

PRACTICAL REASON AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: REFLECTIONS ON UNGER'S *PASSION* AND *POLITICS*

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I.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger's project¹ is breathtaking. It is also paradoxical. He is writing what may be the most powerful social theory of the second half of the century and yet wants to stop social theory as it is usually understood. He defends all but the most radical of modernist tenets and yet proposes the "archaic idea of a universal language of self-reflection" that has prescriptive force.² I want to pursue this paradox.³

I want to suggest that one can come to Unger's project as what he nicely describes as a "modest eclectic," that is, as one who accepts the limitations of existing models of social explanation and political possibility but who suspects "that drastic reconstructive proposals will shatter against limits more unyielding than a mere accumulation of institutional and imaginative biases."⁴ I want also to suggest that one may remain more truly skeptical than Unger about other people, and about the possibilities of knowing other people. I want nevertheless to agree that one may, for these reasons and for Unger's, resist the more extremely modernist option, what Unger calls "ultra-theory," because, unlike Unger's own "super-theory," "ultra-theory" sits uneasily between accepting what it pretends to reject and rejecting everything, including the basis for anything it may itself want to accept. I want in short to suggest that one can in these ways reach conclusions which—though perhaps more qualified than Unger's—are not opposed to them. The only difference is that one does so more pragmatically.

¹ "Unger's project" refers collectively to three works, *FALSE NECESSITY*, *SOCIAL THEORY*, and *PASSION*.

² *PASSION* at 84.

³ I first formed most of my thoughts on Unger's arguments in a discussion on political theory and political practice at the Instituto Internacional de Estudios Avanzados in Caracas in December 1985. Luis Castro, who arranged the discussion and whose institute (with help from the British Council) generously supported it, Gloria Carnevali, John Dunn, Teodoro Petkoff, Richard Rorty, Alan Ryan, and Roberto Unger himself have all affected them. See also *infra* note 34.

⁴ *SOCIAL THEORY* at 140.

II.

Insofar as social theory has attempted to connect the concerns of exemplar history with ethics and the scientific method—that is, insofar as it has marshalled examples of how we have lived in order to answer the question how we should live—it has failed.⁵ It has done so, Unger himself suggests, in essentially two ways. The first is methodological. Each of the two prevailing modes of analysis, which Unger calls “deep-structure analysis” and “positivist social science and naive historiography,” has retreated into spurious naturalism. One has done so by supposing “a closed list of structures”; the other by eliding the distinction between contingent “routines,” or unreflective practices, and unavoidable constraints. This arises in part from the fact that European social theorists were “tempted to misunderstand the triumphant European settlements as the necessary form of a stage in world history,” and from this to derive a theory of natural and necessary stages.⁶

The second failure is connected to the first. It is a failure of imagination, a failure to think about human possibility. “Positivist social science” and “naive historiography” do not directly concern themselves with possibility. At best, they specify conditions that have been met elsewhere and suggest that if those conditions are repeated, the previous outcomes may recur. But these outcomes may not be desirable, and they will not exhaust the possibilities. “Deep-structure analysis,” on the other hand, does consider possibility—Marxism is the most conspicuous case—but both confines it in “false necessity” and is curiously coy about its substance and shape. As in romance, the battles are fought with the loved one. What the love, when lived, looks like remains obscure.

What is possible, Unger suggests, is a question in politics. Indeed, “it’s all politics.” Not only is the question of what the human future will be self-evidently political. It is also that the eighteenth-century thought that a social world exists that is self-creating and self-governing, to be explained neither by legislation nor by character but by principles that are distinctively its own, has been subverted by events. That thought may have made some sense for those European worlds that in the eighteenth century were already beginning to disappear. It has subsequently made some sense for those societies that Europeans and their anthropologists had begun to discover elsewhere. But it has increasingly been overturned in the ironical outcome, in strong modern states, of the enthusiasm for popular rule which in part inspired it. As Unger argues,

The triumph of liberal or authoritarian mass politics has weakened the system of fixed social stations that might enable people to seek their essential safety in the performance of a precise social role and in the claims upon

⁵ This is my characterization, not Unger’s; but the conclusion is similar. For a brief elaboration, see G. HAWTHORN, *ENLIGHTENMENT AND DESPAIR: A HISTORY OF SOCIAL THEORY* 254-75 (1987). I take one or two other reflections in this part of this Article from these pages.

⁶ See *FALSE NECESSITY* at 282.

resources and support that may accompany these roles. The experience of world history, with its headlong recombination of institutional practices and ways of life, has forced whole peoples increasingly to disengage their abstract sense of collective identity from their faithfulness to particular customs.⁷

To understand that fact and to think constructively about what to do with it one has now to think of politics and law as something more than the epiphenomenal expressions of other, as it has often been said in social theory, more “fundamental,” kinds of event.

The rehabilitation of politics, that is, the disinclination to believe that the answers in theoretical reason are sufficient for questions of practice, is, in the 1970s and 1980s, an increasingly common theme in discussions both of social theory and of politics. Many commentators have reacted to the collapse of practical reasoning in “positivism” or to the theoretically more deliberate attempt to preempt it in “structures.” Rawls and Habermas are perhaps the most serious.⁸ But even they, dissimilar in other respects though they are, are in important respects, and similarly, insufficient.

Both start with a conception of what people are, and of the most general circumstances in which they find themselves, and argue to a view of what societies that included such persons could be. Both assume that people are committed to live together and to arrive at an agreed form of, or framework for, collective life through a “reflective equilibrium” (Rawls’ phrase) or through “self-reflection” (Habermas’). Both further assume—Rawls more clearly than Habermas—that having agreed to a form of collective life, people will agree to explicit principles to maintain it and will decide these principles in an equally explicit procedure. This can be done, they both believe, with the greatest practicable degree of social transparency, as Rawls calls it, with the greatest “publicity.” And the society that is to be thus “public” is a society of the kind that we, as distinct from the medieval English or the citizens of modern Zaire, do now inhabit. It is a society in which incomes and wealth are the “all-purpose means,” in which there are further constraints in practical life and “discourse,” but in which it can make sense to imagine that there exist the will and the means to arrive at a reflective equilibrium between our intuitions and our reasons.

But neither Habermas nor Rawls makes clear how a mere understanding of a common interest—either in justice or in what Habermas calls *Mündigkeit*—might hold such a society together. Nor is it clear in either thinker for whom such a society is an option. Unlike Habermas, Rawls does see that there are innumerable many and particular loves and attachments and thick conceptions of the good. But having consigned

⁷ FALSE NECESSITY at 524.

⁸ See generally J. RAWLS, A THEORY OF JUSTICE (1971); J. HABERMAS, COMMUNICATION AND THE THEORY OF SOCIETY (1979).

them to the private realm, as liberal moral philosophers tend usually to do, he, like Habermas, leads us out all too easily to the politically opaque and uninteresting constituency of all the rational agents there are.

