THE CODES OF ADVERSARIALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critiques *the codes of adversarialism* that have come to dominate contemporary Western cultures. It begins by articulating a theory of *culture* and cultural change. It proceeds by analyzing the dominant concepts of *power* that inform Western-liberal cultures and the *normative adversarialism* that derives from them. Next, it demonstrates the relatively ubiquitous and indiscriminate expression of normative adversarialism throughout the public sphere in Western cultures – within our economic, political, legal, mass media, social advocacy, and even academic arenas. In each of these arenas, moreover, it points out that adversarial structures and practices appear to privilege more powerful social groups. Thus the dissertation suggests that normative adversarialism can be understood as a *hegemonic* construct – a widely cultivated set of "common sense" assumptions and beliefs that constrain the social imagination while serving the interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them. The dissertation then critiques the culture of adversarialism from an external vantage point, through the perspective of various non-adversarial alternatives that have been marginalized by it. From this external vantage point, the culture of adversarialism appears both oppressive and culturally maladaptive – especially under conditions of increasing social and ecological interdependence. This insight, the dissertation concludes, provides a valuable new framework for social theory, research, and praxis.

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In addition, I am indebted to all those friends and associates who gave me feedback on drafts of my dissertation at various stages along the way. This includes Dr. Carmen Werder and Dr. Bob Bode at Western Washington University, as well as my panel of Bahá'í readers: Dr. Gerald Filson, Dr. Kurt Hein, Dr. Todd Smith, Janet Grinstead, Doris Bruno, and Dale Peterson.

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Anne Marie, in particular, shouldered the heaviest burden through all my years of graduate school. To Anne Marie I am forever indebted. My daughters, Jessa and Leah, also made many sacrifices in order that I could complete what I started, even though they were too young to fully realize this at the time. To them I promise some return to balance and normalcy in our lives. I am also deeply indebted to my mother, Kathy, who sowed the seeds of this dissertation years ago. For her insights, values, and commitments, as well as the example she has set through an exceptional life's work, I thank her. I am also grateful to my father, Stig, and my brother, Stefan, for the ongoing support and encouragement that each has provided in their own ways. In addition, I am grateful to Marcia Kuhlberg for helping to care for my daughters as I wrote. And finally, I cannot overlook the support, encouragement, and advise offered over the years by Ronald Roesch, without whom I may never have considered an academic career.

PREFACE

This dissertation springs from a desire to reconcile the many insights I have gained from critical discourses on culture and communication, on the one hand, with insights I have gained through my association with the Bahá'í International Community, on the other. Specifically, though I share the broad goals of social justice and equity that underlie virtually all critical discourses and value the many insightful analyses that have emerged from them, the oppositional politics that are often associated with them have always troubled me. I simply am not convinced that social change is best pursued through oppositional strategies. My skepticism in this regard is rooted directly in insights I have gained through my association with the Bahá'í International Community.

In graduate seminars and other forums, however, I have noticed that my reservations about oppositional politics tend to be misinterpreted as a dismissal of these critical discourses themselves. Many students and scholars, it appears, take the marriage of cultural critique and oppositional politics for granted. They have a difficult time dissociating the two. As a result, I know that my own efforts to dissociate the two have often appeared naïve or "uncritical" within these circles.

Moreover, I have come to the conclusion that the critical discourses I have been engaged with do not even offer a vocabulary with which to adequately clarify or articulate my own thinking in this regard. Oppositional politics appear to have become so interwoven with the language of these discourses that it is often difficult for those immersed in them to think or talk about their separation.

As this became clear to me, I came to understand that the tension I was experiencing between my commitment to cultural critique, on the one hand, and my commitment to non-adversarial strategies of social change, on the other, was the result of a clash of two cultures – or two "discursive universes". One was characterized by a relatively adversarial worldview and the other by what I will refer to as a relatively non-adversarial or "organic" worldview. In the former, human nature, social organization, and the pursuit of social change are represented, understood, and enacted largely within a discourse of conflict and opposition. In the latter, these same phenomena are represented, understood, and enacted primarily within a discourse of mutuality and interdependence.

This dissertation is therefore an attempt to reconcile the tensions I perceive between cultural critique and the organic worldview I subscribe to. In this regard, it constitutes a significant departure from most critical discourses – a re-articulation of central concepts from various critical theories with concepts drawn from discourses that have traditionally been dismissed by many critical theorists. This is the original scholarly contribution that this dissertation offers. Given this departure from much critical thought, however, I anticipate that the dissertation will appear quite "heretical" to many critical scholars. Fortunately, "heresy" has been the leaven of critical thought for centuries and, by this measure, I am at least in good company.

Though the dissertation makes an original scholarly contribution in this regard, my underlying motivation is to articulate a theoretical framework with which I can begin to pursue my own critical research and teaching in a manner that is true to my own ontological convictions about human nature, social organization, and the pursuit of social change. Of course, the validity of this theoretical framework, as well as the premises that underlie it,

ultimately need to be tested against empirical evidence, and the dissertation does conclude with some discussion of how this might be done. Moreover, throughout the dissertation, an effort has been made to anchor the discussion to empirical reference points whenever possible. But all cannot be accomplished within a single dissertation, and the larger empirical component of this project will have to be taken up at a later time, as part of a larger post-graduate-school research agenda. In the meantime, it is the first half of this project that I invite my readers to evaluate: the possibility that the analysis is valid and worth considering as a theoretical basis for further research.

And finally, though this entire dissertation is broadly informed by a Bahá'í perspective, and though an entire chapter is devoted to a discussion of various Bahá'í prescriptions and practices, the dissertation was not written as a vehicle for promoting the Bahá'í movement. On the contrary, this dissertation was written simply as a means of advancing the thesis that adversarial norms may be socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive. Toward this end, my initial inclination was to leave out any reference to the Bahá'í International Community, lest the entire dissertation be misinterpreted as simply an intellectual Trojan horse, constructed as a strategy to advocate Bahá'í beliefs in an academic arena. Upon reflection, however, I decided that the prescriptions and practices of the Bahá'í International Community provide invaluable illustrations of the points I was trying to make, and therefore needed to be included, despite the red flags they might raise among some readers. In this context, it is not my intent that readers come away from this dissertation with any interest in, or commitment to, the Bahá'í cause. I will be entirely satisfied, however, if I have spurred in my readers some critical self-reflection regarding the codes of adversarialism that dominate contemporary Western cultures.

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INTRODUCTION: THE CULTURE OF ADVERSARIALISM

We live in a culture of adversarialism. This is not to suggest that mutualism and cooperation are entirely absent from our culture. But throughout the contemporary public sphere – in our media, our politics, our economy, our legal system, and even our social advocacy – adversarial structures and practices are the norm. Indeed, this *normative adversarialism* is so ubiquitous that it appears natural and inevitable to many people. It is widely assumed that "human nature" is essentially selfish and aggressive, and these structures and practices simply reflect this. But is adversarialism an inevitable expression of human nature?

Although selfishness and aggression are clearly potential human traits, the analysis developed in the following chapters suggests that we have an equally well-demonstrated potential for mutualism and cooperation; that human cultures, rather than human nature, are the primary determinant of which potential is realized; and that Western-liberal cultures tend to cultivate the former rather than the latter. In addition, it suggests that this culture of adversarialism is becoming increasingly maladaptive under conditions of growing social and ecological interdependence

Before proceeding with this analysis, however, some simple definitions are in order. Throughout this dissertation, the term *adversarialism* refers to the pursuit of mutually exclusive interests by individuals or groups working *against* one another. Contest, competition, and confrontation are all expressions of adversarialism. Archeological and anthropological evidence suggest that such relations were present in some form or another

within and between the earliest human societies.[1] And they are clearly still present today.

In contrast, the term *mutualism* refers to the pursuit of mutually inclusive gains by individuals or groups working *with* one another. Cooperation, collaboration, and concerted or coordinated action are all expressions of mutualism. Again, archeological and anthropological evidence suggest that such relations were also present in the earliest human societies.[2] And again, they can clearly be discerned today.

Though both strands therefore appear to have been present in all human cultures, they have been woven together in many different ways. As the following chapters will illustrate, adversarialism has become a dominant pattern in contemporary Western-liberal societies. Throughout the contemporary public sphere, contest, competition, confrontation, and other adversarial expressions are the norm.[3] Granted, these expressions of adversarialism are fairly subtle compared to the levels of physical violence that have characterized many slave-holding and feudal societies. In this regard, adversarialism is clearly a relative phenomenon. Moreover, no culture is monolithic. Alternatives forms of social relations always co-exist to some degree. Thus we must think in terms of cultural tendencies rather than cultural absolutes.

With that said, in Western-liberal cultures, we do tend to structure our political, economic, legal, and other public activities as contests – albeit "rational" and non-violent ones. Indeed, this contest model of human relations is so ubiquitous that it tends to appear normal, natural, and inevitable to those raised in Western cultures. Because of this, it is

1 Refer, for instance, to discussions in Ross, *Culture of Conflict*, and Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*.

2 Refer, for instance, to Ross, *Culture of Conflict*, Leakey and Lewin, *Origins*, Eisler, *Chalice and the Blade*, Howell and Willis, "Societies at Peace", and Carrithers, "Sociality".

3 Refer, for instance, to discussions in Ong, *Fighting For Life* and Tannen, *The Argument Culture*.

often difficult for people to envision alternatives. From within a culture of adversarialism, it is difficult to imagine a democratic government without political parties. It is difficult to imagine a fair judicial system without contests of legal advocacy. It is difficult to imagine a productive economy without unfettered and aggressive competition. And it is even difficult to imagine how to reform any of the systems above without oppositional strategies of social reform.

This dissertation seeks to exercise our social imaginations by critiquing contest models of public life and exploring alternatives. Despite its largely theoretical nature, the dissertation has significant practical applications. The ways we think and talk about the world influence the ways we act within it. By articulating new ways of thinking and talking about our world, I am suggesting the need for new ways of acting within it.

Due to the challenge this dissertation presents to much conventional as well as critical thought, a word is also in order about how to approach the text itself. With a topic as complex and expansive as this, it is impossible to articulate a clear and concise line of analysis while simultaneously qualifying and elaborating upon every point to the satisfaction of every potential reader. The linear nature of written text precludes accomplishing all things at once, and endless qualifications and elaborations make it exceedingly difficult to follow a central line of thought. Therefore, at various points in this dissertation, questions will undoubtedly be raised in the minds of many readers that cannot be adequately answered until later in the text. In this context, the reader is asked not to prejudge the analysis until it has been presented in its entirety. For although every effort has been made to anticipate key questions and criticisms, it has not been possible to address each of these at the moment they may initially arise in the reader's mind. Alert readers should find, however, that many of

their questions and criticism will have been addressed by the end of the dissertation.

The text itself is structured as follows:

In order to critically analyze culture, one needs a theory of culture – an explanation of what culture is and how it both shapes and is shaped by those who live within it. Chapter I draws on a range of intellectual traditions, from anthropology and sociology to semiotics and contemporary cultural studies, to articulate a theory a culture. The chapter begins with a conceptual definition of the term *culture* and a discussion regarding the complex relationship between human nature and culture. A distinction is then drawn between *psycho-cultural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of the human mind), as well as *socio-structural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of social organization) in order to draw attention to these two distinct but interrelated aspects of culture. In turn, a theory of cultural change and adaptation is articulated, with the concept of *cultural codes* as its central metaphor. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the concept of *hegemony,* which serves as a useful device for understanding the way that dominant cultural codes can come to serve the narrow interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them.

In Chapter II, I begin critiquing the culture of adversarialism by analyzing the way that relations of power are understood and enacted within it. Toward this end, I illustrate that power is generally theorized as something that is exercised *over* or *against* others in the pursuit of mutually exclusive gains. I then point out that this limited understanding of power illuminates some relations of power while it obscures others. Most notably, it obscures the mutualistic or cooperative exercise of power – exercising power *with* others in the pursuit of collective gains. In this context, I suggest that a narrow descriptive or explanatory theory of

power tends to translate into a narrow prescriptive or normative theory of power. The result is what I refer to as *normative adversarialism* – the prescription of adversarial methods as normal and necessary social practices.

In Chapter III, I illustrate that normative adversarialism is relatively ubiquitous throughout Western culture – albeit in "rational" and non-violent forms. I support this assertion by surveying the way human relations are understood and enacted throughout the public sphere. In this regard, I demonstrate that normative adversarialism underlies the conflict and competition most people take for granted in our economic system; the partisan structures and practices taken for granted in our political system; the adversarial contests taken for granted in our legal system; the polarized conflicts and violence taken for granted in our mass media content; the oppositional strategies taken for granted by many social activists; and even the disputational models taken for granted by many academics. Moreover, I show that all of these models appear to serve the interests of more powerful social groups at the expense of less powerful ones. In addition, I show that all these models are mutually reinforcing. They simultaneously shape and reflect the ways we think, talk, and act throughout the public sphere as they naturalize a general culture of adversarialism that does not serve all interests equally. In this regard, I suggest that normative adversarialism has all the characteristics of an effective hegemonic construct, as defined in Chapter I. In other words, normative adversarialism can be understood as a cultivated set of "common sense" assumptions and beliefs that serve the narrow interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them.

In order to further illustrate the hegemony of adversarialism, I examine a number of marginalized alternatives in Chapter IV. First, I acknowledge that many cultures, past and

present, have embodied mutualistic expressions and aspirations. In this regard, I point out that human history embodies ongoing historical tensions between adversarialism and mutualism. Recognizing this, I turn my attention to various contemporary expressions of the latter. Various streams of feminism, systems theory, ecology, communication theory, and alternative dispute resolution are surveyed as examples. Each is chosen for the unique critical perspective it offers on normative adversarialism and the glimpse it provides of non-adversarial alternatives. At the same time, because these alternatives are relatively isolated from one another within the dominant culture of adversarialism, I suggest that their practical efficacy remains difficult to evaluate. Within a culture that contradicts and undermines them from virtually every direction, these marginalized alternatives tend to appear naïve and idealistic – an outcome that is entirely consistent with the theory of hegemony introduced in Chapter I.

