constructive potential of the 'Russian idea', an argument which, as mentioned above, has received little attention in this study because of its fuzziness and multiple personae (for example cf. Chubais, 1998)

This contextual argument for acknowledging the relevance of the Russian debate for Western political theory echoes the misgivings of other (Western) political theorists who criticise the diminished potential of contemporary liberal political theory to contribute something substantial to the practical resolution of political dilemmas (cf. Little, 2003). O'Neill's argument for the primacy of agency equally reinforces the drive to engage with the Russian debate insofar as her claim of universality explicitly rests on establishing the appropriate boundaries of accessibility and authority of ethical precepts. Least of all, positing

a universal liberalism without Russia would reveal a curious lack of semantic sense. Now, let us examine the theoretical claims.

This thesis has also suggested that a fresh look at the concept of agency yields a surprisingly healthy amount of material for, on the one hand, rebuilding the universal credentials of political liberalism, and on the other hand, a deeper understanding of the difficulties of defining the contours of Russian liberalism. Out of this contextual concern thus would emanate a theoretical drift that points to some possibly fruitful field of normative work that can initiate a common debate between East and West (Western observers should not underestimate the reluctance on the Russian side to recognise that Western political theory has anything valuable to say about Russia. Cf. Akhiezer's response to my attempt to inaugurate a dispute on Russia and political theory, Akhiezer, 2002).

Now, in adopting O'Neill's concept of agency it has been argued we can increase the relevance of political theory in the Russian case insofar as, firstly, agency reckons with the particular backgrounds before which agents operate, and secondly, agency assists our understanding of the dilemmas of the Russian transformation. It reiterates the importance of the agent's capacity to act and those conditions that facilitate the increase in such capacities. The fall of communism was taken to be an unusually intricate challenge of such capacities and I have tried to frame this conceptually by describing it as heuristic radicalism. Political theory, so it has been argued, must acknowledge the difference in encapacitation or decapacitation that exists between the process of constituting politics in a post-communist environment and re-adjusting the aims and objectives of existing political institutions in the West.

However, agency, as O'Neill has formulated it, was also found wanting in one crucial aspect. Contrary to O'Neill's repeated insistence (though this is ultimately expressed in a tone of scepticism), the concept of agency does not entail any principle of building liberal political institutions. It delivers us a framework for identifying the very conditions of ethical (and

virtuous) political existence but says little about specifically liberal underpinnings of politics. O'Neill is conspicuously evasive on this point in her more recent work, while her work generally exhibits a peculiar tension between its aspiration (political liberalism) and its theoretical reach (virtue and justice in liberal institutions). Although this may appear regrettable when hoping for a blueprint of political liberalism, I have argued that this uncertainty counts in favour of the concept of agency rather than disqualifies it from our considerations of the Russian case. In fact, enhancing its openness whilst diminishing its liberal drive even further would, so it has been argued by invoking Oakeshott's concept of human agency, increase its usefulness in the Russian context.

On the other hand, human agency has also permitted us to view the dichotomy of universalism and particularism in another light. It can offer us some constructive account of human conduct that would lead to the appreciation of the relativising stance of universal or particular political and social practices as forming part of everyday life's choices. Preferences for universal or particularistic strategies of vindicating human conduct thus appear as a component of the historically conditioned background of human conduct. The reference to supposedly universal or particular practices and modes of behaviour are then specific to the argumentative culture in which agents operate. The dichotomy disappears if we understand universalism as the particular scheme of justification appropriate in and to Western societies. This implies that universalism becomes a story of habituation within modernity rather than a path towards unassailable forms of rationality.

Progressing from here, weak foundationalism was thought to offer an alternative route towards political liberalism and it has been argued here that in its core form as put forward by H.L.A.Hart does indeed possess some guiding force for the initiation of a viable political framework. However, liberalism is not the main objective of Hart's minimum content of morality and law, nor could it be. Any buttressed version of weak foundationalism such as Haddock's would fail to exert much appeal on those Russian theorists who believe their

country to be still in a state of pre-modern innocence, unaffected by religious, social and political cleavages. However, the fact that such a picture of Russia as slumbering in a state of homogeneity is mainly fanciful may not necessarily come to the rescue of Haddock's weak foundationalism since, as Gadshiev has argued, political theory must take account of the fact that despite the religious and other diversity of modern society, we may very well be dealing with a multitude of conceptual layers in some of which individuals may be able to revitalise a simulacrum of homogeneity and coherence. Haddock's weak foundationalism cuts ice on the national level, yet Russia may retain a resistance to modernity on any lower communal level on which thick social obligatory frameworks may provide the same degree of predictability as a legal framework does. If this is the case, then the preference for the latter would require an appeal to a principle extraneous to the core argument of transparency and predictability, and hence may only be the expression of a cultural proclivity.