In their original impulse and formulation, each of these theories represents a retreat from social theory. Each depends to the least possible extent on any fact about any actual society, and each rests on a conception of persons which is at once thin and prior to any such society. If the theories differ, it is in their respective inclinations to teleology and in their attitudes toward the distinction between the public and the private. Rawls, unlike Habermas, has no telos; he also, unlike Habermas, distinguishes between the good, a private matter, and the right, an object of justice that is accordingly public.⁹ But these differences should not obscure the fact that each, as Unger puts it, is an instance of “the disappointing consequences of the modern philosophical attempt to dispense”—Unger should say, as far as one can—“with a view of the self or of society as a basis for normative vision.”¹⁰ In reply to false necessity, he complains, they offer only emptiness; or, if they do secrete a substantive conception, they retreat. Having lost the older and putatively universal social theories, we are left with a dilemma: we either have a politics which, as a politics for us, as we are, is insufficient to motivate us; or we have sociologies which are too specific.¹¹

Unger’s escape from this dilemma is dramatic and clear. “The ulti-

⁹ T.M. Scanlon’s more minimal reformulation of Rawls’ already minimal assumption sharpens the difference between the good and the right in a contractualist theory focusing on human motives. See T. Scanlon, *Contractualism and Utilitarianism*, in *UTILITARIANISM AND BEYOND* (A. Sen & B. Williams eds. 1982). Rawls has been characteristically well aware of the problem of motivation: “to establish [the principles of justice] it is necessary to rely on some notion of goodness, for we need assumptions about the parties’ motives.” J. RAWLS, *supra* note 8, at 396. Rawls adds, however, that, given what he is trying to argue, “these assumptions must not jeopardize the prior place of the concept of right.” *Id.* He thus restricts them to the “bare essentials.” *Id.* Scanlon proposes, as an alternative to Rawls, that “an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any system of rules for the general regulation of behaviour which no-one could reasonably reject as a basis for unenforced, general agreement.” Scanlon, *supra*, at 110-12. This principle, unlike Rawls’, rules out self-sacrifice and, in Scanlon’s view, “has the abstract character appropriate in an account of the subject matter of morality.” *Id.* The question is whether Rawls’ bare theory of motive is sufficient. A second question might be whether Scanlon’s can be a motive at all.

¹⁰ *PASSION* at 45.

¹¹ Interestingly, both Rawls and Habermas return to Kant, that is, to what one might call the formal start of what became “classical” social theory, and to the most powerfully argued instance of the modern origin of (what Unger and I agree is) the mistaken belief that answers to questions in practical reason are formally analogous to answers to questions in theoretical reason. Ironically, Rawls has in recent years withdrawn from his a priori universalism to a more relativized case. *E.g.*, Rawls, *Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory*, 77 *J. PHIL.* 515-72 (1980). (Rawls’ 1986 Hart Lecture at Oxford University, Judith Shklar kindly explained to me, is an instance.) Habermas has retreated from his more or less unadorned Kantianism, with its pre-Hegelian innocence of the motivating power and moral importance of particular *Sitten*, into a more naturalistic, evolutionary argument of what Unger reasonably could call a “falsely necessitarian” kind. In two very different ways, therefore, both have retreated into what is more recognizably social theory.

mate stakes in politics," he claims, "are the fine texture of personal relations."¹² Politics accordingly requires a conception of human nature that is both fuller and more firm than that which the Kantians and other liberals provide, but which stops short of the "metaphysical realism" in alternative theories like those of Aristotle and Marx: a conception which steers between the thin and arbitrary character of the one and the thick but unacceptable preemption, what Unger sees as the causal or teleological false necessity, of the other.¹³

In the first place, the conception must have some initial claim on us as we think we are. Unger believes that we can profitably start from the "conceptions and projects supported by the major world religions and the moral doctrines associated with them."¹⁴ But, he immediately adds, it does not much matter where we start, since a second and more important condition is that the conceptions which are worth pursuing are those that are strengthened by criticism, rather than reduced by it. The third condition is that those conceptions which survive the criticism also, as a result, converge.¹⁵

Unger concludes that the two that do survive and converge are the "Christian-romantic" and the modernist. Each has "two great themes."¹⁶ In the romantic extension of Christianity, these are "the primacy of personal encounter and of love as its redemptive moment, and the commitment to a social iconoclasm expressive of man's ineradicable homelessness in the world."¹⁷ In modernism, they are the belief that "our dealings with other individuals have primacy over the search for an impersonal reality or good," and the belief "that no institutional order and no imaginative vision of the varieties of possible and desirable human association can fully exhaust the types of practical or passionate human connection that we may have good reason to desire and a good chance to establish."¹⁸ Seen in this light, indeed, modernism is no more than a "moment" in the transformation of the Christian-romantic view. But although it corrects the Christian-romantic's tendency to locate the good either in the transcendental or in a fixed set of rules, glossed with senti-

¹² FALSE NECESSITY at 518.

¹³ See PASSION at 44-45.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 50-51.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at 24.

¹⁷ *Id.* There is an affinity between Unger's hopes and Hegel's claims that "[t]he right of the subject's particularity, his right to be satisfied, or in other words the right of subjective freedom, . . . the pivot and the centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times," is "in its infinity . . . given expression in Christianity and . . . has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilisation;" that "amongst the primary shapes which this right assumes are love, romanticism . . . etc.," "some of which come into prominence [in Hegel's own philosophy] as the principle of civil society and as moments in the constitution of the state;" and that the principle of and for civil society is to be worked out in the concrete settings of concrete *Sitten*. G. HEGEL, PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT § 124, at 84 (T. Knox trans. 1967).

¹⁸ PASSION at 35.

ment—the nineteenth-century, call it “bourgeois,” view of the good, the view to which the first modernists were reacting—modernism can too readily tip into a self-destructive reflex of resentment, and thus, into nihilism or a fatalism about the possibility of revising the contexts it rejects. In the modernist view, which has as its principled corollary what Unger calls “ultra-theory,” there can too easily be no constructive politics at all.

To redress this, Unger argues, the relentlessly particularizing impulse in modernism must be connected to a “universalizing discourse.” Unger does not “deny that the categories and commitments of a normative tradition have a historically located origin.”¹⁹ Such a tradition “will probably always bear the marks of its specific historical genesis,” and, to that extent, it is unrealistic to hope that social theory will be truly “universal.”²⁰ But through the “universalizing discourse,” modernism can give “revised sense . . . to the antique ambition of universality in prescriptive theories of human nature.”²¹ The “universalizing discourse” will “recast our ideas about sociability by diminishing their dependence upon a historically confined sense of associative possibility [and permit us to] imagine the ordering of social life that empowers us more fully by giving freer play to the two great dynamics of empowerment—the dynamics of passion and of practical problem-solving, each of which requires that our relations to one another be kept in a state of heightened plasticity.”²² Of course, this recasting “implies a gamble,” but the only alternatives, Unger insists, are radical skepticism or cultural fatalism.²³ The politics that results is accordingly intended to enhance “our practical capability through the openness of social life to the recombinatorial and experimental activities of practical reason,” to realize “a more complete and deliberate mastery over the imaginative and institutional contexts of our activities,” and thereby to reduce the tension between “our need to participate in group life and our effort to avoid the dangers of dependence and depersonalization that accompany such engagement.”²⁴

The more immediate concern, “[t]he great political issue before us,” is whether the social democrats are right.²⁵ Social democracy is the “least oppressive” of existing political models; it is the “most respectful of felt human needs, and therefore also most likely to attract the most diverse support of the most thoughtful citizens.”²⁶ But the social-democratic ideal, Unger says, is flawed. The social democrats, he explains,

¹⁹ *Id.* at 80-81.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ FALSE NECESSITY at 363.

²⁵ FALSE NECESSITY at 25.

²⁶ *Id.*

like most other political protagonists in “the late twentieth century North Atlantic countries,” still accept a “mutually repellent” but seemingly unavoidable trio:

[A]n ideal of private community, meant to be realized in the life of family and friendship; an ideal of democratic participation and accountability, addressed to the organization of government and the exercise of citizenship; and an amalgam of voluntary contract and impersonal technical hierarchy or coordination, suited to the practical world of work and exchange.²⁷

They also are imprisoned in false necessity and accordingly committed, or, as “modest eclectics,” simply resigned, to a politics of what is at best limited “empowerment.” Unger’s program therefore diverges

from the social-democratic ideal in its advocacy of radically revised ways of organizing market economies and democratic governments, in its search for the institutional arrangements that further soften the contrast between context-preserving routine and context-revising conflict, in its preference for the styles of welfare guarantees that presuppose these institutional reforms rather than compensating for their absence, and in its effort systematically to connect involvement in local and workplace self-government with conflict over the basic terms of life.²⁸

A sketch such as this cannot do justice to the extraordinary range and subtlety of Unger’s argument, although it does indicate the relentless level of generality at which he almost always pursues it. Certainly, no such sketch can do justice to the force of Unger’s argument. Nevertheless, among the many questions that his argument raises, one is clearly fundamental. If we accept Unger’s criticism of the thinness of the purported universal conceptions of human nature in politics, and also accept that local conceptions are not incorrigible, is Unger’s the only alternative? I do not think it is. I want to suggest that an alternative view of the relative importance of the “passions” and the “interests” in politics does not, as Unger says that it does, rule out what a modest eclectic might hope that a social democracy can be.