In order to further evaluate non-adversarial models of social practice, I suggest that it is helpful to view their application within a culture or community that consistently reinforces rather than undermines them. I attempt to do this in Chapter V through a case study of the Bahá'í International Community – an emerging global movement that integrates a wide range of non-adversarial structures and practices into a unified cultural system. I begin by discussing the overall organic worldview that informs these structures and practices. Next, I examine a number of these prescriptions and practices in some detail, including Bahá'í models of collective decision making, Bahá'í institutional structures, and Bahá'í strategies for pursuing social change. In turn, I examine the assumptions about human nature that underlie each of these elements of Bahá'í normative theory. And finally, I conclude the chapter by offering a brief assessment of the actual experience of the Bahá'í community to

date.

In the final chapter, I distill my overall analysis into the following theoretical propositions:

(1) Human beings have the potential for adversarial as well as mutualistic behaviour.

(2) The degree to which we realize either of these potentials is largely a function of the cultures we are raised within, and the tension between adversarialism and mutualism has been resolved differently in different cultural contexts.

(3) Contemporary Western-liberal cultures are dominated by the codes of "normative adversarialism" – the prescription of adversarial methods as normal and necessary social practice throughout the public sphere.

(4) Though adversarialism is a relative phenomenon, and though adversarial practices are not essentially problematic in all circumstances, their relatively ubiquitous and indiscriminate expression throughout the contemporary public sphere does not serve the broadest public interest; as a dominant cultural expression, "the codes of adversarialism" can therefore be understood as socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive.

(5) The historical persistence of these socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive codes can be explained by the theory of hegemony; that is, the codes of adversarialism primarily serve the interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them and who now occupy social positions from which they continue to cultivate these codes (whether consciously and intentionally or not), as a form of cultural common sense.

After outlining these propositions, I discuss their broader theoretical as well as practical implications. I then respond, in turn, to anticipated criticisms of this broader theoretical

framework. Finally, I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of how this theoretical framework could be empirically tested.

CHAPTER I: CULTURE

In order to critically analyze culture, one needs a theory of culture – an explanation of what culture is and how it both shapes and is shaped by those who live within it. This chapter draws on a range of intellectual traditions, from anthropology and sociology to semiotics and contemporary cultural studies, to articulate a theory a culture. The chapter begins with a conceptual definition of the term *culture* itself, along with a discussion of the complex relationship between human nature and culture. A distinction is then drawn between *psycho-cultural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of the human psyche), as well as *socio-structural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of social organization), in order to draw attention to these two distinct but inter-related aspects of culture. In turn, a theory of cultural change and adaptation is articulated, with the concept of *cultural codes* as its central metaphor. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the concept of *hegemony,* which serves as a useful device for understanding the way that dominant cultural codes can come to serve the narrow interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them.

Human Nature and Human Culture

The word *culture* has a complex history and many shades of meaning.[1] In its popular contemporary usage, it often refers to the ensemble of arts, food, dress, and other aesthetic

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1 For overviews of the etymology of the word *culture*, refer to Williams, *Keywords*, and Williams, *Culture and Society*.

variations that distinguish one social group from another. In semiotics and cultural studies, it tends to refer to the systems of representation, meaning, belief, and other ideological variations between social groups. And in its broadest sociological and anthropological use, it also refers to the political, economic, legal, and other structural variations between social groups. What all of these meanings have in common, however, is a reference to phenomena that are socially learned or constructed, and therefore relatively fluid and variable, as opposed to phenomena that are biologically inherited or determined and therefore relatively "fixed".

For the purposes of this dissertation, *culture* will be defined in these very broad terms, as the entire social heritage of a community, including its material expressions, its ideological expressions, and its structural or institutional expressions – all of which are socially learned or constructed and therefore contingent and highly variable.[2] In contrast, the term *human nature* will be used to signify those shared species characteristics that are biologically inherited and therefore relatively fixed or invariable.

For instance, while the need to eat is an innate characteristic of human nature, everything from our tastes in food to the ways we produce and distribute food are expressions of human culture. Similarly, while the capacity to use complex languages is an innate characteristic of human nature, the diverse languages that different populations actually develop are expressions of human culture. Likewise, while the tendency to live in social groups may be an innate characteristic of human nature, the diverse ways that we actually structure our social relations are expressions of human culture. Understood this way, human beings are

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2 For a similar definition, refer to Bullock, Stallybrass, and Trombley, eds., *Dictionary of Modern Thought*, p. 195.

remarkably (although not entirely) malleable creatures. With a finite range of fixed species characteristics we are capable of an almost infinite range of cultural expressions.

Of course, as these examples illustrate, the relationship between nature and culture is subtle and complex. Most human thought and behaviour is a product of the interplay between the two. Accordingly, nature and culture need to be understood dialectically. Each acts upon the other, and although they can be considered separately for analytical purposes, their real-world expressions are inextricably linked. However, they still serve as useful analytical categories. Consider, for instance, how shades of colour can be analyzed in terms of the primary colors that constitute them. Human thought and behaviour are like shades of colour in this regard. In one sense, green is neither blue nor yellow. It has its own independent characteristics and can be studied accordingly. In another sense, green is composed of both blue and yellow, and it can be analyzed in terms of the interplay between the two – even as the actual eating habits of a given person can be understood in terms of the interplay of biological impulses and culturally determined tastes and opportunities.

The dialectical relationship between nature and culture can also be seen in the fact that our capacity for culture is itself an innate characteristic of human nature. Moreover, this capacity for culture enables people to regulate various biological impulses. Consider human sexuality. Though the sex impulse is part of our biological nature, most cultures establish norms regarding its appropriate and inappropriate expressions. Therefore, when discussing the relationship between human nature and human culture, it is important to recognize that we have the cultural capacity to regulate various natural impulses.

To complicate things further, many anthropologists point out that the latter stages of our biological evolution occurred within the matrix of early proto-human cultures. As the

anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains, culture was not a last-minute addition to an otherwise finished evolutionary product: *Homo sapiens*. Rather, the earliest proto-human cultures appear to have played a directive role in the evolutionary process that led to modern *Homo sapiens*.[3] Processes of physical and cultural evolution were therefore not distinct and sequential. Rather, there was a period of overlap in which they were mutually informing, especially with regard to the evolution of the human brain.

Although the distinction between nature and culture is therefore subtle and complex, it can still serve as an analytically useful distinction. Indeed, after exploring the dialectical relationship between nature and culture, Geertz himself concedes that

> [while] the boundary between what is innately controlled and what is culturally controlled in human behaviour is an ill-defined and wavering one... some things are, for all intents and purposes, entirely controlled intrinsically: we need no cultural guidance to learn how to breathe than a fish needs to learn how to swim. Others are almost certainly largely cultural; we do not attempt to explain on a genetic basis why some men put their trust in centralized planning and others in the free market... [similarly] our capacity to speak is surely innate; our capacity to speak English is surely cultural.[4]

Moreover, the distinction between nature and culture serves an especially important purpose in cultural critique because of the problem of *naturalization*. When cultural practices have been internalized, they often appear natural and inevitable to those who have internalized them. And that which appears natural and inevitable appears impossible to change. Therefore, as many cultural critics and reformers have learned, the first step toward reforming specific cultural practices is *denaturalizing* them by demonstrating that they are culturally contingent rather than biologically determined. For instance, in many cultures throughout history, slavery was perceived as a natural and inevitable phenomenon.

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3 Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*. Refer especially to discussions of this theme in Chapters 2 and 3.

4 Ibid., p. 50.

Accordingly, one of the primary strategies of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement was to demonstrate the cultural contingency of slavery. Similarly, in many cultures throughout history, the subordination of women has been viewed as a natural and inevitable phenomenon. One of the primary strategies of the modern women's movement has likewise been to demonstrate the cultural rather than natural basis of gender inequality.

In sum, the distinction between culture and nature is a starting point for critiquing the assumptions of biological determinism – the notion that most, if not all, of what we do and become is directly programmed by our genes.[5] And though such assumptions trace back centuries, they still echo today in discourses such as sociobiology – where they often surface as a justification for existing social injustices and inequities. In contrast, cultural critics question the "naturalness" of racism, sexism, nationalism, militarism, competitive materialism, and so forth – both in their individual as well as collective or structural expressions. In the same way, this dissertation questions the naturalness of *adversarialism* as an even more general (or underlying) category of human relations.

Of course, skeptics (including many sociobiologists) argue that human nature *is* fundamentally selfish and aggressive and that adversarial relations *are* inevitable expressions of this nature. Indeed, these are still widely held assumptions throughout Western societies.[6] The analysis developed in this dissertation, however, suggests that these assumptions are not only misinformed but they are socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive. In order to prepare the ground for this larger discussion, however, the simple definition of culture

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[5] Refer, for example, to critiques of biological determinism in Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*, as well as Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*.

articulated above needs to be expanded into a more comprehensive theory of culture.

Dimensions of Culture

Defining culture as that which is socially learned or constructed and therefore contingent and variable, in contrast to those species characteristics that are biologically inherited and therefore relatively fixed, is only a starting point for a useful theory of culture. Thus defined, the range of phenomena that falls within the domain of culture is still so broad that its value as an analytical category is limited. For the purpose of this dissertation, two primary dimensions of culture also need to be distinguished. On one hand, culture can be analyzed in terms of *structures of the human mind.* On the other hand, it can also be analyzed in terms of *structures of social organization.*

Like the categories of human nature and culture discussed above, these psychological and sociological categories also need to be understood dialectically. Both are inseparably related and mutually informing. Nonetheless, they serve as useful analytical categories because they highlight the way that culture both shapes and is shaped by the interior world of the human mind as well as the exterior world of social organization. As the anthropologist Marc Howard Ross demonstrates in his work on culture and conflict, culture cannot be understood adequately without reference to both.[7]

Ross uses the term *psycho-cultural dispositions* to refer to culturally shared attitudes,

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6 Again, an excellent overview and critique of these assumptions, as well as their roots in biological determinism, can be found in Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*, and Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*.

7 Ross, *Culture of Conflict*.

values, and response tendencies – or structures of the mind – acquired through processes of social learning.[8] The term *psycho-cultural* highlights the fact that these psychological structures develop within a cultural matrix. They are widely shared rather than idiosyncratic. Of course, individuals do develop certain unique and idiosyncratic attitudes toward, and ideas about, the world around them. In addition, there is always tremendous variation between the ways different individuals think within a given culture. Cultures are not monolithic entities. Within any given culture there are always many currents, cross-currents, and sub-currents of attitudes, ideas, and behaviours. At the same time, many of the ways that we understand and respond to the world are socially learned and culturally contingent, and these are what Ross is signifying through the term psycho-cultural dispositions.

Structures of social organization, on the other hand, include the political, economic, legal, and other social arrangements (e.g., structures of authority, relations of production, systems of resource distribution, divisions of labour) that constrain and direct human attitudes, ideas, and behaviours. Of course, these social arrangements both shape and are shaped by the psycho-cultural dispositions of those who live within them. Thus both categories are inseparably linked and mutually informing. At the same time, they are analytically useful distinctions because they provide complementary insights into human culture.

Consider the case of conflict between social groups. Socio-structural analyses tend to highlight objective conflicts of interest within the organization of society (i.e., the empirically identifiable relations between capital and labour in a capitalist economy, between men and women in a patriarchal society, or between first- and third-world nations in a post-

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[8] Ibid., Chapter 4.

colonial world order). Moreover, socio-structural prescriptions tend to focus on reforming underlying economic, political, or legal structures – that is, reorganizing the relations of production within the economy, formulating laws that guarantee the equality of men and women, or writing off third-world debt and subordinating an unfettered global economy to structures of democratic control.

Psycho-cultural analyses, on the other hand, tend to highlight the diversity of interpretations and responses within otherwise objectively identifiable social arrangements (i.e., different ways the same social arrangements are culturally justified by those who are privileged by them as well as different cultural responses to the same social arrangements by those who are disadvantaged by them). Accordingly, psycho-cultural prescriptions tend to focus on reforming attitudes, values, and beliefs (i.e., the subjective structures of the mind rather than the objective structures of social organization). Given the significant role that early childhood development plays in the formation of these psycho-cultural dispositions, these strategies often focus on cultivating new attitudes and values in children or youth during their formative years. Of course, psycho-cultural dispositions continue to be formed or reinforced throughout life by a wide range of social institutions. Accordingly, strategies to reform these dispositions can also be directed at other age groups, as seen in contemporary "social marketing" campaigns (i.e., media campaigns that promote attitudes, values, and beliefs rather than material commodities).

Though disciplinary or paradigmatic blinders often privilege one perspective over the other, each perspective reveals as much as it obscures – like looking at different sides of the same coin. Although social arrangements may be objectively identifiable, perceptions of interests are highly subjective and vary significantly across cultures with otherwise similar

social structures, and psycho-cultural research is needed to understand and explain these differences. In addition, even though socio-structural theories often admit the possibility of multiple cross-cutting interests, psycho-cultural research is needed to explain how and why the same interests are ranked differently by different people in otherwise similar situations. At the same time, psycho-cultural studies can obscure larger social structures by focusing only on internal structures of consciousness. Therefore, socio-structural analyses are also clearly needed. As Ross explains, objectively structured conflicts of interest are half the picture. Inter-subjective interpretations of interests are the other half.[9]

Cultural Change and Adaptation

Given that structures of the mind and structures of social organization are both culturally contingent rather than genetically programmed (in the strong sense of the word), a theory of culture also needs to explain how and why these structures vary between cultures. A theory of culture, in other words, needs to account for processes of cultural change and adaptation. Of course, even processes of genetic adaptation (or evolution) defy simple modeling, and cultural adaptation is an infinitely more subtle and complex process. In this regard, cultural change and adaptation can be accounted for only through the crudest conceptual models. Nonetheless, crude models at least provide an initial vocabulary for thinking and talking about culture, as well as a starting point for cultural analysis and critique.