These were in essence the discursive and theoretical claims that this thesis formulated. What the Russian debate itself motivated us to conclude comprises again a cluster of theoretical and contextual aspects so that the arguments presented in the second part of the thesis can be distinguished by the extent of their thrust towards stringent theoretical logic or contextual persuasiveness. The thesis has grouped these arguments into different themes and attempted to cluster them around the discursive character of argument as opposed to the strictly politico-theoretical nature of others (chapters 8 and 9 as well as 10 to 13).

Since the summary of the Russian debate in chapter 14 has already listed them tentatively, it remains to relate these results more specifically to the practice of Western political theory. I have grouped them, once again, around the discursive, contextual and theoretical thrusts of their arguments.

III

One of the most important points that this thesis has tried to make operates on a contextual platform. We may describe these sorts of propositions as related to the way in which we say or present something, referring to the very preconditions of conducting political theory as a discourse. I am aware that none of the Russian authors have intended their arguments to be used as a counterfoil to a debate on the shortcomings of Western political theory. Many of the contributions presented in the previous chapters were not primarily intended by their Russian authors to form part of a political theory debate in the first place. Yet, I do believe that we can distil some important fundamental insights from the Russian debate for our own enterprise, redefining and re-building the universalist credentials of political liberalism.

To a certain extent, saying something about such a strictly regulated and intentionally rationalised discourse as political theory is easier than saying something about such a diversely structured and internally unstable discussion as a public debate. In the light of the dysjuncture between the Russian and Western debate, however, these characteristics of political theory appear partly more aspiration than reality.

The fundamental lesson that Pantin and others have provided for us is that the very possibility of theorising requires a semantic stability that is currently lacking in Russia. I have argued that, although such a semantic stability has been accomplished amongst Western theorists, this has almost solidified into discursive strategies that have a disturbingly exclusive edge. Utilising MacIntyre's concept of epistemological crises, I have pointed to the constructive abilities of accepting epistemic challenges by recognising the diversity of terminological and conceptual meaning and understanding political theory as an enterprise that continually re-constitutes its own conceptual tools and devices. In effect, I contend that our liberal universalism is only as universal as the questions we dare to ask. Integrating differences without banning them from our semantic foundations is a precondition of making good on our aspiration to construct a viable political liberalism with universal applicability.

Pantin and others have pointed to the fact that, while discursive stability facilitates the search for solutions to pertinent questions, it may also foreclose difficulties and black out problems, thus diminishing the universal appeal of our theory. While Russia in its political public debate as well as in the theoretical debate amongst academics is searching for some tentative semantic stability, Western political theory has accomplished it by means of excluding the creative influx from other discursive contexts. Taking seriously the differences between Russia and the West is the first step towards creating the new semantic and epistemological equilibrium that Western political theory as a healthy and vibrant intellectual enterprise requires.

This leads us to the next lesson that Western political theory should learn. As some Russian scholars have also argued, the appeal of liberalism is irreparably damaged if political liberalism is somehow supplanted by other prevailing political ideas such as the notion of democratism. Discursive stability thus pairs up with discursive prevalence. And liberalism may well have diminished chances of revival in Russia because of the predominant position of rival political concepts such as democratism. Liberal values, rights and liberty have patently failed so far to become the central terms around which political dialogue and debate is structured.

This alerts us to the notion of interdependence between the various spheres of society. The predominance of democratism hints not only at the preconditions for the development of a liberally minded public, but also at the prerequisites of conducting political theory. Politics needs to be perceived as a clearly demarcated sphere with its own principles of regulation and internal structure. Without this any discussion on the pro and cons of, say, market orientated welfare policies confronts an immature idea of politics that will prove unable to defend itself from an equally empowered position. The history of Russian political theory shows this clearly. The view that politics is inferior to ethics, which has dominated important fields of

Russian political thought, is only echoed recently by the colonisation of politics with economic principles of organisation.