III.

There is irony, as Albert Hirschman has said, in reintroducing passion into politics:

As soon as capitalism was triumphant and “passion” seemed . . . to be restrained and perhaps even extinguished in the comparatively peaceful, tranquil, and business-minded Europe of the period after the Congress of Vienna, the world suddenly appeared empty, petty and boring The stage was set for the Romantic critique of the bourgeois order as incredibly impoverished in relation to earlier ages—the new world seemed to lack no-

²⁷ *Id.* at 271.

²⁸ *Id.* at 586.

bility, grandeur, mystery and above all, passion.²⁹ And that critique has continued, in tones sometimes of despair, as in Max Weber, sometimes, as in Marcuse, of anger, sometimes, as in Unger himself, of hope. But whatever their temperament, the model for most of those who have in the twentieth century sought to revive the passions in public life has been the virtuous republic. However much they may have transformed it—as did Gramsci, for instance, deliberately recalling Machiavelli in his description of the revolutionary party as the “Modern Prince”—the model remains one of honor in a perpetually vigilant, and often militant, defense of what used to be thought of as manly *virtus*, Machiavelli’s *virtù*.

Unger acknowledges that virtue is the apparent historical source for his own vision of empowerment.³⁰ “Its characteristic . . . trope,” he says, “is the need to recapture the selfless devotion to collective ends that supposedly distinguished the ancient republics. Its ambition is to ensure an equality of material circumstance and to enlist a selfless devotion to the common good.”³¹ In practice, however, he adds, and rightly, it has been a disaster. It has inhibited practical innovation; where it has not actually encouraged violence, it has, as Aristotle and Hegel said it would, made those who pursue honor in it dependent upon the others, in whose eyes they seek that honor; and it has caused these others to sink into resentment and a diminished self-respect. Civic virtue, Unger and I agree, has been a vice.³²

The classical idea of virtue also rested on what we might now regard as a philosophical mistake. Those who defended it thought that there were facts of the matter about character, about its nature and tendency in individual and collective life—facts of a holistic and teleological kind—and that these could be known in the way in which we know the facts of the rest of nature. The thought was, in Robert Nozick’s recent formulation, that if we believe a fact of character to be true, and it is, and this is more than chance coincidence, so that if the fact in question were not true we would have a different belief, then there is a truth of character to “track.”³³ But truths of disposition and character are few and far be-

²⁹ A. HIRSCHMAN, *THE PASSIONS AND THE INTERESTS: POLITICAL ARGUMENTS FOR CAPITALISM BEFORE ITS TRIUMPH* 132 (1977).

³⁰ *FALSE NECESSITY* at 586.

³¹ *Id.* at 586-87.

³² *Cf. id.* at 92-95 (characterizing problems of ancient republics) and 49-51 (characterizing the Soviet dilemma).

But, for an ingenious attempt to defend the compatibility in principle between civic virtue and liberty, see Skinner, *The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives*, in *PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY: ESSAYS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY* 193-221 (R. Rorty, J. Schneewind & Q. Skinner eds. 1984).

³³ R. NOZICK, *PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLANATIONS* 172-85 (1981). As Nozick says, this leaves “large questions open about how to individuate methods, count them, identify which method is at work, and so on.” *Id.* at 184. But the answers to these questions do not affect his account of what it

tween and, even then, insufficient for the purposes of practical reasoning. If there were such truths, they would be theoretical truths, truths *of* human nature which, being true *of* all, would be truths *for* all. If we did not accept them, we would have false beliefs. But if there are such truths, they are few, and thin. They are certainly too few and too thin to be a sufficient basis for any practical reasoning in any actual circumstance. Truths for this, if “truths” they are, are both more complicated and more indeterminate. They are “truths”—if one still wants to use the word—which are truths *from* us as we see ourselves *for* our projects as we see them.³⁴

Unger only partially escapes from the stronger of these two theses, and remains ambiguous. He does reject any argument about human nature that is grounded in what he calls “metaphysical realism.” But he insists that there is “authority” in his conception and that three sorts of reflection can reveal it. One must ask whether the conception suggests “more readily verifiable or falsifiable ideas.”³⁵ One must ask whether it is compatible with a “powerful social theory.” Because the connections between a theory of the self and a theory of society are close, “a view of the self is indefensible if no defensible social theory can deploy or presuppose it.”³⁶ Third, and for Unger most importantly, there is “qualified introspection.” Unger suggests that each person consult his experience “and gauge the extent to which the story hits home.”³⁷

But not all subjective experience counts with the same weight. Having judged the faithfulness of the story to your recollected knowledge of per-

means for a proposition to be true. (Nor is the formulation itself affected by Nozick’s own further argument, contrary to the one I suggest in this Article, that value, what he calls “bestness,” also can be tracked. *Id.* at 317.) Unger prefers to talk about the ancient assumption as an assumption of what Hilary Putnam has called “metaphysical,” as distinct from “internal” realism. See H. PUTNAM, *Why There Isn’t a Ready-Made World*, in 3 *REALISM AND REASON: PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS* (1983); H. PUTNAM, *MEANING AND THE MORAL SCIENCES* 135-36 (1978). However, Unger’s characterization of metaphysical realism corresponds rather closely to Putnam’s characterization of internal realism: “true or false with respect to a single coherent view of the world.” *PASSION* at 44. For an excellent discussion of how the matters discussed in this note bear upon the natural sciences, see N. JARDINE, *THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY* (1986). For the best account of the influence of such matters on a human science, see B. WILLIAMS, *DESCARTES: THE PROJECT OF PURE INQUIRY* 292-302 (1978).

³⁴ This distinction is illustrated by the difference between sexual desire—which is a truth *of* human nature but is alone inadequate for making any decision in one’s sexual life—and self-love or compassion, or indeed love itself—which, as truths *of* human nature, are too thin and conditional and too practically and cognitively indeterminate, but which, in practical instances in particular lives, do serve as accessible “truths” *from* us as we are.

This and the following discussion owe much to Bernard Williams’ essays and to conversations we had about how these thoughts might bear upon a social democracy. See B. WILLIAMS, *ETHICS AND THE LIMITS OF PHILOSOPHY* (1985) [hereinafter *ETHICS*]; B. WILLIAMS, *MORAL LUCK: PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS* (1981) [hereinafter *MORAL LUCK*].

³⁵ *PASSION* at 86.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

sonal character and collective association, you must also consider the authority of this knowledge. You must do so by evaluating both the extent to which your experience resists the given order of society and culture and the extent to which this culture and society have overcome the sharp contrast between context-preserving routine and context-revising invention. Thus, an informed reflection draws out the lessons of an accumulated conflict, which enlarge the realm of recognized possibility, and calls on the help of the imagination, which anticipates as vision what conflict has not yet produced as fact.³⁸

A view of the self, one might say, is indefensible if a defensible social theory runs against it. There is something to be said for this, and I return to it. But Unger's point is more general. It is that there is a possible "knowledge" of character, that this can be arrived at through reflection, and that the reflection carries authority.