The model of cultural change and adaptation articulated below draws from a range of theoretical traditions, ranging again from anthropology and sociology to semiotics and

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[9] Ibid., Chapter 10.

cultural studies. At the core of the model is the concept of *cultural codes* (or conventions). After an initial definition of this core concept, the model is developed by examining how cultural codes function within a series of increasingly expansive cultural phenomena, from isolated *representations* to more complex *discursive constructs* to integrated *discourses* to *comprehensive discursive (or cultural) formations*.

Cultural Codes

Pyscho-cultural dispositions and socio-structural arrangements can vary widely between cultures. Even within a given culture, they often change over time. However, within any given culture at any given moment in time people are generally able to understand one another, communicate, and interact effectively because of culturally shared conventions or "codes".

Cultural codes, in this context, refer to widely shared *rules of correspondence* – or structured relationships – between the complex elements that constitute a given culture (i.e., the structures of mind and structures of social organization).[10] Some codes are explicitly stated and others merely implied. Some codes are learned or constructed through conscious effort and others are learned or constructed largely unconsciously. Regardless of how they are stated, learned, or constructed, cultural codes establish conventions or rules of correspondence through which thought, talk, and action becomes mutually intelligible within a shared culture.

In semiotics and cultural studies, a key concept for understanding the function of cultural

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[10] Refer to Hall, "Representation", for a concise discussion of cultural codes. See also Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*; Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*; and Turner, *British Cultural Studies*, for additional discussions of the concept of codes.

codes is the concept of *representation.*[11] And though a full-fledged theory of representation is not needed for the analysis developed in this dissertation, a simple overview of the concept provides a means of understanding the way that cultural codes function. In this context, representation refers to the social process of creating and exchanging meaning through the use of languages or "signifying systems".[12] Languages facilitate the exchange of meaning within a culture because words and other signs are *encoded* to stand for (i.e., to *represent*) the meanings and things we associate with them. In addition, the term *representation* also refers to the product of this process: *representations.*

Representations can be understood in terms of three basic dimensions or components. First, a representation is associated with some *sign* or *signifier* – a word, a gesture, an image, or anything that is used to refer to something else. Second, a representation is associated with some actual *thing* or *practice* in the world – some material or social phenomenon apart from the signifier used to refer to it. And third, a representation is associated with some *meaning* – some cognitive and/or affective association – that is conceptually linked with the respective sign and thing.[13] Together, this three-way association between sign, thing, and meaning constitute a given representation.[14]

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[11] For the most comprehensive scholarly treatment of the field of semiotic theory and history, refer to Bouissac, ed., *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*. The discussion that follows is adapted in large part from the work of Stuart Hall, who has woven concepts from diverse intellectual traditions, including semiotics, into a concise and insightful theory of culture. For an edited collection of Hall's contributions in this regard, refer to Morley and Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall*. For a concise discussion of many of the specific concepts outlined below, refer to Hall, "Representation".

[12] O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, and Fiske, eds., *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, p. 265.

[13] The term *meaning* refers not merely to conscious and rational interpretations of things, but also to unconscious and affective associations with signs and things. Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme in Allan, *Meaning of Culture*.

[14] This rather simplistic sounding but analytically useful distinction between *thing*, *sign*, and *meaning* is borrowed from Hall, "Representation". The genealogy of these terms can be traced to Saussure, *Course in*

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The relationship between these three components in any given representation, of course, is culturally determined. That is, there is no necessary correspondence between the signs, things, and meanings we associate together in a given representation. Meanings do not "reside" in things – as the same things can clearly have different meanings in different cultures. Neither do meanings reside in the signs we use to refer to those things – as the same signs can also have different meanings in different cultures. Nor does a necessary relationship exist between any given thing and the sign we associate with it – as the same things are frequently signified by different signs in different cultures. Thus we associate signs, things, and meanings together in our minds and through our language in culturally contingent rather than genetically programmed ways.

The formal study of these representational relationships and the codes that make them culturally intelligible has yielded valuable insights into the social or cultural construction of reality. Semiotic scholars point out, for instance, that while codes temporarily "fix" or "stabilize" the rules of correspondence within a culture, and thus enable groups of people to "translate" meaning in mutually intelligible ways, these codes are never entirely or permanently fixed. Subgroups within a given culture often challenge or change widely shared cultural codes. Alternative and oppositional codes often coexist alongside culturally dominant ones. In addition, dominant codes shift and change over time as a result of forces

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General Linguistics. Saussure conceptualized a *sign* as embodying both a *signifier* and a *signified*. In Hall's usage, and in this dissertation, the term *sign* is synonymous with Saussure's *signifier* – the actual word, sound, image, and so forth, used to signify something else. Saussure's term *signified*, on the other hand, refers to the mental concept that a specific sign is associated with – or the *meaning* in Hall's vocabulary. Following Saussure, other authors (e.g., Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*) added the term *referent* to refer to the actual phenomenon that a given sign referred to (as opposed to the mental concept or meaning the sign was associated with). In Hall's usage, and in this dissertation, the term *thing* is synonymous with this use of *referent*. Much semiotic theory has subsequently been developed around this

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within and between cultures.

Of course, while representations and the codes that render them intelligible may be among the most basic elements of culture (the "semiotic bricks" from which cultures are constructed), narrow attention to the isolated building blocks can obscure the larger and more complex cultural constructs that are often built from them. In this context, representations and codes take on depth and dimension as they are *articulated* together into more complex constructions. *Articulation,* in this sense, has a twofold meaning.[15] First, it refers to expression through language, where language is understood as any organized system of words or signs. In addition, it refers to the linking of two or more things together, such as the articulation of two bones at a joint. Of course, the two meanings are not as distinct as they appear at first glance, for expression through language always involves the joining or linking together of multiple words or signs.

Bearing in mind the insights of semiotics, articulation thus has a deeper meaning in cultural studies than in popular usage. Because all words or signs are parts of representational triads that also embody associations with specific things and meanings, the linking of signs together on the linguistic surface of communication is accompanied by the simultaneous linking of different meanings in people's minds, as well as different things and/or social practices in the material world. For example, the phrase "that's just human nature" is, on the surface, a simple linguistic expression. But beneath the surface of that

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three-way distinction between *sign*, *meaning*, and *thing*, although the vocabulary employed varies from author to author.

[15] For discussions of the concept of *articulation* as used in cultural studies, refer to O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, and Fiske, eds., *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, pp. 17-18; Hall, "Race" and Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation"; and Slack, "Theory and Method of Articulation".

linguistic expression lies a culturally coded set of meanings and practices. In many Western cultures, the phrase embodies a complex set of attitudes and beliefs (i.e., meanings) about the inevitability of certain human behaviours, such as the competitive pursuit of individual self-interests. As the discussion in subsequent chapters will illustrate, these attitudes and beliefs frequently translate into social structures and practices that tolerate or even encourage such behaviours.

In this way, just as individual words are articulated together to form more complex grammatical constructions in a given speech act, the meanings and things (or practices) that are associated with those words (or other signs) simultaneously articulate together to form more complex social constructions – or what will be referred to below as *discursive constructs*.[16] Like the concept of articulation, however, the term *discursive* also has a surface meaning and a deep meaning.[17] On the surface, it refers simply to complex linguistic expressions that are larger than a sentence or so. On a deeper level, however, it refers to the meanings and things or practices that are associated with these linguistic expressions. It thus reminds us of the inseparable connection between language, thought, and things or practices in our material and social worlds. It reminds us, in other words, that cultural ways of talking and thinking about things influence the ways we act in relations to those things.

A *discursive construct* is thus a socially constructed way of talking about, thinking about, and, by extension, acting in relation to, a given phenomenon – such as "human nature" in the

[16] The term *discursive construct*, as used in this dissertation, is a loose adaptation of the concept of *statement*, as conceptualized by Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*.

[17] This use of the term *discourse* also owes much to Foucault, Ibid. See also Hall, "Representation", and O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, and Fiske, eds., *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, pp. 92-94, for summaries of the concept as it has come to be used in cultural studies.

example above. Moreover, discursive constructs also tend to be governed by cultural codes or conventions. That is, some representations are more likely to be articulated together than others because cultural codes determine whether a given discursive construct will "make sense" or not within a given culture.

To extend the example above, highly individualistic and self-interested representations of human nature are easily intelligible when interpreted through the dominant codes of modern Western-liberal cultures. Some non-Western cultures, however, have historically represented human nature in a much more "relational" manner, with interests being understood primarily in communal rather than individualistic terms. In such cultures, Western representations of human nature would be relatively unintelligible.[18] Discursive constructs are thus culturally and historically specific. Even though they may have only a vague meaning, if any, in other cultures or at other times, they have very specific meanings that translate into concrete material practices within the cultures that articulate them.

To extend the analysis further: *discursive constructs* can be articulated together into highly complex systems of representation – entire *discourses* – which tend also to be governed by cultural codes or conventions. Discourses are widely shared systems of representation which provide culturally and historically specific ways of thinking about, talking about, and acting in relation to an entire class of phenomena. It is in this context that the connection between cultural codes and social practices becomes especially apparent.

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[18] As the political anthropologist Marc Howard Ross points out, "The notion of the individual apart from the group is a product of Western thought, not of the general human experience" (Ross, *Culture of Conflict*, p. 19).

For instance, for much of this century, Western medical discourse has provided culturally specific ways of thinking about, talking about, and practicing medicine. It has articulated a conceptual system – primarily a "disease model" of medicine – characterized by a specific vocabulary for thinking and talking about the human body. It has articulated a system of research and expertise that has determined what counts as valid medical knowledge. It has articulated doctor-patient relations in ways that largely define the former as expert service providers and the latter as victims of disease and passive recipients of medical intervention. And it has articulated the institutional arrangements – hospitals, health insurance, and so forth – that have organized and regulated modern medical practices. Other discourses, such as discourses on education, commerce, law, politics, and so forth, can be understood in the same way. They are all culturally and historically specific ways of thinking about, talking about, and acting in relation to a given class of phenomena.

In this context, all discourses share a number of similar characteristics. They articulate what is generally "sayable" or "thinkable" in relation to a given class of phenomena in any given cultural and historical context. They articulate bodies of "knowledge", as well as authoritative producers of this knowledge, that in turn constitute culturally and historically specific beliefs or "truths" about these phenomena. They articulate their "subjects" – the people that act within them or that they act upon – in such a manner that these subjects can be seen to, or even start to, personify or conform to these representations. And finally, they articulate social structures that organize and regulate collective practice in a manner that is consistent with these representations.

Moreover, discourses are as much defined by what they *exclude* as by what they include. They simultaneously influence what is *not* sayable or *not* thinkable in a given cultural

context; what does *not* constitute authoritative knowledge or truth and who is *not* an authoritative producer of such knowledge or truth; how subjects should *not* act; and what institutional configurations are *not* present.

For instance, in the case of Western medical discourse, holistic concepts such as "health maintenance" and "prevention" have until recently been eclipsed by reductionist concepts such as disease management and intervention. In this manner, healing arts based in nutrition, the use of herbs, body movement, acupuncture, and so forth have largely been excluded as valid knowledge systems in the West for much of this century. In turn, the human "subjects" of Western medicine have generally not been seen as primary agents in their own health-maintenance and healing. Accordingly, institutional support for these alternative approaches to health and healing have been largely absent. In all of these ways, modern medical discourse has been defined as much by what is absent within it as by what is present.

To extend the analysis even further, while discursive constructs can be articulated together into entire discourses, entire discourses can in turn be articulated with other discourses into comprehensive discursive formations.[19] In this context, a *comprehensive discursive formation* refers to the articulation of distinct but mutually compatible discourses in a manner that reinforces similar ways of thinking, talking, and acting in relation to many classes of phenomena. And once again, discourses articulate together into larger discursive

[19] This use of the term *comprehensive discursive formation* is loosely adapted from Foucault's two terms *discursive formation* and *episteme*, as conceptualized in Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. In this dissertation, a *comprehensive discursive formation* refers to the articulation of entire discourses into a larger discursive complex or totality. In this way, the distinction between *discursive construct*, *discourse*, and *comprehensive discursive formation* is used to indicate three distinct levels of analysis: the micro, meso, and macro, respectively. At the same time, however, these three terms are not meant to constitute mathematically precise units of measurement. The "boundaries" between them cannot be rigidly defined. Rather, they are metaphorical constructs intended to aid thinking and talking about micro-, meso-, and macro-level cultural constructions.

formations according to cultural codes or conventions.

For instance, when the medical discourse described above is articulated with discourses that idealize the free-market delivery of goods and services, they form a larger discursive formation that translates, in practice, into a commercialized medical system that sells health care as a commodity to those who can afford it and thereby operates much like any other free-market entity – as in the United States today. On the other hand, when the medical discourse described above is articulated with discourses that value the public delivery of essential goods and services, they form a discursive formation that translates, in practice, into a public health care model that provides service irrespective of the financial status of its recipients – as in Canada today.

In this regard, a discursive formation can be thought of as a sort of discursive universe — a constellation of relevant discourses that characterize a given culture at a given historical time, and within which its members are born, grow and develop, and learn "normal" ways of thinking, talking, and acting.[20] And though this constellation of discourses is never permanently fixed and might always be re-articulated in new ways, it tends to appear entirely "natural" to those who were raised within it. In other words, we tend to take our cultural or discursive environment for granted.