It seems that liberalism requires a specifically conducive constellation of debate that enables politics to rebut the expansionist tendencies of other organising principles. On the back of sufficient maturity and a degree of independence, the arguments for or against the introduction of economic or ethical principles into the realm of politics can be debated in an atmosphere that secures a balanced outcome. While these are those arguments that have contextual character as opposed to those of strictly theoretical nature, the Russian debate can highlight equally some theoretical lessons to be learned for Western political theory.

Political theory concerns itself with determining the appropriate relation between moral principles and political institutions. Liberal political theory then posits the idea of liberty at the heart of this enquiry, and most liberals understand it to possess a particular quality that makes it the overriding criterion in the attempt to define the proper balance between morality and politics. This particular quality is supposed to be its ability to contribute more than all other aspects of social life to the autonomy of an individual. Although the relation between autonomy and liberty is a complex one and there exists considerable disagreement amongst liberals as to the proper contributory role of liberty (cf. Kekes, 1997), liberals would deny that any notion of autonomy can be conceived without liberty as core principle. This has led some liberals to contend that the increase of liberty must be the sole objective of the various political arrangements to which a society commits itself. Liberal conservatives (often unfortunately lumped together under the label of communitarians) have criticised this position from various viewpoints and with different objectives. One of the most recent criticisms has been formulated by Cahoone, who argues that simply articulating the principles of liberty as an aim of social and political institutions often runs counter to securing the very essence of society whose social cohesiveness and practices are what allowed us to demand the augmentation of individual liberty in the first place (Cahoone, 2002). He goes as

far as to say that the preservation of society must thus logically precede the increase of individual liberty, since the latter is inconceivable without the former.

Now, without counting this as circumstantial corroboration of Cahoon's claim, the Russian debate has conventionally been shown to attach particular significance to the idea of civilisation in its Russian, Eurasian or Orthodox emanations. I believe that within the context of re-crafting a political liberalism of universal appeal, we need to take account of the pre-eminence of such a concept in the Russian debate. There can be no doubt that this would horrify some liberals (although this reaction may have come to change in the wake of the terrorist attacks in 2001) for whom the concept of civilisation bears religious or ethnic undertones, and stands for exclusivity, boundaries and particularism with malign consequences. It is no accident that the revival of the civilisational idea in conservative historiography and political propaganda on the continent at the beginning of the twentieth century coincided with a frontal attack on the principles of Enlightenment and, implicitly economic and political liberalism, although the anti-Enlightenment thrust was toned down in the Anglo-American versions.

Consequently liberals may be reluctant to grant the idea of civilisation any ground in a debate that rests fundamentally on the motivations and aspirations of the Enlightenment. Yet, I can see little chance of forging a common debate on political liberalism between Russian and Western political theorists without recognising the tremendous purchasing power that this concept has in the Russian domain. That does not mean that it ought not to be submitted to a rigorous and rational criticism. But it does mean that Western political theorists should acknowledge the relevance of this idea for any future debate on the understanding and definition of Russia in the modern world.

For the purpose of clarification: I do not intend to advocate any particular hierarchy of values or a specific ranking of organising principles that should guide us in determining the appropriate relation between ethics and politics. Rather I would contend that, in order to

rebuild the universalist credentials of political liberalism, theorists need to reassert the openness of the discursive field and the possibility of valuable conceptual import from other debates. Civilisation thus should assume its deserved stance amongst other ideas and should be treated with the semantic revisability that we are happy to ascribe to many other conceptual terms. As things stand, given the Russian discursive proclivities, I cannot envisage a debate on Russian identity without some recourse to this notion.

Yet, these remarks served only to highlight and identify some possible tension between the contemporary Western and Russian theory of politics. Now for the real lessons that Western theorists can take on board. The first aspect concerns the prerequisites of politics as Kniazeva has indicated in her analysis of British political history (Kniazeva, 2000). Politics may well be undergirded by a raft of civic values which political theory only marginally conceptualises. The political consensus of a polity may be underscored by a general attitude towards politics that either hinders or facilitates the convergence of political views. Also, and more importantly, the emphasis on procedures only effects the collaboration between the various political forces if the outcome of negotiations or the procedures themselves are not conceived as simple vehicles for securing the advantage of one over the other party. Echoing the Lockean account of political contract, individuals may have to be bound by a set of ethical principles prior to their political negotiation on the basic institutional arrangements. While Locke was optimistic that they would be, Russians may prefer to share the Hobbesian scepticism and thus postulate that politics is not a game of rational players, but one between individuals with a baggage of historically evolved commitments to various, often conflicting, moral norms.