The contrary view, which also is "modernist," is that reflection on character ("character" understood as a set of dispositions and aspirations) can destroy knowledge. Reflection implies alternatives, other possibilities. Reflection on aspects of nature other than character can increase knowledge. If I persist in a belief that does not, as Nozick puts it, track natural facts, I would not have a true belief. If, on reflection, I adjusted my belief to the natural facts, I would. That is why the subjunctively conditional formulation of propositional knowledge is so illuminating.³⁹ But knowledge can be acquired in this way only to the extent that there is a fact of the matter, a truth to track. Once one contemplates alternative states of affairs for which there is no such fact, alternative possibilities for the ends of life, for instance, or for living a life, one loses the "knowledge" that is inherent in having (only knowing about) one way of living. If there ever were societies in which there was such knowledge—societies in which there could be no reflection on life because no alternative for life occurred to anyone in them—they have disappeared and there is no way back to them.⁴⁰ In their place are the societies we now inhabit, in and for which alternatives do exist. In these, reflection is endemic and such "knowledge" has gone.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Unger sees something of this. "[T]o understand any part of reality," he writes, "is to conceive it from the standpoint of variation. You discover how this part of reality works by imagining it transformed." *SOCIAL THEORY* at 43. But this does not quite capture the distinction that I think is important, both in itself and to Unger, between explaining something by "locating its actual connections with other things," and understanding it by locating it "in a network of possibility [and] showing the connections it would have to other non-actual things or processes." R. NOZICK, *supra* note 33, at 12.

⁴⁰ Williams invents such a society for purely expository purposes and calls it "hyper-traditional." *ETHICS*, *supra* note 34, at 142-48. But we have no reason to believe that such a society has ever existed. An exceptionally sensitive account of what some might think is a present-day example reveals, on the contrary, the considerable range of choice for a life, and the remarkable extent to which that choice depends upon character. See J. LIZOT, *TALES OF THE YANOMAMI: DAILY LIFE IN THE VENEZUELAN FOREST* (E. Simon trans. 1985).

One can arrive at this conclusion in another way. One can think of the tracker of facts as impartial. That is, if a fact of the matter exists, the truth of true statements about it does not depend on any further fact about the tracker. Whether the tracker arrives at the truth is an interesting question, but it is a question in the history or sociology of science. It is not a question about truth itself. Its answer does not affect the claim that, if there is a truth to track, reflection can bring a believer to believe it. In this sense, truths about those aspects of the world of which there are truths are truths that can be arrived at impartially.

But it is a mistake to think in the same way of truths about how we might lead our lives. If I ask myself how I should live, I care about the answer. If I did not, I would not have sufficient motive to ask the question. Therefore, I cannot be impartial. The life in question is *mine* and the question comes from me. Someone may think me foolish, even mad, to live as I do, but he cannot show me that I am actually wrong; we have ruled out that argument. He is left either with the claim that I am irrational—which in itself is too thin, since it requires some point of reference—or with arguments about my well-being, which, because they refer to a well-being that purportedly is mine, will only bear upon me if I agree that they are arguments to my well-being as I see it. It follows, as Bernard Williams said, that “the excellence or satisfactoriness of a life does not stand to beliefs involved in that life as premise stands to conclusion. Rather, an agent’s excellent life is characterised by *having* those beliefs.”⁴¹ If therefore there were to be a convergence in the decision to lead a life in one way rather than another, the convergence would be in practical, not theoretical, reason.

It might nevertheless be said that, even if there are too few determinate truths about human nature, and, in modern societies, almost none about how one should live, practical reason must have some theoretical limits. Human beings and their lives cannot be just anything. The suggestion that they can is the exaggeration of those who claim that we are in some way “constituted” by our language and that, by talking differently, we can change. The more modest view is that people have some lasting quality that makes them who they are. There is some quality, in Richard Wollheim’s way of putting it, which gives life its thread,⁴² a

⁴¹ ETHICS, *supra* note 34, at 154 (emphasis in original). For an earlier and more formal statement, see his *Internal and External Reasons*, in MORAL LUCK, *supra* note 34, at 101-13. Once again, Unger sees something like this, but he says that an attempted detachment would change us, which is not quite to say, as I believe, that if we achieved it, we would have no motive to do anything at all, even, perhaps, science.

⁴² R. WOLLHEIM, *THE THREAD OF LIFE* (1984); see also *infra* note 90. For a more formal argument to a similar conclusion, see D. WIGGINS, *SAMENESS AND SUBSTANCE* (1980). For Wiggins’ conclusions on personal identity and on the implications of alternative—what Wollheim calls “radically constructivist”—views, see *id.* at 179-82. One way of deciding between these views is implied by Judith Shklar: what theory of human nature (apart from the theories of those, like Christians, who dislike that nature) would lead us *not* to “put cruelty first” among the vices? J. SHKLAR,

thread that includes dispositions of character. (In more formal terms, individuations are sortals, and they surely have to sort over something other than one of themselves?) There will of course be moments, moments which are a function of character and circumstance and of reflection on the two, at which one will be able to do only one thing. These will be moments of true practical necessity.⁴³ In our public lives, however, they will be rare. In most public moments, our dispositions will be an insufficient guide to action. A full theory of disposition could be a basis for ethics and for politics, a set of truths in theoretical reason with determinate implications for practical reason. But no such theory exists, and there is reason to think that it never will. There is an inherent indeterminacy in specifying and explaining mental events.⁴⁴ It leaves us with our own indeterminate dispositions, our reflections on those and other things, and the practical reasons we produce from each.

These considerations suggest that the “qualified introspection” that Unger urges us to exercise on his conception of passion is as likely to lead us to dissent as to convince us that his particular conception of human nature and its possibilities match our existing dispositions. It is important to turn skepticism on ourselves. Skepticism about our knowledge of others, as Cavell remarks, has often and unwarrantably gone with complacency about our sense of ourselves.⁴⁵ Reflection, whether on Unger’s conception of love, hope and faith,⁴⁶ or on our own dispositions, beliefs and actions, or, insofar as we can gauge them, on the dispositions, beliefs and actions of others, can only further reduce our knowledge of these things. This is so even though reflection may enhance our practical sense of the life we thereby decide that we want to lead. That life will remain *somebody’s* life; if it is ours, it will remain ours. If, on reflection, we prefer some other option, our preference cannot be called a mistake. Beyond minimal limits, we have authority for ourselves.

Nothing in the view I have been proposing suggests that the passions are not important. Quite on the contrary. I merely suggest that

ORDINARY VICES 7-44 (1985). For a clever answer to the question, however it is posed, see D. PARFIT, *REASONS AND PERSONS* (1984). Parfit argues for the substantive sense, conceptual coherence, and liberating implications of a causal view of persons in which the closest and most crucial causal connections may not be those through one life (me now and me as a child) but between lives (me and you) and, given progress in medical science, between actual matter (bits of me joined with bits of you). For him this means that identity does not matter. Parfit’s view also licenses utilitarianism by undermining one of the most powerful objections to it, that is, that utilitarianism does not respect people as indivisible and continuing. Nothing in this argument about personal identity applies to institutions, the “thread” of which can at most be interests and the continuity of these interests in convention and codification in law.

⁴³ MORAL LUCK, *supra* note 34, at 124-31.

⁴⁴ Unger comments on this in his remarks about psychiatry, but again seems to resist the most radical implication for explanation. See *PASSION* at 282-85.

⁴⁵ S. CAVELL, *THE CLAIM OF REASON: WITTGENSTEIN, SKEPTICISM, MORALITY AND TRAGEDY* 109 (1979).