None of this, of course, implies that these discursive formations should or even could be avoided. Discourses *enable* as well as *constrain* us. They provide the productive scaffolding for human talk, thought, and practice, even though that scaffolding simultaneously limits us

[20] The terms *worldview, ideology, paradigm, episteme, weltanshauung,* or *knowledge system* all approach this same abstraction from only slightly different angles. In the context of this dissertation, however, the advantage of a *discursive* analysis is that it focuses on the relatively tangible and accessible communicative traces or indicators of these more abstract mental and cultural phenomena.

in various ways. Either way, discourses are an inevitable and necessary feature of social existence. Human beings are discursive creatures. We will always exist within discursive environments. The challenge, from a cultural studies standpoint, is to remain aware that these environments are culturally constructed and that they can be reformed.

Moreover, even though semiotic and cultural studies scholars tend to use the concept of *discourse* to emphasize the crucial role that systems of language and representation play in the formation of cultures, the role that collective social structures and practices play should not be overlooked. Languages provide a model for thinking about culture because languages provide the means of thought and communication that make cultures possible. But language is only a partial model or metaphor for culture. Once the insights provided by this metaphor are grasped – especially the central role played by cultural codes – it is helpful to translate the concept of discourse back into the broader concept of culture. In this regard, one can think not only in terms of *discursive constructs* but also in terms of *cultural constructs.* Similarly, one can think not only in terms of *comprehensive discursive formation*s but also in terms of *comprehensive cultural formations.* In both cases, the former terms highlight the linguistic or representational dimensions of culture while the latter terms bring our attention back to the full breadth of cultural expression, including social structures and practices. In subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I will therefore use these terms interchangeably, depending on whether I am emphasizing "representational" or "practical" expressions of culture.

Influences on Cultural Codes

Moving from the analysis of isolated representations to the analysis of increasingly

complex discursive systems to the analysis of integrated cultural formations provides an increasingly expansive vantage point from which to examine and critique culture. From each of these vantage points, one of the more obvious features of any discursive or cultural system, as discussed above, is its social and historical relativity. Different societies employ different codes, which yield different discursive or cultural formations.

Recognition of this historical specificity raises questions such as how and why do specific cultural formations arise in a given historical context? What are the social consequences and implications of these different formations? And how, as well as on what basis, can the codes that underlie these formations be critiqued, evaluated, or reformed? The theoretical framework outlined above provides conceptual categories with which we can begin to answer these questions as well as influence or reform our cultural environment. Consider the question: How do different cultural codes gain prominence (or dominance) within a given culture?

On the most obvious level, natural environment appears to play some role. Cultural codes can be understood at least partially as social adaptations to environmental features and pressures. Thus many cultures have developed complex systems for talking and thinking about unique features of their natural environments, from tropical rainforests to tundra and from deserts to oceanic atolls. On another level, historical chance and circumstance undoubtedly play a role in the propagation of various cultural codes, as when diverse cultures come in contact with one another through migration and exploration, and the cross-fertilization of words, ideas, and practices occurs. On yet another level, individual leaps of imagination and invention undoubtedly play a role in the genesis of new cultural codes, as when individual minds articulate radical new insights – such as Einstein's grasp of the

relation between energy and matter (i.e., $e=mc^2$) that in turn exert profound influences on social thought, talk, and practice (in this example, by ushering in the atomic era).

The Role of Social Relations

But beyond these basic forces, many critical scholars have also turned their attention to the important role that social relations – relations of production, gender, race, nationality, age, and so forth – play in the ascendance of various cultural codes. Much of this scholarship has focused on the role that *unequal power relations* play in these processes.[21] From this vantage point, cultural codes can at least partially be understood as the outcome of ongoing historical struggles between competing social groups seeking to construct our cultural worlds – from our structures of consciousness to our structures of social organization – in ways that serve their own self-interests.[22]

Though it can be argued that not all social groups are motivated to promote their own self-interests at the expense of others, the historical record clearly demonstrates that many have been, and continue to be, motivated in these ways. For instance, even as historical instances of slavery provide glaring examples of this phenomena, the more subtle forms of racism that are still prevalent today can also be understood in the same way. Economic exploitation and gender domination provide other obvious examples of the same

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[21] For overviews as well as seminal edited collections of this scholarship, refer to Turner, *Cultural Studies: An Introduction*; Storey, *Cultural Studies*; Hardt, *Critical Communication Studies*; During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader*; Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies*; Surber, *Culture and Critique*; Dirks, Eley, and Orthner, eds., *Culture, Power, History*; Giroux and Shannon, eds., *Education and Cultural Studies*; Scannell, Schlesinger, and Sparks, eds., *Culture and Power*; Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, and Woollacott, eds., *Culture, Society and the Media*; and Morley and Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall.*

[22] It should be noted that mutualism and cooperation also appear to play very important roles in social or cultural evolution. To date, however, most critical analyses have tended to neglect mutualism and cooperation as important determinants of discourse and culture – a theme that will be picked up again in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

phenomenon.

Moreover, even though history can be interpreted (in part) as a process of competing social groups seeking to construct the world in ways that best serve their own self-interests, it must be remembered that a level playing field has not always characterized this competition. Historically, some groups have had clear advantages over others in their abilities to propagate cultural codes that promote their own self-interests. By depriving women of equal access to higher education and in turn to the means of cultural production, men have gained many historical advantages. Many ethnic minorities and the working poor have also experienced unequal access to the means of cultural production, with similar results. For various material and historical reasons, then, some social groups (and alliances of groups) have historically occupied privileged positions from which to define or construct our cultural worlds.

The Question of Intentionality

To say that power relations influence the ways we think, talk, and act need not imply, however, that such influence is necessarily conscious or intentional – although in some cases it clearly is. The leadership in Nazi Germany, for instance, was clearly pursuing intentional designs through its articulation of discourses around German nationalism, militarism, and racial supremacy.

Even though efforts to define reality may sometimes be conscious and intentional, self-interested definitions of reality need not always be arrived at through conscious and deliberate processes. People are often inclined to “see” the world in ways that serve their

own self-interests, without necessarily being aware that they are doing so.[23] We do not always consciously decide that we want to interpret things one way rather than another after weighing the extent to which other possible interpretations might promote our self-interests. Rather, our interpretations of reality emerge through the interplay of complex, subtle, and often subconscious processes of motivation, rationalization, socialization, and so forth.

Moreover, because of the complex "chicken-and-egg" nature of causality between language, thought, and social practice, efforts to attribute intentionality are doubly problematic. How can intentionality be solely and definitively attributed to individuals or groups when the intentions of those individuals or groups are influenced by the language, thoughts, and practices that preceded them? Intentions are at least partially shaped by psycho-cultural dispositions that we do not choose to inherit. This is not to suggest that individuals or groups should be excused from any responsibility for their own actions. Rather, it is simply to suggest that issues of intentionality are often complicated and conscious intentionality cannot always be assumed. We do exercise free will, but we exercise it within mental and social structures that were not entirely of our own choosing.

Regardless of whether these processes are conscious and intentional or not, the ultimate ascendancy and establishment of some cultural codes over others can still be a function of social relations. For example, because some groups are in more privileged positions from which to determine how various phenomena are represented, it follows that their systems of

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23 Refer, for instance, to the concept of *elective affinity* articulated by Weber in *Essays in Sociology*, pp. 62-63, 284-85, and elaborated by Clement in *Canadian Corporate Elite*, pp. 283-4, 92. In brief, elective affinity refers to the ways that people have a natural affinity for ideas that support their material interests and they elect, either consciously or unconsciously, to adopt those ideas over others. Moreover, as Clement illustrates, those with the most control over the means of cultural production are often able to project ideas that they have an affinity for onto others, even though those others might have different material interests.

representation will dominate – whether intentionally or not – within a given culture at a given historical moment.[24] In this regard, one of the most consistently supported empirical findings in mass communications research is the existence of a "hierarchy of access" to the commercial media, characterized by a relatively exclusive population of elite voices at the top.[25] Furthermore, in contemporary societies, those who have better access to the means of mass communication occupy a privileged position from which to construct the dominant representations, or preferred definitions, of reality.[26] The ascendancy of a remarkably narrow range of interpretations on most issues does not mean, however, that the individuals positioned at the top of this hierarchy of access are consciously "conspiring" with one another to promote self-serving interpretations of reality. Many of them may well be entirely sincere in their efforts to simply interpret, and respond to, the world as they see it. The ways that they see the world, however, often unconsciously coincide with their own self-interests.

Moreover, the degree to which such privileged groups are successful in their discursive construction of reality is the degree to which the codes they cultivate appear normal or natural within their culture. And the degree to which these codes appear normal or natural is in turn the degree to which alternative cultural codes are ignored or marginalized. On the other hand, cultural codes are never completely fixed, and efforts to advance alternatives from the margins are sometimes successful. In this regard, the histories of cultures can at

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[24] The genealogy of this theme can be traced, for instance, to Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*. Refer also to Eagleton, *Ideology*, for a more contemporary discussion of this theme.

[25] Refer, for example, to Hackett, "Hierarchy of Access"; Gandy, "Structuration of Dominance"; Schlesinger, "Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism"; Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, *Negotiating Control*; Gans, *Deciding What's News*; and Sparks, "The Media and the State".

[26] For more detailed discussions of this theme, refer to Eagleton, *Ideology*; Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*; Hall, "Rediscovery of 'Ideology'". Many contemporary discussions of this theme can in turn be traced to Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*.

least in part be interpreted as ongoing processes of discursive or cultural "negotiation" – whether conscious or not – between diverse social groups.

Hegemony

The process of establishing and maintaining, as well as challenging or reforming, dominant discursive or cultural formations was explored over three-quarters of a century ago by Antonio Gramsci.[27] Central to Gramsci's analysis was his reworking of the traditional concept of *hegemony*. Historically, the concept of hegemony referred to the spatial or geographical extension of dominance by one political entity over others. This type of hegemony was typically achieved and sustained largely through force. In contrast, Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony referred to the relative ability of various social classes to project their own ways of seeing and representing the world on others. This was accomplished, according to Gramsci, not primarily through physical force but through cultural leadership.

Since Gramsci's original reworking of the concept of hegemony, the term has fallen into rather cliched usage through which it has lost much of its value as a theoretical construct. The term is often used simply to refer to dominance of any kind. In Gramsci's usage, however, the term signified the ability of dominant social classes to cultivate, through non-coercive means, a popular worldview that naturalized their dominant social positions and made these structural arrangements appear to serve the interests of all other social classes. Force was not needed provided subordinate social classes would consent to their own subordination based on the assumption that it was inevitable or that it actually served their

best interests.

Of course, Gramsci developed his analysis primarily in terms of economic class dominance. Retaining Gramsci's original sense of the term, contemporary cultural theorists have also applied the concept of hegemony to relations of race, gender, nationality, and so forth. In this expanded context, hegemonic dominance is achieved when any social group (or alliance of groups) is able to establish their representations of reality so effectively that they become the accepted "common sense" not only within their own group but also within other groups whose interests are subordinated in the process. The key point, however, is that hegemony is not achieved perceptibly, through force. Rather, it is achieved relatively imperceptibly, through the cultivation of consent to a given social order. To the degree that this is effective, the result is the normalization or naturalization of particular ways of thinking, talking, and acting – along with the marginalization of alternatives. In this manner, hegemonic dominance legitimates some cultural codes while simultaneously discrediting others.

For example, historical efforts to exclude women from many arenas of public life, ranging from higher education to public decision making, and to consign them primarily to domestic affairs, can be understood as a hegemonic process. It involved the cultivation of "common sense" notions among both men and women regarding the "appropriate" role of women in society. Of course, not all women historically accepted these common sense notions and many struggled against them. On the other hand, many women did accept these notions, as demonstrated by women who organized in opposition to women's suffrage

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[27] Refer to Gramsci, "Prison Notebooks".

movements on the conviction (among others) that the moral purity of women would be compromised by their entrance into public life and that the entire social fabric would thereby be weakened.[28]

As this example demonstrates, of course, hegemonic dominance is never final or absolute. Even though much remains to be achieved, Western women (as well as many ethnic and other historically oppressed minorities) have gained significant ground in recent decades. History can therefore be understood as an ongoing process of hegemonic struggle or negotiation. Discursive "boundaries" shift and change over time along with the cultural codes that underlie them. Sometimes they remain relatively unchanged for extended periods. Other times they go through radical transformations. In any given period of hegemonic dominance, however, change tends to come from the margins – from outside of the dominant cultural common sense.

Efforts to change established cultural codes therefore tend to be uphill struggles. Even when such changes may be in the widest popular interests, populations whose language, thought, and actions have been largely prefigured by existing discursive or cultural formations, and who have thus internalized views that may ultimately subordinate their own interests to other historically privileged groups, can be expected to resist those very changes that might emancipate them from their own oppressive conditions. Simply put, it is often difficult to step outside of a discursive universe that you have been born and raised in. It is difficult to imagine what the world might look like outside it. Moreover, it can be difficult even to recognize that you are living in a culturally and historically specific discursive

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[28] For an overview of the arguments put forward by women who opposed women's suffrage, refer to Cholmeley, *The Women's Anti-Suffrage Movement*, and Adams, "American Anti-Suffrage Women".

formation at all. To the extent that hegemonic dominance has been effective, that formation will appear not as a cultural construct at all but simply as "reality" itself – normal, natural, and inevitable.

We are thus born into culturally constructed worlds that are not of our own making. This is not to suggest that people cannot be agents in changing or reconstructing the cultural worlds they inhabit. In light of the ultimate fluidity of cultural codes, such possibilities are always present. Such changes, however, are contingent upon our ability to recognize the historical specificity of our cultural environment and to step outside of it, if only in our imaginations at first – as subsequent chapters of this dissertation attempt to do with regard to the culture of adversarialism.