The second point relates to the difficulty which Western political theory has in acknowledging additional levels of differentiation in between individuals and nations. Criticism of the tendency of Western political theory to fail to conceptualise the multiple arenas of social life in between the nation and the individual has been forthcoming for a while

(Canovan, 1996)). Yet, the contours of the typical communitarian critique have replicated the problem on the level of the community rather than solved the dilemma. Gadshiev's insistence that political theorists need to accord differential treatment to different levels of human life may only be a vehicle for his (political) hope that the locally embedded practices may serve as a template for national political principles, but we may take his point as indicating the shortcoming of a two-layered approach in political theory in the first place. Political notions such as legitimacy and principles of justice are complex emanations that develop at the intersection of various strands of human life in which individuals are involved. And, as Gadshiev's argument indicates, the high diversity of different webs of meaning in which individuals locate themselves may entail that some practices are associated with high legitimacy while others are severely contested. Recognising the various intermediate layers of social interaction in political theory would free us from the dualistic scheme that underwrites much of political liberalism and has often proven to be detrimental to sensible conceptualisations of political reality.

In conjunction with such a plea for the recognition of the multifaceted networks of human life, Western political theorists equally need to grant that some of these forms of social co-operation and interaction are epistemically privileged over others. In the Russian context, this does not translate straightforwardly into a communitarian agenda. In a country that only recently exited from a ruthless centralism, local political practices may be incipient and immature, fomenting uncertainty about rules of the political game. I believe something along these lines may have provided the main arguments for the introduction of the new federal districts in Russia under Putin. However, what is significant in light of the difficulties of perceiving the options and alternatives that political agents have under the conditions of heuristic radicalism, is that deliberate attempts at destroying those political practices that are habituated in the polity must decrease the capacity of political agents rather than resulting in the desirable increase.

A far bigger challenge arises when asked to reconcile the different historical trajectories of political liberalism in East and West. Given Akhiezer's course of argument, this challenge does not spare those liberals in the West who contend that Western liberal institutions are the product of a contingent historical constellation, a historical 'accident' as it were, originating in a unique interplay of political and social forces over time. Oakeshott is probably the philosophically profoundest proponent of this view. In a sophisticated construct, his version of contingency is tied in with his notion of agency. Liberalism, so he argues, is the result of a plethora of choices that have a reason but not a cause (Oakeshott, 1991). His radical focus on human agents as origin and *movens* of history also inhibits simple accessibility of history to those who wanted to reconstruct the course of human history. And it is only Oakeshott's radical view of historical contingency that proves immune to Akhiezer's theory of history that informs his notion of political liberalism. Any moderated version of contingency, however, faces the full brunt of Akhiezer's argument.

At the core of Akhiezer's thesis stands the idea that chasms ('raskol(y)') within societies has produced (and many continue to produce) fundamentally different outcomes. While the narrative of Western liberalism appropriated societal schisms as a requirement for pacification and institution-building, Russia's societal rifts are more of a destructive rather than a constructive character. In effect, Akhiezer challenges established Western historical narratives on their own ground by questioning the proper source and origin of their uniqueness. The fact that similar constellations can have entirely divergent outcomes points to deeper underlying factors that a historical reconstruction of Western liberalism must appraise.

This does not make Akhiezer any more sympathetic to radical contingency as an organising principle of (post-) modern historiography. Yet, he does attempt to, and succeeds in, creating a narrative of the Russian *Sonderweg*.

What does that mean for political theory? Why should the business of re-forging historical narratives be of any concern to those who are concerned with determining the

appropriate relationship between justice and politics? The argument goes back to John Gray: A liberalism that is not sure of its origin cannot be sure of how best to defend itself. It may be conceded that historiographical portraits of political thought are methodologically distinct from theoretical arguments as employed in political philosophy. Yet, it seems impossible to revitalise the universalist credentials of political liberalism when historiography contaminates its foundations with the bug of cultural particularism. That does not render theoretical arguments in favour of liberal political institutions any less valid. But it does undermine any of those justifications of political liberalism that retain even a tenuous link to the cultural and historical contexts of liberal politics. Or to put it differently, if we can work through a purely theoretical constructivism, we would not have to worry about reconciling divergent historical narratives.