⁴⁶ See *PASSION* at 220-50, especially 247.

because we cannot determine what the passions are, any conception we have of them can have authority over us only to the extent that it in some way, at some point, fits our existing dispositions. Only if a conception appears to us, from where we are, to have such authority, can it be said to have what Unger calls "prescriptive force." This view certainly leaves the rest of Unger's argument more or less in place. It does not license a simple relativism, or, as I will explain in part IV, the conservatism, cynicism, or simple resignation that Unger fears will follow from it. It does not say that reflection is idle. It merely says that reflection will not produce this kind of knowledge. Admittedly, my view retreats from Unger's occasionally extreme formulations of his own opinion.⁴⁷ But nothing in it suggests that any of our dispositions, including our dispositions to what Unger thinks of as passion, are immune to greater social transparency or to practical social involvement. On the contrary, the claim that they were immune would betray my view of our dispositions. It would suggest that our dispositions are natural facts to track and that they are as they are independent of our reflection on them. And the more purely pragmatic part of Unger's pointedly political argument, that "the dynamics of . . . practical problem-solving . . . requires that our relations to one another be kept in a state of heightened plasticity,"⁴⁸ still stands.

IV.

Theoretically, the view that I have been outlining may seem to be even more radical than Unger's. One might even think it licenses the license of "ultra-theory." But it does not. It holds on to a thin if indeterminable dispositional thread. Politically, however, my view might be thought, as Unger fears, more conservative. If a proposal for radical change has to sit with my existing dispositions, and my existing disposi-

⁴⁷ Unger claims, for instance, that "our elementary desires" can "change under the influence," not only "of an altered understanding of society," but also of "personality, of thought and language." FALSE NECESSITY at 367. Unger sometimes comes close to the radical antirealist position that, since everything is "constituted" by thought and language, we cannot know (in Hilary Putnam's joke) that we are not brains in a vat, wired up in such a way as to believe that we are who we are, using language in the way that we are. The antirealist must consider Putnam's reply: concepts are not identical with mental objects of any kind; we cannot simply *say* to ourselves that we are brains in a vat and thereby have sufficient grounds for believing that we understand the world and act in it in the way that we actually do. It follows either that we are brains in a vat with some very different ideas about what we are up to, which we are not, because we do not, or that we are not brains in a vat. If we are not brains in a vat, we are concept-using creatures who, when asked questions about the identity of things other than ourselves, give answers that turn on existence, and who, when asked such questions about ourselves, give answers that turn (at the very least) on what it is to be the kind of thing, for instance a concept-using creature, that a person is. See H. PUTNAM, REASON, TRUTH, AND HISTORY 1-21, especially 20-21 (1981); cf. S. CAVELL, *supra* note 45, at 207 (starting from a less amusing place, that is, Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin, to "put the human animal back into language and therewith back into philosophy").

⁴⁸ PASSION at 80-81.

tions have been formed by my past experiences, including my experiences with others (whose dispositions were formed by experiences that go even further back), then I may not be inclined to accept it. The change might not be a change for me that could be a change *from* me, as and where I now am. “The effect of liberty on individuals,” Burke remarked, “is that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may soon be turned into complaints.”⁴⁹

So if, for example, I cannot envisage personal fulfillment in a world other than one in which there is “private community, meant to be realized in the life of family and friendship,” “democratic participation and citizenship,” and “an amalgam of voluntary contract and impersonal technical hierarchy or coordination, suited to the practical world of work and exchange,” then so be it. My only alternatives are either to reconsider the matter from an impartial standpoint or to accede to someone else’s more substantive, perhaps even passionate, conception. Both are moves that, as the “I” that I am, in the circumstances in which I find myself, I am unlikely to be motivated to take. If I do accede, the conception will not be my own, or, at least, certainly will not be something to which I arrived or acceded in a practical, rational fashion.

But of course, the options are not so closed. First, and more generally, experience does not so firmly form anyone’s dispositions. In a society for which social democracy has been or remains an option, that is, in a society that is at least moderately open, dispositions will be, at least in part, the product of reflection. And there will always be room for more reflection. In particular, there will always be room for more reflection on how our dispositions were formed. This is the truth in so-called Critical Theory, once one brackets out that theory’s pre-modern ambition to show us our “real interest,” its nostalgia for the absolute, its mistaken belief that we can know the ends to be pursued in life. Reflection on the causes of one’s beliefs, and on the consequences of continuing to hold them, can bring one to change them, and accordingly to embrace a proposal for radical change.⁵⁰ Second, reflecting on the origins of one’s commitment to a social democracy and on the consequences of maintaining that commitment leads to the conclusion that Unger may be right about it, although, given what I have said previously, he cannot be right for quite his reasons. An important distinction may exist, implicit yet easily

⁴⁹ E. BURKE, REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE 91 (C.C. O’Brien ed. 1968).

⁵⁰ For an excellent distillation of the truth and the falsity—the false claims to cognitive truth—in the stronger versions of Critical Theory, see R. GUESS, THE IDEA OF A CRITICAL THEORY 75-88 (1981). So, for example, someone may reflect, counterfactually or subjunctively, on being where others are and in that sense being them. Having done so, he may be led *from where he is* to agree to principles of justice that only can be agreed to by adopting what I think of as an unintelligible “third-” rather than “first-person” view of the self. But for a defense of double vision, from inside and outside, see T. NAGEL, MORTAL QUESTIONS 196-213 (1978).

overlooked in his seemingly seamless case, between the conditions and practical consequences of such reflection in any particular place and Unger's own more distant goal.

Unger insists throughout his work that how we think and what we think about our attributes and possibilities are affected by the institutions there are and by the ideas there are about them. "To an astonishing degree [our] active belief in the pieties of a social world depends on the quiescence of that world."⁵¹ This is so whether "we" are citizens of the so-called first world, to whom he says his proposals are primarily directed, or citizens of countries like his own Brazil, which prompts his own more immediate hopes.⁵²

One such set of experiences and ideas, close—one might almost say intrinsic to—both the liberal impulse in social democracy (its wish to treat all citizens equally) and its impulse to reform, is the administrative style of politics. Formal administration, what the sociologists often call "bureaucracy," is, of course, pervasive. But two arguments, which, as Unger repeatedly hints, are more generally implicit in the conventional defense of liberal social democracy, converge on the conclusion that bureaucracy also is desirable. One argument is Kantian, the other utilitarian. The former is that our conceptions of the good, of the substantive ends of life, are a function of our desires. In Kant's own metaphysics, these conceptions are in the phenomenal self and are heterogeneous and perhaps incompatible. They cannot be the basis of a politics, which must lie in reason, seated in the noumenal self. Reason's condition is a freedom to form rational rules, which, being rational, will secure the assent of all the citizens. These rules will ensure freedom, which is the condition of reason. Hence the priority in politics and law, as Rawls suggests, of the right over the good. And hence institutions for rules.

The utilitarian argument starts in an entirely different place. Individuals are seats of desire and the object of a politics is to maximize those desires. But the desires, utilitarians imply, can be separated from their seats and aggregated or otherwise combined for collective purposes. There is no privileged position except that of the calculator in the ministry, who takes, as best he can, what Henry Sidgwick called "the point of view of the Universe." There are other differences. The Kantians' distinction between the right and the good, for instance, forces a distinction between the public and the private, which utilitarians not only do not need, but cannot coherently concede. Nonetheless, the two arguments converge on the conclusion that a settled politics is and must be essentially an administrative matter.

However, administration is, as Unger would say, "routine." It imposes uniformity and encourages passivity and is notoriously prone to

⁵¹ SOCIAL THEORY at 41.

⁵² *Id.* at 67-79.

imaginative and practical closure. Accordingly, administration is inimical to the open inquiry and debate required not only by strong theories of the possibility of a pervasive passion, like Unger's, but by theories such as my own. (Contrary to the Kantians, I hold that passion prompts reason; I insist, against the utilitarians, that passion exists in individuals who are in part created by it and continue as discernible persons—in politics and in other things—to be motivated by it; and I insist, with the Critical Theorists, that imaginative reflection is itself essential to politics.)