CHAPTER II: POWER

Given the model of culture outlined in Chapter I, discourse analysis has become a widely used method of cultural critique. In this chapter, discourse analysis is used to begin deconstructing the culture of adversarialism through an examination of one of its most fundamental concepts: *power*.

Representations of power and contests over power dominate the contemporary public sphere. From political and economic competition to legal and social advocacy, we have constructed elaborate systems of thought, talk, and practice around adversarial relations of power. Relations of power have thus, either implicitly or explicitly, become central constructs in contemporary Western thought. Like all discursive constructs, however, Western representations of power are culturally and historically specific. They illuminate some facets of reality even as they obscure others.

Models of Power

"Power To" versus "Power Over"

For several decades now, theorists of power have drawn a distinction between two broad ways of thinking and talking about power – a distinction that is generally made by contrasting the expressions "power to" versus "power over".[1] As Wartenberg explains,

[1] This distinction is discussed by many theorists of power, including Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*; Wrong, *Power*; Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*; Hartsock, *Feminist Historical Materialism*; Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*; Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*; Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*; Coser, "Notion of Power"; Dowding, *Power*; and others.

> the expressions *power-to* and *power-over* are a shorthand way of making a distinction between two fundamentally different ordinary-language locutions within which the term "power" occurs. Depending upon which locution one takes as the basis of one's theory of power, one will arrive at a very different model of the role of power in the social world.[2]

In this context, "power to" is understood as a generalized capacity to accomplish something. Thus people may have the "power to" bear children, erect a bridge, coordinate a journey to the moon, or establish a system of democratic governance. On the other hand, "power over" is understood as the capacity of some people to exercise control over others – to dominate or exploit them in some manner.[3] In this sense, "power over" relations are adversarial relations in which one party exercises some power advantage against the other in an oppressive manner. The historical domination of capitalists over labourers, men over women, or colonizing nations over colonized ones, are all classic examples that have received much attention in this literature.

After setting up this distinction between "power to" and "power over", many scholars either implicitly or explicitly dismiss the first as largely irrelevant to social theory. For example, Steven Lukes, one of the more influential theorists of power, explicitly dismisses the concept of "power to" by arguing that it is "of less value" than the concept of "power over" for two reasons.[4] First, he asserts that "power to" theories "are out of line with the central meanings of 'power' as traditionally understood and with the concerns that have always centrally preoccupied students of power". Thus Lukes invokes scholarly tradition as

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2 Wartenberg, *Forms of Power*, p. 27.

3 This latter definition characterizes most social and political theories of power. This can be seen, for example, in Weber, "Domination"; Dahl, "The Concept of Power" and "Power as the Control of Behaviour"; Bachrach and Baratz, "Two Faces of Power"; Lukes, ed., *Power*; and de Jouvenel, *On Power* – all of whom were highly influential theorists of power.

4 This quote, and the quotes that follow, are taken from Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, pp. 30-31.

his first reason for dismissing the relevance of "power to" theories. Second, Lukes asserts that when one focuses on "power to" concepts "the conflictual aspect of power – the fact that it is exercised over people – disappears altogether from view. And along with it there disappears the central interest of studying power relations in the first place".[5] In this vein, Lukes argues that "power to" theories end up "concealing from view the central aspects of power which they define out of existence". Ironically, however, by dismissing "power to" theories, Lukes does exactly the same thing in reverse. He conceals "power to" categories from view by defining them as irrelevant to serious scholarly inquiry.[6]

In this regard, even though theorists like Lukes sometimes acknowledge that "power over" is only one category of power relations, they explicitly privilege it as the exclusive focus – the central category – of analysis.[7] Most other scholars, however, do not even acknowledge other categories of power relations in their writing. They simply assume that the word power is synonymous with "power over", without any qualifying discussions – which are seldom needed because the terms are synonymous for most readers as well.[8]

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5 As the discussion below will illustrate, the opposite appears actually to be the case. "Power over" analyses figure prominently within the broader category "power to", while "power to" analyses are obscured within the more narrow category "power over".

6 Lukes's argument is doubly ironic given his reference to *scholarly tradition* (above) as a justification for dismissing "power to" theories. The irony arises here because scholarly tradition is seen by most critical theorists as a potential hegemonic constraint on critical thought – and thus something to be perpetually critiqued rather than uncritically accepted. Yet Lukes invokes tradition while at the same time explicitly subscribing to the theory of hegemony.

7 This explicit focus on "power over" relations also characterizes the work of many other theorists of power. For instance, after drawing the distinction between "power to" and "power over", Wartenberg, in *Forms of Power*, p. 5, goes on to argue that "a theory of power has, as a first priority, the articulation of the meaning of the concept of power-over because social theory employs this concept as a primary means of conceptualizing the nature of the fundamental inequalities in society". "Power over", he thus asserts, is "the primary meaning of power". And, like Lukes, he in turn argues that a focus on "power to" relations merely "shifts the theorist's gaze away from the set of phenomena that a theory of social power must comprehend, namely the illegitimate inequalities that exist in modern societies".

8 Refer, for example, to essays in Scannell, Schlesinger, and Sparks, eds., *Culture and Power*; and Dirks, Eley, and Orthner, eds., *Culture, Power, History*.

Similarly, in popular discourses, the terms are also generally synonymous. In discussions of social relations (as opposed to discussion of energy or physics), references to power tend to imply adversarial relations of domination, oppression, or struggle. Western-liberal discourses thus tend to illuminate only one category of social power relations while they obscure all others.

As the discussion in Chapter I reminds us, however, discursive constructs are not simply passive or neutral linguistic devices. They affect the ways that people think and act in relation to the phenomena they represent. By privileging adversarial aspects of power, we primarily "see" adversarial "power over" relations in their analyses, while other types of power relations recede from view. This is not to assert that "power over" relations are figments of our imagination. They are real and very worthy of attention. Rather, it is simply to point out that these particular relations tend to be highlighted and emphasized in Western discourses while other relations of power tend to be obscured.

In order to understand the implications of this narrow understanding of power relations, including the ways that it informs our broader culture of adversarialism, it is helpful to step back from the adversarial "power over" construct and situate it within the full field of power relations. Situating "power over" within this wider context allows us to recognize what is obscured or excluded by a narrower focus on adversarialism. The recognition of these discursive blind-spots in turn provides a framework for evaluating alternatives to the culture of adversarialism. Toward this end, a more comprehensive framework for thinking and talking about power relations is outlined below.

"Power To" and "Power Over" in Context

Aside from the fact that "power to" categories tend to be dismissed or obscured in Western-liberal discourses, the distinction between "power to" and "power over" is problematic in its own right. When it is used at all, it tends to be used in a manner that implies the two concepts are distinct but parallel categories. If power is not understood in terms of "power to", it must be understood in terms of "power over". Conversely, if power is not understood in terms of "power over", it must be understood in terms of "power to". On closer inspection, however, this parallel distinction is problematic. Cannot "power over" more accurately be understood as a subcategory of "power to"? For instance, if I have "power over" someone, is this not simply another way of saying that I have the "power *to* exercise control *over*" that person? In fact, all possible forms of "power over" can be conceived in terms of the power *to* exercise control *over* – thus making "power over" a specific sub-category of the more general category "power to".

The more general nature of "power to" is further illustrated by considering that other forms of "power to" do not entail exercising "power over" others at all. For instance, a group of people that makes a consensual decision to collectively build a bridge are exercising their "power to" pursue a common goal by acting in a cooperative manner. The very terms *consensus* and *cooperation* denote the fact that within the group no individual or alliance of individuals exercises "power over" the others in the sense of dominating or exploiting them.[9]

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[9] Of course, as Lukes points out in *Power: A Radical View*, a subordinate group can arrive at a consensus that unwittingly sacrifices its own interests to the interests of a dominant group, as a result of the hegemonic influence that the dominant group can exercise over the subordinate group's common sense views. This is, in fact, the key insight of all hegemonic/ideological models of "power over" relations. Such examples, however, could be called examples of false or imposed consensus. They do not negate examples of fully informed consensus arrived at through transparent and cooperative means.

These terms denote a different kind of "power to" than that denoted by "power over". They denote the power to act together in the pursuit of a common goal. Therefore "power over" is only one possible subcategory of "power to".[10]

In this context, it is problematic to understand "power to" and "power over" as parallel or equivalent categories. Rather, "power to" – which could be restated in the general terms of *power as capacity* – is an over-arching definitional category within which "power over" can be located. But if this is the case, what other sub-categories of *power as capacity* are being obscured by a narrow focus on "power over"? What other subcategories can be conceptualized in order to provide a more comprehensive framework for thinking and talking about (as well as enacting) relations of power?

On the most basic level, it is possible to distinguish between two broad subcategories of power as capacity. On the one hand, people have the capacity to exercise "power together" in a cooperative manner. This type of power relation will be referred to below simply as *cooperative power relations.*[11] Yet the concept of "power over" – as it is typically used in the sense of domination, exploitation, or oppression – is still too narrow to serve as the alternate parallel category to *cooperative power relations.* To illustrate this, consider that a stalemate arrived at by two equally powerful adversaries is not an example of *cooperative power relations*, yet it also is not an example of "power over". If two people are equally

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10 "Power over" is sometimes acknowledged as a special case of the more general category "power to". Refer, for example, to Wrong, *Power*, p. xiii; Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*; and Parsons, "Power and the Social System". None of these authors, however, develop a schema for conceptualizing the full range of power relations as outlined below.

11 In fairness, some feminist scholars have theorized various forms of cooperative or "co-active" power relations, and these theories will be discussed in some detail in Chapter IV. These feminist theories of power, however, are not consistent with most theories of social and political power. In this regard, due to their relatively marginalized status, they actually illuminate the boundaries of traditional discourses on power.

powerful, one cannot be said to have "power over" the other, even if they are locked in an adversarial relationship. Rather, the capacity people have to exercise "power against" one another in a generalized adversarial manner would be the parallel, mutually exhaustive, alternate category to *cooperative power relations* – for it encompasses both "power over" as well as the contrasting possibility of the stalemate.[12] Thus, on this first level of distinction, people either exercise "power together" in a cooperative manner, or they exercise "power against" one another in an adversarial manner. For the sake of clarity, the second of these categories will be referred to below as *adversarial power relations*. *Cooperative power relations* and *adversarial power relations* can therefore be conceptualized as the first-level subcategories of the more general definitional category *power as capacity*.

In this context, "power over" is a subcategory of *adversarial power relations*. The example of the stalemate introduced above – which can be expressed in terms of a "balance of power" within an adversarial relationship – is the parallel, alternative subcategory.[13] Moreover, the distinguishing characteristic of these two subcategories is *power equality* versus *power inequality*. In the case of a "balance of power", power is distributed equally between adversarial agents such that neither can dominate the other. In the case of "power over", power is distributed unequally between adversarial agents such that one can dominate the other.

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[12] In *Power*, p. 237, Wrong does, in passing, use the phrase "power against" to indicate a particular form of "power to". He does not, however, provide a comprehensive schema within which to locate that insight.

[13] The concept of balance of power, sometimes referred to as "intercursive power", has been theorized to some extent in Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, p. 118; Gamson, *Power and Discontent*; and Reismann, Denny, and Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd*. In many respects, all pluralistic models of partisan democracy embody some notions of balance of power. To my knowledge, however, the concept has never been situated within a comprehensive framework in order to clearly distinguish how it relates to other relations of power.

It is only this third-level subcategory – *power inequality* as a subcategory of *adversarial power relations,* as a subcategory of *power as capacity* – that most people, including most power theorists, are referring to when they use the word "power". This narrow definition of power, however, clearly obscures other important relations of power. Moreover, when some power theorists contrast this third-level subcategory as parallel and equivalent to the overarching definitional category of "power to" – which in turn tends to be dismissed as irrelevant to social theory – all of these other categories disappear from view. In addition, the concepts of *power* and *inequality* – which refer to entirely distinct phenomena – tend to be conflated.

The "power to" versus "power over" distinction becomes even more problematic when you consider that the subcategories of *power equality* and *power inequality* within *adversarial power relations* have parallel counterpoints within the category of *cooperative power relations* – which in turn are also obscured when the term power becomes synonymous with the concept of "power over". To illustrate this, consider that two or more agents acting cooperatively can also be characterized by either equal or unequal distributions of power, and the distinction is again significant. In this context, *power equality* within *cooperative power relations* could be said to result in the "mutual empowerment" of all cooperating agents. For example, this would be the case when a group of equals deliberate together and agree to cooperate in a project that mutually benefits all involved. In cases such as this, *power equality* expressed within c*ooperative power relations* results in the "mutual empowerment" of the entire group.

In contrast, *power inequality* within *cooperative power relations* could be said to result in the "assisted empowerment" of the less powerful agents by the more powerful agents. For

instance, the relation between a parent and child involves certain power inequalities. But this does not mean that the parent need oppress or exploit the child. Rather, parent-child relations are more commonly characterized by nurturing – a form of "assisted empowerment" – in which the child actually benefits from the unequal power relationship. The same can be said of healthy teacher-student relationships.[14] In both of these cases, power inequalities can actually be understood as necessary and desirable characteristics of these relationships. In addition, though necessary and desirable, these power inequalities are often merely temporary or transitional. The goal of these relationships is often to nurture the unequal parties until they arrive at a state of equality.

The framework outlined above is thus more nuanced and comprehensive than the simple and problematic distinction between "power to" and "power over" – as the visual summary on the following page illustrates.

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[14] In *Forms of Power*, Wartenberg does acknowledge the possibility that some unequal power relationships can be beneficial to the less powerful agents in the manner described above. He refers to these as "transformative power" relationships, and uses the same examples of nurturing and education to illustrate his point. However, because he does not clarify the distinction between adversarial and cooperative relations on the one hand, and between equality and inequality on the other, he conflates the two and thus views transformative power simply as another type of "power over" relationship. Various feminist theorists have also articulated theories of "nurturing" power which will be discussed in some detail in Chapter IV.