Unfortunately, even Rawls had to concede crucial ground in 'Political Liberalism' to his critics and admit that his version of justice equally assumes a given cultural and political environment, a culture of democratic dispositions (Rawls, 1993). Therefore Akhiezer's insistence on the divergent outcomes of societal schism matters to the theory of political liberalism and a reconciliation of historical trajectories may be counted as a prerequisite for any viable argument in favour of UC. Acknowledging, instead of ironing out, the differences takes this project further. That Akhiezer himself is in fact hostile towards such a reconciliation and insists on the particularism of Russia must add further urgency to addressing his argument. But the list of differences still does not end here.

The importance of shared cultural and political backgrounds was also highlighted by Kara-Murza and Fedotova, who utilised the notion of chaos in their conceptualisations of political liberalism. Kara-Murza argued that an abstract notion of individualism would fall on equally infertile ground in Russia. He proposed to supplement the concept of the individual with a necessary embeddedness into social and cultural circumstances. He consequently suggested that this modification of the notion of individualism should be reflected in

terminology and argued that the term 'personality' would approximate more closely this modified conception of the individual, thus echoing past Russian political philosophy.

Fedotova similarly found the idea of chaos conceptually attractive. The peculiar structure of her argument added much to its lack of clarity, but it appeared that she was reiterating the need for societal stability as a prerequisite for political liberalism. Contrasting international relations theory with political theory (focusing on the level of the individual and a particular political society), she argued that chaos would inhibit social co-operation, and politics would thus require a stable framework depending, in large measure, on the existence of a self-conscious notion of (national as well as individual) identity. It has been noted by Western political scientists that identity may require ideological commitment and that this would facilitate the genesis of a societal consensus, whereas liberal political theorists seem to deliberately shun the language of ideological commitment. This reluctance may turn out to be misguided. As Shari Cohen aptly remarks:

'Ideological commitments allow elites to recognise and trust one another in order to co-operate to make decisions that postpone personal gain for a longer term goal.'
(Cohen, 1999a, p.119)

Although the emphasis on the need for a stable notion of identities may seem plausible to many Western political theorists, the implications of this view may receive less favourable comments. Fedotova is no exception among Russian scholars in seeming to assume, firstly, that these desirable 'stable' identities are mainly uncontested, and secondly, that identity politics is broadly innocuous in character. These marked differences in attitude towards identity politics represent one of the biggest obstacles to a reconciliation of Western and Russian views. Yet, perhaps, O'Neill is right in claiming that, at times, the recognition of incompatibility of different opinions goes some way towards finding workable solutions for conflicts. Seen in this light, this thesis attempted to contribute to such an acknowledgement of differences as a first stepping stone towards a universal political liberalism.

IV

Our starting point was a dilemma. Liberal political theory enquires whether or not there are any stable *modus vivendi* that can serve as foundations of social co-operation in lieu of a shared and uncontested idea of the good. The dilemma has been that Russia, like so many Russian political theorists, refuses to acknowledge that Russia is bereft of this basis for building viable political institutions. Liberalism thus inevitably appears as a trait, a redundant feature, not as a necessity in order to provide the platform for a reconciliation of divergent notions of the good. When Western scholars test this supposedly unifying idea of Russian identity any further, it often appears as fuzzy as it is servile to many purposes. The 'Russian idea' is many things to many different people (Siber, 2002). But above all it is a smokescreen that serves a political purpose for some, and prevents the engagement with the real theoretical dilemma for many Russian scholars. This thesis has not critically analysed the various uses and abuses of the Russian idea or tried to outline the proper contours of a viable idea of Russian identity.

Equally, I have documented my doubts that an entirely procedural conception of liberalism would make any sense (in East and West) apart from leading directly into the formal constitutionalism that the Weimar Republic epitomised, while proving so woefully inadequate to face the challenges of radical politics. Rather the thesis was motivated by an altogether different intention. I attempted to show that for constructing universal political liberalism it is worthwhile looking at a debate that appears radically different from Western political theory. The way in which Russian theorists debate their prospect of building liberal institutions, so I argued, matters to our chances of forging a universal liberal political theory. Western theorists may still cite the differences between Russia and the West as an excuse for not engaging with the often peculiar conceptual tools and ideas of Russian political philosophy (and, paradoxically, they often concur in this reluctance with many of their

Russian colleagues). Yet, I would contend that this is a self-defeating move since it means rejecting an epistemological challenge that actually takes us further in our quest for a universal political liberalism.

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