Practically, however, administration is unavoidable. Even those like Unger, "whose hopes depend upon our further emancipation from false necessity, cannot bypass the state; they must rebuild it."⁵³ In Unger's own program of radical reconstruction, public administration remains to adjudicate "destabilization rights."⁵⁴ Ironically, administration will preserve rights that "protect the citizen's interest in breaking open the large-scale organizations or the extended areas of social practice that remain closed to the destabilizing effects of ordinary conflict."⁵⁵ Unger also, one presumes, contemplates a similar institution to adjudicate "immunity rights," rights, he says, which are not just "a last-ditch defense against despotic governments" or, as in the United States, "an ecstatic deviation from the tenor of ordinary social life," but intended to provide protection and welfare.⁵⁶

In a more reforming spirit, Unger envisages administration of a "central capital fund." This is "to draw the limits of variation within which the competing investment funds [that it establishes] must operate." It will do so by setting the outer limits on forms of production and exchange and on the employment and price of capital itself. Its most far-reaching consequence, Unger insists, must be completely to separate all "right" in the society from the right to property.⁵⁷ Unger also envisages administration in conceding, if uneasily, that the political body "responsible for systematic interventions . . . should have at [its] disposal the technical, financial, and human resources required by any effort to reorganize major institutions and to pursue the reconstructive effort over time."⁵⁸ Although he does not elaborate, Unger also, one supposes, would adopt similar administrations in the organization of foreign affairs and defense and other matters with which modern governments must concern themselves and for which expertise is necessary.

Opinions will differ on the extent to which these institutions are feasible. Several, most particularly the institution that guarantees "destabilization rights," are a considerable distance away from the pro-

⁵³ FALSE NECESSITY at 312.

⁵⁴ See *id.* at 530-35.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 530.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 526-27; see also *id.* at 524-30.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 493.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 453.

posals even of Unger's most radical contemporaries in social democracies. Others, however—especially if one includes Japan and Brazil in the list of democracies—are a good deal closer.⁵⁹ I discuss these different distances in part V. The more immediate issue is what Unger offers in place of the modest eclectic's acceptance of existing patterns of political competition and representation. To succeed, Unger's alternative must ensure that those who exercise control, and particularly economic control, are not able to hold the state hostage⁶⁰ and that a more empowered society does not also become more divided and unstable.

Unger agrees that our existing commitments to representative democracy are among the most entrenched of our ideas. He does not want to undermine them. But he insists that we see how very accidental are the representative procedures to which we are so committed. There have been two such accidents. The first was the invention of liberal constitutions, which, he recalls, "sought to grant rule to a cadre of politically educated and financially secure notables, free from both clientalistic dependence and untrammled factionalism and fully able to safeguard the polities they governed against mob rule and the seduction by demagogues."⁶¹ The second accident is what, given this fear of mob rule and demagogues, was the "surprise" of universal suffrage and the emergence of once feared and detested factions, now called parties, to compete for the vote.⁶²

According to a "mythical history" of democracy, "the trials and errors of modern political experience, and the undoubted failure of many proposed alternatives, have confirmed that the emergent institutional solutions were much more than flukes."⁶³ Needing to present themselves as something other than gangs of pillagers, and to preserve their contin-

⁵⁹ The policies of the Ministries of Finance and of International Trade and Industry in Japan are well-known successes. Less recognized are the successful innovations of Geisel's military administration in Brazil, from 1973 to 1979, in contrast to the hesitations of Figueiredo's civilian regime (1979-85). Nevertheless, it would be too simple to infer that only a government with the powers of Geisel's (or as insulated from pressure from below as Japan's) could be so successful. After all, the technical ingenuity of the Cruzado Plan to reduce inflation in 1986 was matched by corresponding political imagination, both in the way in which the plan was devised and its authority conferred, and in the way in which President Sarney managed to turn it into a popular crusade for shoppers in every street. (The point is not affected, I believe, by the fact that by late 1987, the Plan was in ruins and inflation was once again rising at a worrying rate.) The Plan perhaps provides an example of the "new political spaces," mentioned in part V, which many people are imagining, creating, and deploying in countries that have recently emerged from a period of non-democratic rule. The Plan also confirms (what I take to be) Unger's conviction that the political initiative has now moved away from the older democracies. This is not to say that there are not sad exceptions: more than two years after the death of Sekou Touré, I heard a Guinean journalist remark that he and his countrymen were still "waiting for a text."

⁶⁰ FALSE NECESSITY at 368-73.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 209.

⁶² *Id.* at 213-21.

⁶³ *Id.* at 211.

ued credibility, parties adopted and implemented broad and reasonably altruistic programs. They also set out to privatize religion and to make society more fluid and fragmented.⁶⁴ But this history must be set against the question why two world wars and a few colonial wars after that were fought before the inevitability of these arrangements (at least in Europe) became apparent. More importantly, it must be set against the error of assuming that the fluidity of a liberal politics is a function of a fluid, liberal society. In fact, Unger argues, such a politics only can work in a society in which social forms, especially the consolidated property right and its consequences, are fairly well fixed. Accordingly, a liberal politics is a politics committed to the fixity of social forms.⁶⁵

This is not to say that an empowered democracy should not start from existing political parties. Those who want a new democracy should start by working through the parties on the left.⁶⁶ In countries with a strong statist tradition, they might also work with those in the lower echelons of government. These people, like those in the administration of agrarian programs in Latin America, are more radical and have more room to maneuver than one would expect. But there is no principled reason to be committed to existing institutions. Indeed, Unger's argument demands that one should not be so committed. We have every reason eventually to work beyond and in some instances perhaps even to transcend such institutions.

For two reasons, our journey to a new democracy will not be a predictable and "relentless march."⁶⁷ First, Unger's argument insists that the most vivid and empowering conceptions of possibility will arise only out of the activities themselves. Second, we cannot now foresee the limits to the possible. There will be messes, with much duplication. We have good reason to encourage such duplication, both to extend and to limit powers. For instance, we should reintroduce the experiments with "dual constitutions." Such experiments were attempted in several European countries in the inter-war period, cut short in the international conditions of that time, and repeated in Iceland in 1944 and Portugal in

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 218.

⁶⁵ In this connection, see A. PRZEWORSKI, *CAPITALISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY* (1985). Przeworski's work demonstrates, in line with Unger, that "when election results and collective bargaining outcomes have no visible impact upon the material conditions of wage-earners, masses become dissociated from their representatives." *Id.* at 163. Contrary to Unger, Przeworski says that when "the institutional crisis of several advanced capitalist societies" becomes "a crisis of participation," the answer is to renew conventional participation—resorting to "movements" only inflames and antagonizes, and risks resolving nothing—because conventional participation "reduces political activities to material issues, and these can be resolved under capitalism in a cooperative" and predictable manner. *Id.* at 163. Przeworski's is the clearest and most intelligent defense of the more usual, "modestly eclectic," view of its subject. This is not to say that his arguments and conclusions are self-evident or that Przeworski does not also see some of what Unger sees.

⁶⁶ See *FALSE NECESSITY* at 542.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 127.

1978.⁶⁸ As false necessity reappears as mere contingency, imagination should prevail, and, in Unger's conception of the "ultimate stake," the relations between people should reach a point of irreversible transparency and passion.