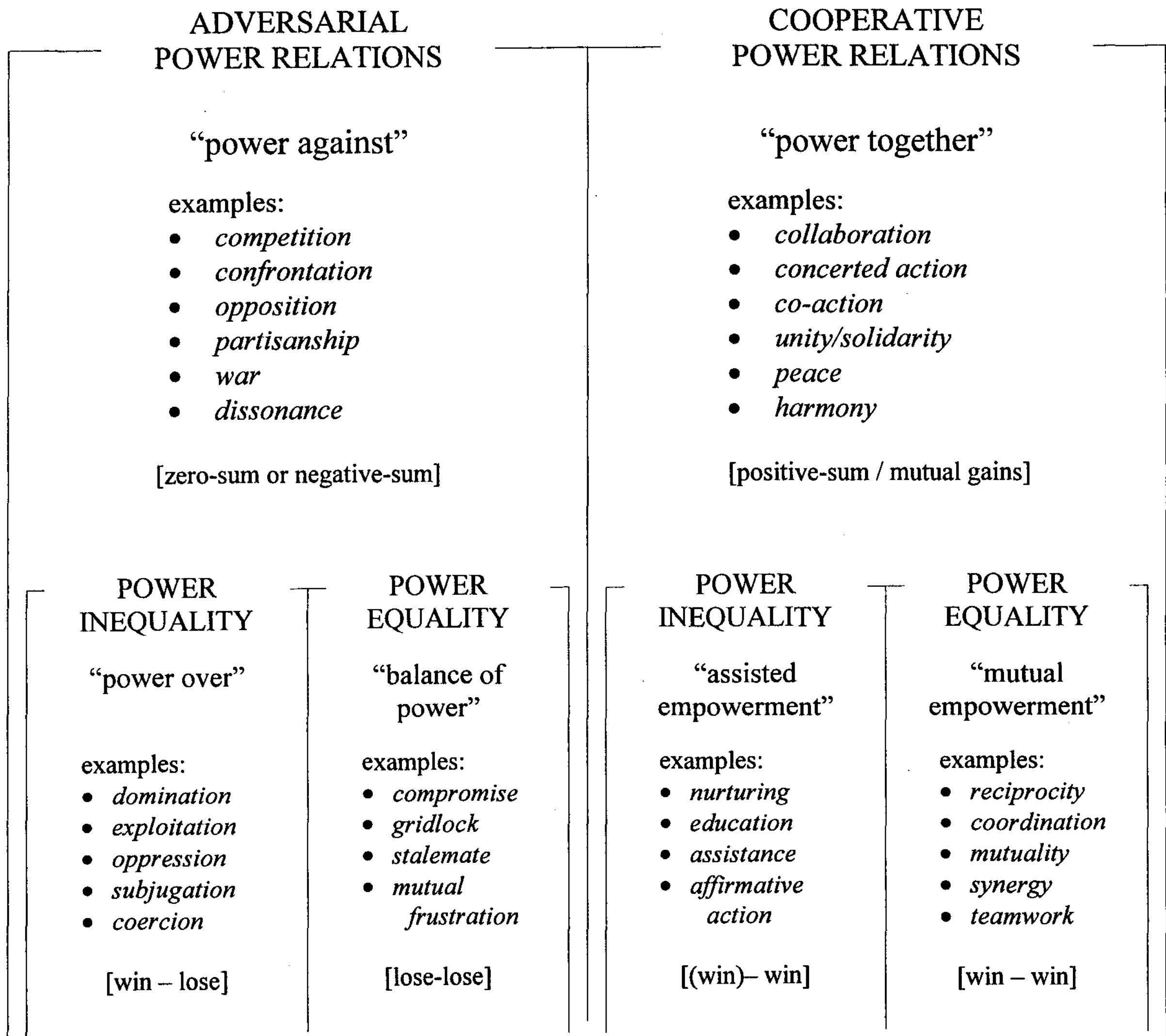

FIGURE 1: Power and Power Relations (*ideal type* categories).

The schema above, of course, is merely a conceptual model – a visual and mental representation intended to aid thought and discussion regarding what are ultimately highly complex and subtle phenomena. In this sense, the categorizations are not intended to be rigid or precise. Rather, they are intended merely to provide a vocabulary of *ideal types*, as Weber used the term, by which broad patterns and distinctions can be recognized and discussed. In this sense they are more metaphorical than mathematical.

This metaphorical schema, however, helps us make a number of distinctions that are often lost in discussions of power. [15] Most obviously, it visually demonstrates that "power to" and "power over" are not equivalent categories. But beyond this, the schema also provides a framework within which to understand many other types of social relations that are generally obscured in discourses on power. For instance, within the schema, *power inequality* cannot be automatically equated with relations of domination, exploitation, and so forth. *Power inequality* may be oppressive when coupled with *adversarial power relations*, but in the context of *cooperative power relations*, *inequality* can actually be empowering, as in the nurturing relationship between a parent and child, or the educational relationship between a teacher and student. Relations of domination between entire social groups can even potentially be reformed into relations of assisted empowerment in order to rectify historical inequities of power. Affirmative action policies and progressive taxation schemes are all potential examples of such assisted empowerment.

[15] At the same time, of course, a number of other important distinctions are obscured by this schema. For instance, the schema does not distinguish between different sources of conflict (e.g., between conflicts that arise from simple misunderstandings as opposed to ideological convictions or structural disparities). Nor does it distinguish between different manifestations of adversarialism (e.g., rational debate as opposed to physical warfare). However, everything cannot be accomplished within a single schematic. In addition, some attention will be paid to these other distinctions in subsequent chapters.

Hierarchy, as an organizational principle, can also be seen as a potentially desirable form of inequality. In a social or organizational context, hierarchy refers to unequally structured power relations. Not surprisingly, many people equate hierarchy with oppression. But this equation conflates *unequal power relations* with *adversarial power relations*. In the context of *cooperative relations*, however, hierarchy can be recognized as a valuable and often necessary organizing principle. When any group of otherwise equal people is too large to effectively engage every member in every decision-making process, the group may benefit by intentionally delegating certain decision-making powers to smaller, often elected, sub-groups. This consensually structured inequality – or hierarchy – can in turn empower a group to accomplish things it could otherwise not accomplish. In the process, it can also relieve the burden of ongoing decision-making responsibilities from large numbers of people who are thereby freed to devote their time and energy to other productive pursuits that can benefit the entire group. Hierarchy can therefore be a valuable and desirable organizing principle under the right conditions. But these conditions include cooperative relations between otherwise equal people. In this respect, while the schema outlined above illustrates that hierarchy cannot automatically be equated with oppression, it also cautions that hierarchy cannot automatically be equated with empowerment, as many conventional "functionalist" theorists often conversely assume.[16] Under conditions of adversarial relations, hierarchy does tend to lead to oppression.

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[16] Refer, for example, to the functionalist theory of power and hierarchy developed by Parsons, "Power and the Social System". As Wrong points out in *Power*, p. 249, "to argue that permanent hierarchies of power relations are indispensable in any modern complex society is not, of course, to stamp the seal of necessity on the power structures of particular existing societies. Functionalist arguments have too often been vulnerable to the charge that they imply just this... as in the case of Parsons... Parsons, as we have seen, is open to the accusation that he idealizes the status quo because he minimizes to the point of neglect the use of power on behalf of some group interests at the expense of others".

Another insight offered by the schema is the recognition that all adversarial relations themselves cannot be lumped together. Rather, adversarial relations take very different forms depending on the relative equality or inequality of power between the antagonists. While inequality between antagonists leads to the domination, exploitation, or oppression of one by the other, equality often merely leads to mutual frustration. In this context, even though equality may be preferable to inequality in adversarial relations – at least from the perspective of the victims of oppressive relationships – both can be essentially disempowering (in the former case, for one of the parties, and, in the latter, for both). Consider, for instance, the partisan gridlock that defines so much contemporary political decision making in Western-liberal democracies. Such gridlock disempowers not only the respective political parties, it also disempowers the entire public by bringing its only means of collective decision making to a grinding halt.

Or consider the more extreme example of the nuclear-arms doctrine known as Mutually Assured Destruction (M.A.D.) that reigned throughout the cold war (and arguably still reigns today with the continued existence of massive nuclear stockpiles around the world). M.A.D. is a classic example of an adversarial relationship defined by that otherwise desirable characteristic: power equality (in this case, equality of nuclear capacity). Yet this adversarial expression of equality keeps people hanging in a delicate balance that, if upset, could result in mutual annihilation. At the same time, it also places a massive burden of ongoing military expenditures on the backs of the very people whose lives are unceasingly threatened by it – namely, all of us. In this respect, it not only threatens to destroy us, but it also guarantees to disempower us. The doctrine of M.A.D. – which is in many ways an inevitable outcome of an adversarial geo-political structure characterized by relative equality of nuclear capacity –

might just as well stand for Mutually Assured Disempowerment.

As these few examples illustrate, the framework above provides an expanded vocabulary with which to think about and talk about relations of power. It gives us a more useful map of power relations. In fact, by representing this schema in a two-dimensional manner, it can literally allow us to "map" various power relations relative to the two axes *adversarialism↔cooperation* and *equality↔inequality*, as the figure on the following page illustrates.

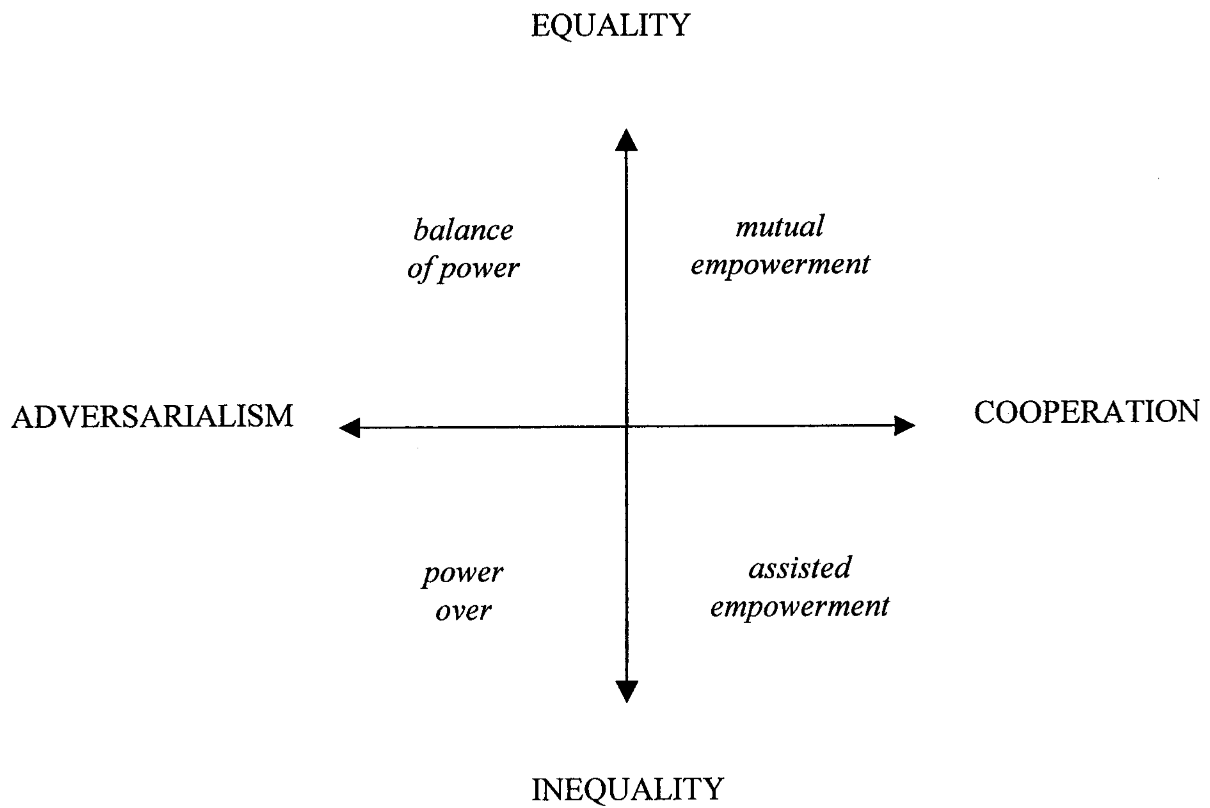

FIGURE 2: Mapping Power Relations

In this two-dimensional representation, domination, exploitation, and other oppressive "power over" relations are situated only in the lower-left quadrant, defined by the combination of adversarialism and inequality. Compromise, gridlock, and other "balance of power" relations are situated in the upper-left quadrant, defined by the combination of adversarialism and equality. Nurturing, educating, and other "assisted empowerment" relations are situated in the lower-right quadrant, defined by cooperation and inequality. And reciprocation, coordination, and other "mutual empowerment" relations are situated in the upper-right quadrant, defined by cooperation and equality.

This two-dimensional representation also helps us recognize (more effectively than the schema in Figure 1) the *relative* nature of both *adversarialism↔cooperation* on the one hand, and *equality↔inequality* on the other. Some relations are *more* or *less* adversarial or *more* or *less* cooperative than others, just as some distributions of power might be *more* or *less* equal or unequal than others. Thus extreme adversarialism or extreme inequality can be distinguished from more moderate expressions of both. Moreover, within this schema it is possible to conceptualize *movement* along either axis. A nurturing relationship may begin with a high degree of inequality and steadily progress toward a state of relative equality, as in the case of both parenthood, education, and other developmental relationships. Or, conversely, a relationship may become either more adversarial or more cooperative over time, as in oscillations toward or away from political partisanship and bipartisanship.