A modest eclectic will nevertheless press the question of why those with property should not hold us hostage and why, for this and other reasons, the extending and increasingly passionate democracy should not collapse into the self-destructive conflict that vitiated the older models of virtue and passion in politics. After all, and aside from externally imposed exigencies—one thinks, for instance, of the turbulence of Europe before 1939 and of the horrible, if ironic, effects of the Nixon Doctrine on the internal politics of several American allies after 1969—this skepticism has a foundation in democracy's own history and theory. Democratic theorists have repeatedly insisted "that democratic government will work to full advantage only if all the interests that matter" within the nation "are practically unanimous not only in their allegiance to the country but also in their allegiance to the structural principles of the existing society."⁶⁹

Unger freely concedes that an empowered democracy would destroy certain sorts of security. If, to feel safe, people required a "quiescent polity," that is, the assurance of a consolidated property right, a "lifelong guarantee to occupy a particular job," or—he adds a little tendentiously—to live a life "in the manner customary to a certain caste," they will feel insecure in Unger's democracy.⁷⁰ "But," he replies, "if the ideals and understanding underlying this institutional program hold up, people will have reason to change their views of what essential security consists in."⁷¹ They will do so "in part by finding senses and varieties of security compatible with an ever greater jumbling up of distinct styles of life and in part by awakening to a conception of the personality as both dependent upon context and [upon] context smashing."⁷²

This is Unger's hope. But he also has an argument. He overturns the more conventional democratic theorists⁷³ by ingeniously suggesting

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 447.

⁶⁹ J. SCHUMPETER, 3 *CAPITALISM, SOCIALISM, AND DEMOCRACY* 296 (1950); *cf.*, e.g., R. DAHL, *POLYARCHY* 203 (1971). For an account of the paradoxes of the Nixon-Kissinger Doctrine—its devolution of responsibility for security against the Soviet Union to regional "middle powers" that it also wanted to "modernize," its equation between international security and the internal security of these regimes, and the elision in turn between that and its toleration of internal repression—see R. LITWAK, *DETENTE AND THE NIXON DOCTRINE: AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PURSUIT OF STABILITY, 1969-76* (1984). The most extreme instance of these effects was the Shah's Iran.

⁷⁰ *FALSE NECESSITY* at 514.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ Przeworski, who has much the same view as Unger on this issue, is an exception. See generally A. PRZEWORSKI, *supra* note 65.

that ideological conflict is not just a disabling condition for liberal politics, but also its consequence:

The feature of the conflict over the basic arrangements of society that most directly makes it resistant to compromise is, paradoxically, its characteristic vagueness, its elusive and almost dreamlike quality. The less the abstract vision championed by the contending parties is worked into a texture scheme of social life, the flimsier the basis for any compromise. In the absence of a detailed plan for a reordered society, the only sure sign of victory becomes the triumph of an exclusive allegiance: The defeat of the disbelievers and the rise of the orthodox.⁷⁴

Religious dispute will disappear from politics if politics causes it to reappear in a different guise. This would not occur in an empowered democracy, because politics and social life would cease to be so separate. Hopes and realities would converge, and ideology, the function of impotence in distance, would dissolve in a constructive pragmatism. In that respect, but in that respect only, we return to the arguments for capitalism before its triumph.

V.

This also, one might say—as for the early-modern enemies of passion—is hope. But two further things make it difficult in advance to say anything more definite about it. First, if my earlier argument is correct, whether or not ideology dissolves into a constructive pragmatics is a function not only, as Unger insists, of the greater fluidity of the new society, the corresponding increase in personal contact, and of how those changes affect people's sense of possibility; nor is it, as more conventional theorists, like Przeworski, suggest, just a function of a narrowed range of disputes in the new society. It is also and to an unknown and in advance unknowable extent independently of either, a function of the dispositions of the people themselves.

Second, one of Unger's own arguments rules out examples. One can travel through the almost interminable literature on democratic politics and distill from it the conditions for democracy. One can then transfer one's findings to other cases and ask whether the other cases meet the conditions. This seems unexceptionable. But the process also can be fruitless, because mistaken and, thus, in Albert Hirschman's word, "pernicious."⁷⁵ At the limit, the process can produce the erroneous and arrogant conclusion—as the political adviser at a British embassy in Latin America put it to me recently—that a country consists of "political children" who need "another three hundred years" of steady social evolution.

The mistake that undermines attempts to test for conditions of de-

⁷⁴ FALSE NECESSITY at 465.

⁷⁵ A. HIRSCHMAN, *Notes on Consolidating Democracy in Latin America*, in *RIVAL VIEWS OF MARKET SOCIETY AND OTHER ESSAYS* 176 (1986).

mocracy is the mistake that Unger identifies in his critique of “positivist social science.” If one had applied one’s “findings” in empirical democratic theory to, say, Japan in 1946, or Venezuela in 1956, or Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay in the early 1980s, one would have concluded that democracy in these places was not possible. The traditions in each case were inimical to democracy, the internal divisions too deep, the levels of living and education too low, and the political expertise perhaps insufficient. But each of these places has surprised us. The Japanese accepted the constitution imposed on them in 1947 and have since maintained it, even if not quite in the way that General MacArthur envisioned. The four Latin American countries have moved to what is clearly, if in one or two cases still precariously, an open and democratic politics. Moreover, there are moves in several Latin American countries now also to invent, occupy, and deploy what Latin Americans call the “new spaces” of politics. Confirming Unger’s explanation of the causes of ideological divisions in societies with a liberal politics, these countries have turned the tables on the more established democracies. The South now demonstrates (in contrast to several countries in the North, including the United States and Britain) a surprising openness, a refusal to resort to fixed and abstract, as it is sometimes said, “ideological” solutions.

But it still does not follow that Unger’s argument, which he presents as an argument *for* us all, is one that can be expected to bite equally *from* where we each are. At one extreme are the more fundamental of the many groups of *Islamiyyoun* in the Middle East, like the *Salafiyyin* in Saudi Arabia, who wish quite literally to return to the society the Prophet left at his death in 632. As they presently see themselves, they must be immune to Unger’s argument. Also immune, if less obviously so, might be the “Confucian.” In Unger’s view, these people are superior, even to “Christian-romantics” and their modernist descendants. Their superiority lies in their “sureness of focus on the relation between the personal and the social,” their recognition of “the other person as the ground on which the whole life of passion develops,” and their acknowledgement of the “dynamism of the life of passion” and of the “readiness with which apparently different passions change into one another and the rightful subordination of all of them to a central impulse.”⁷⁶ But, as Unger immediately adds, “[o]n their way to becoming concrete moral and political teachings,” these Confucian insights become “combined and contaminated with the implications of the naturalistic view.”⁷⁷ The disposition to subordinate passions to a “central impulse” can lead to mistaking “a specific system of social division and hierarchy for the scheme of social life that can best reconcile the conflicting conditions of self-assertion.”⁷⁸ Even where “Confucians” do break out, as they did in

⁷⁶ PASSION at 66-67.

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 67.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

the cultural revolution in China from 1966 to 1969, the upshot of the “breakthrough [can be] defined as a return to a clearer version of preexisting institutions.”⁷⁹ “Surely a background condition [of the cultural revolution],” Unger suggests, “was the tilt toward restabilization” and political demobilization “inherent in the available technologies and organizational forms—the ones that China had largely imbibed from the West.”⁸⁰ But he might also acknowledge that surely another condition was the “Confucian” disposition that he describes.

At the other extreme, although rather less obviously, is the kind of politics built on a dispersed set of entitlements “against the state and . . . power over others,”⁸¹ in which entitlements are treated as property rights. However these entitlements are justified, by a state-defined legal order, for instance, or unspoken constitutional arrangements, or precepts of natural right, the justifications are an additional level of defense against the transformative powers of the state and the modest surprises of routine politics.⁸² The entitlements can moreover coexist “with a severely restricted measure of participation in government—a restriction that may apply even to the groups benefiting most directly from the order of powers and immunities.”⁸³ For societies at this extreme, like Britain since 1979, it may be too simple to say that “the state must be arranged in ways that keep routine politics on this narrow path.”⁸⁴ The Conservative government in the United Kingdom has rearranged some entitlements, perhaps more radically than any government in recent years. The rearrangements were prompted by exactly that escalation of ideology that Unger explains so well. In inspiration and in practice, the rearrangements have been partial, but they may change the hitherto “routine” terms of debate; even if, in the currently weak and divided opposition to them, the British appear still to have no conception of a politics for themselves beyond trying miserably to restore old immunities.