Finally, this two-dimensional representation provides another way of recognizing the spurious nature of "power to" versus "power over" distinctions. For while "power over" is represented as the lower-left quadrant above, the concept of "power to" – or *power as*

capacity – can be understood as the entire *plane* on which both of the axes (*adversarialism↔cooperation* and *equality↔inequality*) are inscribed. Again, of course, this conceptual map is primarily a metaphorical construct. Actual social relations cannot be precisely located and compared according to exact, ordinal coordinates on this plane. Nonethelesss, the schema can serve as a useful aid for thought and discussion.

From Theory to Practice: Normative Adversarialism

Although the discussion above articulates alternative ways of thinking and talking about power relations, the purpose of the discussion is not to refute the existence of domination, exploitation, and other "power over" phenomena. Indeed, oppressive social relations exist and require urgent attention. Recognizing them, understanding them, analyzing them, raising popular awareness of them, and actively working to change them are all crucially important tasks. Oppressive relations of power are not simply academic abstractions; they are a reality for countless people around the planet. The critical work that is being done in these areas has a valid empirical as well as normative basis. In fact, given the state of contemporary societies around the world and current trends toward increasing disparities of wealth and power, attention to these areas needs to be significantly expanded.

At the same time, however, the analysis above suggests that "power over" concepts need to be situated within a more comprehensive conceptual framework because narrow conceptual frameworks easily translate into narrow frameworks of social practice or *praxis*. After all, thought, perception, and practice are mutually informing. In this context, adversarial theories of power easily translate into adversarial praxis.

This should come as little surprise. If adversarial relations appear to be the driving forces of human history (because this is what our theories of power tend to implicitly or explicitly focus on), it makes sense to structure our collective affairs in ways that harness those forces for the maximum social good. However, even if adversarial relations have been the primary driving force of history (a questionable assumption in itself), it is easy to confuse human affairs as-they-have-been or as-they-are with human affairs as-they-could-be or as-they-ought-to-be. In this context, descriptive/explanatory frameworks tend to carry over into normative/prescriptive ones – hence adversarial theory easily translates into adversarial praxis. When social relationships are assumed to be essentially adversarial, because that is primarily what our perceptual models lead us to notice, even projects of social reform appear to require methods that harness these adversarial forces in the service of emancipatory goals. Thus *normative adversarialism* – the prescription of adversarial methods as normal and necessary social practices – becomes the framework of much conventional as well as critical praxis.

As a result, however, we often overlook the significant role that non-adversarial relations can and do play in human affairs – including the role they can and do play in social reform. Given the relative absence of a framework for thinking and talking about non-adversarial social relations, alternative social structures and alternative strategies of social change tend to be overlooked and undervalued. These non-adversarial alternatives therefore remain under-theorized, under-researched, and seldom practiced or prescribed. And yet, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, a case can be made that non-adversarial social structures, as well as non-adversarial strategies of social reform, may be more just, sustainable, and effective than their adversarial counterparts. Hence the practical need for a

more comprehensive conceptual framework. Aside from expanding our abstract knowledge of social power relations, it may also expand our possibilities for social praxis.

CHAPTER III: NORMATIVE ADVERSARIALISM

Adversarialism Throughout the Public Sphere

Normative adversarialism is a culture-wide phenomenon with a complex genealogy. It is rooted not only in contemporary theories of power but in a range of Western traditions, including the oppositional dualisms of ancient Semitic thought, the antagonistic nature of ancient Greek rhetorical practices, and the Hobbesian conception of society as "a war of all against all".[1] Normative adversarialism, in other words, is deeply embedded in the codes of Western culture.

The ultimate adversarial practice, of course, is war itself, and Western societies have had no shortage of war in recent centuries. But beyond the actual practice of war, martial/military concepts have been articulated into metaphors (discursive constructs) that shape social perception and practice throughout the public sphere.[2] In the economic arena, we speak of "market wars", "trade wars", and "hostile takeovers". In the political arena, we speak of election "campaigns" funded by "war chests" and characterized by "wars of words". In the media, virtually every social issue is at one time or another framed through the metaphor of war – from the "war in the woods" over old-growth forests to the "war on poverty" in the inner cities to the "war on drugs" that spans international boundaries.

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1 Refer to Kehoe, "Conflict is a Western Worldview", and Ong, *Fighting For Life*, for two insightful discussions of the complex genealogies of Western adversarialism.

2 Refer to Lakeoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, for a seminal discussion of the role that metaphors play in shaping human thought. For a concise overview of literature on the subject, refer to Thornburg, "Metaphors Matter".

Closely related to these martial/military metaphors is the way that masculinity is conceptualized throughout Western societies.[3] From the battlefield to the playing field to the workplace, competition and aggression against adversaries have been central to the construction of Western male identities. Moreover, given the long histories of male domination of the public sphere in most Western societies, these masculine-adversarial ideals have carried over into virtually every sphere of public life from the market to the legislature to the courts and beyond.

All of these adversarial ideals and metaphors, and many more that echo throughout Western societies, reflect the underlying codes that structure much Western thought, talk, and practice. In order to illustrate the practical implications of these underlying cultural codes, this chapter will examine their expression throughout the contemporary public sphere. Before beginning, however, several notes of qualification are in order. First, the survey contains an admittedly Anglo-American bias, drawing primarily on illustrations from the English-speaking West – especially the United States. However, with the exception of the Anglo-American legal adversary system, most of the illustrations used are consistent with cultural practices throughout the West, due to the common cultural influences of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, the legacy of Renaissance and Enlightenment thought, as well as many other social, economic, and intellectual ties between Western societies. Moreover, although this dissertation does not attempt to generalize beyond Western cultures, many of these adversarial structures and practices are clearly present in other parts of the world. This is due, on the one hand, to parallel traditions of militarism, masculinity, and so

[3] For discussions of the historical associations between masculinity and adversarialism, refer to Hartsock, *Feminist Historical Materialism*; Spretnak, "Cultural Forces"; Strange, "Feminist View of the Arms Race";

(footnote continued on next page)

forth in many non-Western cultures. On the other hand, it is also due to the powerful international influence, or cultural imperialism, of many Western countries in recent centuries. At the moment, this influence can be seen most conspicuously in the global domination of mass media content by the United States, which exports cultural expressions of violence, conflict, partisanship, and litigousness not only to other Western countries but to virtually every region of the planet.

In addition, it must be pointed out that the survey below is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. In the interest of brevity, I examine only the most salient features of a number of the most influential arenas of public life – the economic arena, the political arena, the judicial arena, the commercial mass media, social advocacy, and academia.[4] Furthermore, in my focus on adversarialism, my intent is not to imply that non-adversarial or cooperative practices are entirely absent from each of these spheres. Rather, my intent is to illustrate the presence of adversarialism as a dominant normative ideal within each of them. As my introductory chapter acknowledges, strands of adversarialism and mutualism are present in all cultures. Accordingly, examples of cooperation can be found in each of the social arenas discussed below. These examples tend to occur, however, within larger structures of adversarialism that shape and constrain them.

Finally, in my critical treatment of adversarialism, my intent is not to imply that all forms of adversarialism are problematic or undesirable under all conditions. Adversarialism may be necessary and appropriate in some contexts. For example, some forms of competition can

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Brocke-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives*; and Reardon, *Women and Peace* and *Sexism and the War System*.

[4] Throughout the survey, footnotes direct the reader to more detailed discussions of particular points by other authors. In addition, Tannen provides an excellent socio-linguistic analysis of adversarialism (or what she calls *agonism*) in *The Argument Culture*, which touches on a number of the same points made below.

be very healthy. In addition, because adversarialism is a relative phenomenon, some expressions of adversarialism may be more desirable than others. Rational debate, for instance, is clearly a more desirable alternative than physical violence or war in most circumstances. Even the use of physical or military force, however, can be necessary and appropriate when it is used to uphold just laws, protect individuals or groups from injury or abuse, and protect populations from military aggression. My critique, therefore, is not directed at all expressions of adversarialism. Rather, it is directed at the relatively ubiquitous and indiscriminate expression of adversarialism throughout the public sphere. In this context, the following survey suggests that structured and habitual reliance on adversarial practices may be an obstacle on the path to social justice and equity.

Economics

Given that capitalist economics has become a dominant influence in contemporary Western societies, it will be the first arena examined in this survey. Throughout the contemporary public sphere, people have come to be defined largely in economic terms, as self-interested beings whose satisfaction lies in the consumption of ever-increasing levels of material goods and services within a competitive free market. In this context, economic competition has emerged as one of the dominant organizing principles of modern Western societies. Competition, moreover, is a form of adversarial relation. In any competition, parties compete *against* one another. In the economic arena, parties compete against one another for material wealth, jobs, capital, market share, and so forth.

As a normative ideal, economic competition has a genealogy that traces back to classical economists such as Adam Smith, who articulated the basic principles of modern capitalism.

The theory of capitalism rests on Smith's assertion that a free market, unfettered by state interference, is capable of generating the greatest good for the greatest number of people. According to Smith, the "invisible hand" of a competitive free market naturally harmonizes the self-interested pursuits of individual consumers and private businesses by balancing supply and demand in the most efficient manner possible, which in turn generates the maximum collective wealth.[5]

Smith – who was a moral philosopher – thus provided a moral justification for capitalism by implicitly transforming the pursuit of self-interest from a vice into a virtue. Granted, as a moral philosopher, Smith also assumed that self-interested individualism would be expressed within a larger moral framework.[6] In place of market regulation by the state, Smith believed that individuals pursuing their own interests in a competitive free market would be self-regulated by an intrinsic framework of moral values or virtues.

Since Smith's time, however, morality has generally been neglected in economics in favour of a strictly utilitarian focus on material self-interests.[7] This focus on material self-interests, in turn, has had a two-fold result. On the one hand, in keeping with Smith's assertion that self-interests could be maximized only if governments minimized their interference in the market, a competitive economy has emerged that is largely unfettered by external state regulations.[8] On the other hand, through the neglect of Smith's larger moral

5 Smith, *Wealth of Nations*.

6 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

7 Thus, little more than a century after Smith, Edgeworth penned his now famous dictum: "the first principle of economics is that every agent is actuated only by self-interest" (Edgeworth, *Mathematical Physics*, p. 16).

8 Refer to Kuttner, *Everything for Sale*, for an excellent critique of current trends toward deregulation in contemporary economies.

philosophy, the relative absence of external state regulation has been accompanied by the relative absence of internal moral regulation. Thus material self-interest has become virtually the only relevant economic "virtue" within an economy that has become little more than an arena for competitive acquisition.

In the relative absence of both state regulation and moral restraint, moreover, competitive ideals have led to widespread social conflict in the modern world. On the most obvious level, the valorization of material self-interests within a competitive economy has led to extreme disparities of wealth and poverty, both within and between nations, as workers compete against other workers for wages, and capitalists compete against other capitalists for profits. These extremes of wealth and poverty, in turn, keep the world in a perpetual state of instability that fosters political conflict, crime, terrorism, and war.

In addition, the valorization of competitive self-interests has exacerbated the structural tendencies toward conflict that already exist between capitalists and workers (i.e., conflicts that derive from their different relations to the means of production). Thus, in the relative absence of both state regulation and moral restraint, many capitalists transfer the competitive/adversarial ideals that characterize their relations with other capitalists to their relations with labour. In doing so, they attempt to extract the maximum surplus value from the labour force that is a primary source of their wealth. In response, workers organize in an oppositional struggle for a more equitable allocation of the surplus value they play an indispensable role in generating. The results, of course, are the class conflicts that Marx so clearly understood.

The competitive pursuit of material self-interests also translates into adversarial rivalries between entire nations. Every modern capitalist nation, in an attempt to pursue the maximum

possible gains for its own consumer-citizens, currently competes with every other nation in the global market. Struggles over the accumulation and control of resources, capital, labour, commodities, and information are thus played out daily in the global market – with the citizens of each nation regularly alerted to the state of the competition through comparisons of Gross Domestic Product, balance of trade reports, currency exchange rates, and other indicators of relative national advantage. Moreover, in a largely unregulated international economy that is not even characterized by the pretence of fair play and a level playing field between nations, these economic contests yield few winners and many losers, as the residual advantages conferred by colonialism and imperialism play themselves out in the continued exploitation of weaker nations by stronger ones.

Finally, the valorization of material self-interests, in the relative absence of both state and moral regulation, has also led to unprecedented conflict between humanity and most other species on this planet. Transformations in human productive capacity and population size, combined with the unfettered pursuit of material self-interests, have resulted in a seemingly insatiable consumer society which has, in effect, placed the human species in direct competition with most other species on the planet, as we compete on a global scale for habitat, food, energy, and raw materials. Granted, competition between species is as old as the process of evolution itself. What makes this current competition unique, however, is its planetary scale combined with the overwhelming dominance of the competition by one species – *Homo sapiens*. In this context, as the relative absence of both state and moral regulation results in the permanent extinction of increasing numbers of species, the sustainability of the competition itself is called into question.

In all of these ways, the valorization of self-interested competition in the economic arena

reflect the underlying codes of normative adversarialism. Competitive ideals pit worker against worker, capitalist against capitalist, and worker against capitalist, in ongoing contests of material acquisition and control. They also pit nation against nation, and humanity against nature, in similar contests writ large. And in this context, as Patrella asserts, competitiveness has "ceased to be a means" and instead, " it has become the main objective not only of business enterprises but also of governments and the whole society".[9]

Granted, the modern economy is not entirely devoid of cooperative relations. In business, as in sport, agreeing to compete within even a minimal set of rules or regulations requires a basic level of cooperation between otherwise competing opponents. In addition, in business, as in sport, internal cooperation within a corporation or team is often a requisite of success. Competition can thereby be an effective means of training for cooperative skills.[10] Moreover, by making reward contingent on effort and risk, competition can spur individuals as well as groups toward excellence, creativity, innovation, and efficiency – all of which are generally desirable goals in the economy or on the playing field.