At one extreme, that is to say, are societies, like those of the Islamic East, in which the conception of politics and of the authority for politics runs entirely against invention, experiment, and an open future. From many otherwise different readings, the Koran is a scripturally authorized collectivism of conception far more closed than anything that now exists in the politics of the West or the European East. At the other extreme, the conception in societies like Britain places supreme importance on institutional autonomies and personal privacy. This conception appears to rule out not only the creation of more openness from below, but also the

⁷⁹ FALSE NECESSITY at 245.

⁸⁰ *Id.* at 246.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 131.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.* at 132.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 133.

sorts of central institutions that Unger imagines, even the seemingly least intrusive one that guarantees “immunity” rights. These extremes clearly are not preemptions of a similar kind, or even preemptions at all. To think that they are is to make the mistake, as Unger would say, that “positivists” make. After all, Middle Eastern states occasionally demonstrate understanding of a conception of politics other than those that their more orthodox subjects find in the holy book. (What might Mosadeq have achieved in Iran?) And Britain and the United States, especially in time of war, have managed hastily to invent directive institutions that prevailing sentiments and justifications should have forbidden. Even more surprising moments of invention have occurred elsewhere.⁸⁵ As both Unger and Hirschman insist, much more is possible than our usual ways of thinking lead us to suppose. There are always surprises.

Nevertheless, we would not ourselves be surprised if Unger’s argument appealed most directly in societies most like the one in which his own dispositions were formed. These appear to be societies—societies which are also exceptionally self-conscious nations—in which there is a Christian tradition, but in which there is also a sense of the unreality, or magical reality, in any actual political arrangement, which makes them hosts to modernism; societies, in which, because of their Iberian past, there is a conception of strong and perhaps even incorporative central rule; societies, however, in which, in the ideals with which they came to independence, there is an equally deep and now ineradicable sense of what it means freely to combine against such rule. Because of the wildly oscillating political history in the lives and thus the memories of a single generation, people in these societies find it easier to think in a way that is at once radical and not fantastical.

VI.

What I have said suggests three virtually self-evident conclusions and a doubt. The first conclusion is that political surprises are surprises and do occur. As Unger says, we have no reason in principle, that is to say, in imaginable practice, to rule out altogether the possibility of any of the political moves that he suggests. A modified view of the inescapable place of passion in politics requires that one rethink some of the most pervasive and particular presumptions, not least those that derive from existing justifications for the present scope, nature, and naturalness of public administration. Second, the moves that Unger suggests are much

⁸⁵ One striking instance of these are the short-lived but apparently successful institutions—to collect taxes, run factories, and other things—invented by indigenous Korean Communists in 1945 and 1946, between the effective departure of the Japanese and the consolidation of the Soviet-backed North Korean regime and the establishment of the United States Military Government in the south, each of which soon imposed its pre-given models. The experiments are striking in themselves and because there was nothing in the political history or political “culture” of Korea to lead one to expect them. See G. HENDERSON, *KOREA: THE POLITICS OF THE VORTEX* 321-22 (1968).

more imaginable from some places than from others. Third, if Britain, with its disabling combination of ideological inflammation and lack of imagination, is an example of the North Atlantic democracies to which Unger directs his argument, some of these places may not soon be where he hopes they will.

The doubt is about the compatibility between Unger's proposals and the more immediate end of improving the material conditions of the majority. If one concedes that there is a distance between working to improve these conditions within the existing state of affairs and changing this state of affairs to increase autonomy, then one must ask whether this distinction is merely a distance, as Unger believes, or, as Przeworski argues, a real difference, which, in more effectively using the institutions there are, reduces the desire to change them.⁸⁶ The answer may turn, not only on the causes of desire, but also on the question of how far those with an interest in the entitlements and procedures of the status quo are willing to defend them with force. Unger's answer probably would be: "Let us see."

But this uncertainty could take a toll, and, together with my earlier suggestions, it prompts three opposing considerations. The first is that—although one can come to something like Unger's own political conclusions, or at least, not resist them, from an even more radical premise than his—the practical reasoning of the agents from and for whom these might be the conclusions may be a reasoning, in virtue of those agents' dispositions and circumstances, which does not incline them to Unger's own view of the importance of passion in politics. It certainly cannot be said that they would be making a mistake if they were not to be so inclined. Second, even if it were, they may decide that the practical and emotional space which such a politics would take up would inhibit the pursuit of other things that the passion prompts.⁸⁷

A third and deeper, though indeterminate, consideration might follow from this. Cavell observes that Othello, perhaps the most Christian and the most romantic of Shakespeare's heroes, had a need for love and its affirmation that caused a "rage for proof."⁸⁸ Othello's "Christian-romanticism," it is true, is not Unger's. Othello could not find that delicate balance to which Unger aspires, the balance that lies between affirmation from a context and the acknowledgement in the other that can prevent dependence on the context.⁸⁹ Othello could not live in or out of his new marriage, and I do not think that he could have lived a politics of passion that was not heroic. He was a Christian, and so hated being

⁸⁶ A. PRZEWORSKI, *supra* note 65, at 247-48.

⁸⁷ "Socialism," said Oscar Wilde, "takes too many evenings." A politics of passion—even, or especially, if it lingers on, as Unger hopes that it will, in conversations after the meetings are over—may be thought to take too many evenings away from what passion elsewhere dictates.

⁸⁸ S. CAVELL, *supra* note 45, at 495.

⁸⁹ PASSION at 247-71.

human. But even if we are not Christians, and do not hate being human, we cannot do without love, and this need can cause for us, as for Othello, the rage for proof. In the impulse to affirmation, the rage for proof also might be caused by a passion in politics, which some of us as we now are could do without, because we have always done without it. If so, our ambition for affirmation and transparency may only be satisfied peaceably and predictably, if not with full passion, in friendship. But friendship, if not “mutually repellent” to either, is nevertheless less than love and not obviously sufficient to politics.⁹⁰

The promise in the conversation that Unger so brilliantly begins, and certainly the promise in a more open politics, is that this may be wrong. My anxious eclectic hopes that it is. But if it is, this will be a truth of practice, and not of theory.

⁹⁰ This suggests a continuity, if also a distance, between the various states. But this is not uncontested. For Cavell, love is to do with “reciprocity” and “acknowledgement”; for Wollheim, friendship also is to do with “acceptance,” “the overcoming of confusion, the abatement of intolerance, and the relinquishment of certain controlling attitudes.” R. WOLLHEIM, *supra* note 42, at 279-80. At first sight, these conceptions seem to be similar both to each other, and to what I have said here, and compatible with Unger’s position in *Passion*. But Wollheim insists that love and friendship “stand contrasted . . . in the feelings, emotions, and beliefs that they draw upon, and . . . also differ in their characteristic histories.” *Id.* The center of the contrast, he suggests, is that in love we involuntarily respond and only later, if at all, acquire the “attitude” of acceptance; in friendship, by contrast, we start with the attitude and only later, if at all, come to love. And the love we have for friends is not exclusive, as is the love we have for lovers. We almost always serially substitute for friendship, but rarely if ever do so for love. *Id.* I do not find Wollheim as persuasive as the others, but I mention his differences from them simply to point out the inherent contestability of the matter. Nevertheless, having begun with Kierkegaard’s remark that in saying we have to understand life backwards, the philosophers forget that we have to live it forwards, Wollheim concludes with a view that is consistent with my own: that for much of the time, actually leading a life is, or is mostly, understanding it. We have different lives and, especially after reflection, often have different understandings. I have pursued the question of the continuities and discontinuities of love, friendship and public life before reading Unger in Hawthorn, *Three Ironies in Trust*, in TRUST (D. Gambetta ed. forthcoming 1988).