On the other hand, unlike most athletic competitions, the contemporary economy is characterized by minimal regulation. Athletic competitions are among the most regulated of all human activities. Extensive rules exist to ensure fair play and a level playing field in all

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9 Petrella, "Beyond the Myth of Competitiveness", p. 246.

10 Given the normative complexities of economic competition, motive and context are important to consider in the critique of any specific instances or forms of competition. Competition that is motivated by mutual gains (e.g., mutual recreation and enjoyment or collective innovation and efficiency) is arguably more desirable than competition motivated by the struggle over lasting, mutually exclusive gains and losses (e.g., warfare or economic exploitation). Moreover, competition in the context of rules that ensure fair play and a level playing field (e.g., athletic competitions or carefully regulated economies) is arguably more desirable than competition lacking such rules (e.g., wars or unregulated economies). Some economists are beginning to distinguish these contrasting models of competition with the phrases *cooperative-competition* and *conflictual-competition*. Refer, for example, to Papini, Pavan, and Zamagni, "Towards Co-operative Competition" and Merloni, "Cooperative Competition".

athletic competitions. If markets are analogous to athletic competitions, then trends toward deregulation and market liberalization represent a shift away from fair play and level playing fields. And the absence of these conditions exacerbates economic conflict, alienation, domination, and exploitation.

Some would argue, of course, that the current trends toward market liberalization, especially at the global level, are fair and equitable because they are intended to ensure that all economic competitors face the same rules. This argument, however, is flawed on numerous levels. First, fair competition requires not only that all competitors operate under the same rules, but that all competitors begin the contest at the same time. Within the current global economy, however, some competitors have been accumulating capital for generations, while others have only recently been invited into the contest, and thus find themselves at a serious disadvantage. It is as if a few people began a game of *Monopoly*, played until they bought up all the property, and then invited a number of others to join them. The latecomers would be perpetually handicapped by a constant need to pay rent and no opportunities to accumulate their own properties. Thus they would never be able to compete on equal terms. Second, labourers are also players within the global economy, yet current trends toward market liberalization address the rules by which capitalists compete against other capitalists while largely ignoring the rules that govern their relations with labour. Third, by equating uniformity of rules with minimization of rules, or what many have called a lowest common denominator approach to market regulation, current trends toward market liberalization remove any restraints on the tendencies of natural monopolies to emerge in sectors of the economy that are prone to this. Even by the standards of classic capitalist theory, monopolies are sources of both inequity and market inefficiency. And finally, by adopting

this lowest common denominator approach to regulation, rules that govern the relationship between economic activity and the environment tend to be undermined. Ironically, this leads not only to a reduction in the quality of life for most of the inhabitants on the planet (whom liberalized markets allegedly serve) but it also threatens to undermine the basis of the entire economy itself, as economic competition becomes an unsustainable process through which long-term ecological capital is squandered in the pursuit of short-term financial gains.

Either way, the modern economy embodies numerous competitive or adversarial ideals. It defines human beings as self-interested and competitive, and structures human relations accordingly. For better or worse, it situates economic thought, talk, and practice largely on the left side of the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2: the domain of "power against" relations. Moreover, given the absence of fair play and a level playing field in many economic arenas (i.e., given the relative absence of both state and moral regulation, as well as the inequalities between and among capitalists and labourers, between "first world" and "third world nations", and even between *Homo sapiens* and most other species inhabiting the planet), economic competition often translates, in practice, into the oppressive "power over" relations located in the lower left quadrant of the same schema.

Politics

Western partisan political systems likewise embody a range of adversarial structures and practices. Indeed, political scientist Jane Mansbridge refers to these systems simply as "adversary democracy".[11] Not surprisingly, the evolution of these systems is closely

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[11] In *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Mansbridge discusses many of the limitations of partisan political systems and prescribes a non-partisan, consensus-based "unitary democracy" as an appropriate alternative in many contexts.

interwoven with the evolution of capitalist economic systems. Both are legitimated through fundamentally self-interested representations of human nature, which are used to naturalize competitive/contest models of social organization and practice. In economics, of course, it is the distribution of material commodities and capital – or the distribution of *economic power* – that is determined through a competitive contest. In politics, on the other hand, it is the distribution of public authority and decision making – or the distribution of *political power* – that is determined through a contest. In both cases, however, the underlying cultural codes are remarkably similar.

At the core of all partisan political systems is the concept of political *interests*, which refers broadly to the needs, values, and/or desires of an individual or group. Interests, thus conceived, are assumed to underlie the preferences of individuals and groups in political decision-making processes. Interests guide appraisals (either consciously or unconsciously) of what is best for one's self or one's group. Moreover, in pluralistic societies, different individuals and groups often appear to have divergent or conflicting interests.

In this context, Western-liberal philosophy assumes that one of the primary functions of a political system is to negotiate conflicting interests within a society in a utilitarian manner that satisfies the widest possible range of those interests.[12] The standard by which Western societies tend to evaluate political systems is thus very similar to the standard by which they evaluate economic systems: how well they allegedly maximize the satisfaction of competing

[12] There are, of course, other Western political philosophies that assume the possibility of consensual interests (i.e., the elimination or transcendence of historically conflicting interests). For instance, Marxism, anarchism, and communitarianism all subscribe to this idea in one form or another. However, all of these alternative political philosophies have been marginalized by the liberal philosophy that currently dominates Western political thought.

self-interests. Toward this end, the political arena has in fact been structured much like the capitalist free market: an arena within which individuals and groups or parties try to advance their particular ideals and interests in a self-interested and competitive manner.[13] As Lyon explains, even though the self-interested dimension of party performance is widely acknowledged,

> supporters of party government argue that if one looks at the larger picture and sees the "political market" in which several parties, the media, interest groups, and individuals all interact, democratic needs are served in a kind of mysterious way... [as though] another "invisible hand" is at work.[14]

In this regard, Western political systems have largely evolved into arenas of political "entrepreneurship" in which politicians compete for control over the means of public decision making in a manner that parallels competition for control over the means of production in the economy.[15] This occurs initially through the formation of political parties that represent competing ensembles of interests. Competitive political "campaigns" (a military metaphor) then determine leadership and control within and between parties – as politicians and parties organize to fight and win elections.[16] Moreover, in their efforts to "defeat" their opponents and "win" these campaigns, politicians engage in antagonistic exchanges, often characterized by expressions of overt hostility, as demonstrated by the mudslinging and negative advertising that has come to dominate many modern partisan

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13 Briand, *Practical Politics*, p. 154.

14 Lyon, "Green Politics", p. 129. In the next sentence, Lyon goes on to comment that "the analogy drawn with the economic market is, however, not reassuring when one notes the ways in which the unregulated economic marketplace threatens public interest".

15 Refer, for example, to discussions in Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, and Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.

16 As Held notes in *Models of Democracy*, p. 170, "parties may aim to realize a programme of 'ideal' political principles, but unless their activities are based on systematic strategies for achieving electoral success they will be doomed to insignificance. Accordingly, parties become transformed, above all else, into means for fighting and winning elections".

campaigns.[17]

Once political leadership and control is determined through these adversarial contests, processes of public decision making are also structured in an adversarial manner. Decision making is organized as a *partisan debate* – a "war of words" – between the representatives of opposed interest groups.[18] Within these debates, political adversaries maneuver and joust in an effort to defeat their opponents and gain the political high ground in the arena of public opinion. The extent to which this oppositional model of debate has become institutionalized is demonstrated most clearly in the parliamentary concept of "the loyal opposition" – a concept which is either explicitly or implicitly enshrined in many Western parliaments and congresses.

These oppositional debates tend, in turn, to be characterized by positional argument as opposed to principled deliberation.[19] Parties stake out positions at the outset, and the goal is to ensure that one's own position prevails. As a result, the identity of a party is bound up with the position it takes, and defeat of a position involves a loss of "political capital" for the party. In this way, decision-making processes become inseparable from election processes, as partisan debates become the stage for "permanent campaigns" – never-ending contests over political capital – in anticipation of the next round of elections.[20]

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17 Refer, for example, to Jamieson, *Dirty Politics*.

18 Granted, much contemporary political decision making actually occurs outside of these formal partisan debates – which often serve as little more than a dramatic veneer on complex processes of political maneuvering and negotiation. However, even these behind-the-scenes processes are generally characterized by the same adversarial dynamics. Refer, for example, to Clift and Brazaitis, *War Without Bloodshed*, for illuminating insights into the adversarial nature of behind-the-scenes partisan politics.

19 Refer to Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes*, for a discussion of the distinction between "positional" versus "principled" decision making.

20 For an insightful analysis of this phenomenon refer to Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign*.

Encircling these integrated structures of partisan electioneering and decision making is another sphere of political contests in which lobby groups and political action committees vie with one another to pressure parties and shape public opinion in ways that advance their own interests. Adversarial contests within the formal institutions of government are thus mirrored by adversarial contests among their informal counterparts.[21]

Lobbying and political organizing, however, are expensive activities that require access to significant material resources. Not all interests are represented equally in the contest to influence partisan decision making. In this way, the political economy of partisan systems tends to subordinate public decision making to pressures from powerful economic interests. Moreover, political processes are further subordinated to economic pressures through mechanisms such as campaign financing. Political campaigns, like war, are expensive – hence the metaphor of a "campaign war chest" to describe the substantial funds that partisan candidates raise in preparation for partisan elections. In this context, successful campaigns are waged either by people with tremendous personal wealth or by people who have the support of others with significant wealth – and political decision making is thereby further linked to the logic and outcomes of the capitalist economy.[22]

Western-liberal apologists defend this partisan system of electioneering, debate, lobbying, and so forth as the rational alternative to political violence and war. Based on this

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21 In fact, many political analysts argue that lobby groups and political action committees have largely replaced elected representatives as the primary political agents in many Western-liberal democracies, and thus contests among organized interest groups outside of formal legislatures have become more influential than the partisan contests within those legislatures. Refer, for example, to The Harwood Group, *Citizens and Politics*.

22 Of course, this problem can be minimized by campaign finance reform and similar measures. However, as the discussion in Chapter V suggests, refining the electoral procedures within partisan political systems does not address many of the other underlying problems with partisan politics.

common sense premise, we structure our political systems as non-violent contests, even though most people recognize that the political economy of these contests tends to favour more powerful social groups. This tradeoff is widely accepted as a "necessary evil" based on the premise that rational partisanship is more desirable than the irrational alternatives of violence or war. But this common sense premise embodies a false choice because it conceals the possibility that a third alternative might be more desirable than both partisan politics and violence or war in many circumstances (a theme that will be discussed further in Chapters IV and V).

For better or worse, the codes of adversarialism thus situate most public decision making on the left side of the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2 – the domain of "power against" relations – though not as far to the left as physical violence and war. Even when relative equality is present within the political arena, adversarial contests between equally powerful opponents tend to result in gridlock, mutual frustration, alienation, or compromise – as expressed within the "balance of power" domain in the upper left quadrant of that figure.[23] At its worst, due to the political economy of partisan systems, adversarial politics often translates into a politics of domination.[24] In this regard, partisan politics, like capitalist economics, tends to combine the relations of adversarialism and inequality identified in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 2: the domain of "power over". In these ways, both partisan politics and capitalist economics articulate together within a larger

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[23] Refer, for example, to Cox and Kernell, eds., *Divided Government*; Johnson and Broder, *The System*; Jones, "Parties, Institutions, and Gridlock"; Brady, *Revolving Gridlock*; Gray, "Democratic Gridlock"; Scott, "Legislative Gridlock"; and Chrislip, "Pulling Together".

[24] Held, for instance, refers to this as "competitive elitist democracy" in *Models of Democracy*. See also Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*; Greider, *Betrayal of American Democracy*; and Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality*.

cultural formation characterized by mutually reinforcing adversarial structures and practices – many of which are oppressive and exploitative.

Justice

Like their political and economic counterparts, Western legal systems – at least within Anglo-American traditions – also embody the codes of adversarialism. And the evolution of the legal adversary system is, once again, closely interwoven with the evolution of Western political and economic systems. All of them were products of the same shifts in social thought that characterized the early European Enlightenment: movements away from religious dogma toward secular rationalism, from authoritarianism toward liberalism, and from antiquated and static Greco-Roman knowledge systems toward intellectual progressivism.

These shifts in thought, however, did not occur in a cultural vacuum. Rather, they involved the rejection of some cultural constructs and the re-articulation of others. In Anglo-American jurisprudence, these processes involved the rejection of priestly authority as the arbiter of truth, but the retention of assumptions that in an open contest between good and evil, or truth and falsehood, the former would prevail. They involved the rejection of juries as political instruments of the sovereign's will, but the reformation of juries as neutral arbiters of judicial contests among free individuals. They involved the rejection of the Roman-canon system of jurisprudence (an amalgamation of various aspects of Roman law and medieval ecclesiasticism), in which judges simultaneously directed investigations, weighed evidence, and rendered a verdict; at the same time, however, they involved the retention of argumentative or forensic practices of disputation and debate (whose genealogies

traced back through Greek, medieval, and Renaissance traditions), in which truth was assayed through the proposal and refutation of facts or ideas.[25] In the Anglo-American tradition, they involved the rejection of continental assumptions that truth was best discerned through a process directed by a neutral third party. In addition, they involved the adoption of liberal political economy assumptions (discussed in the previous two sections) that fairness and efficiency in a free society were best achieved through contests motivated and directed by the pursuit of competing self-interests – in this case, the competing self-interests of legal adversaries.[26]

Through this selective process of re-articulation, a highly adversarial forensic process emerged. This process was characterized by elaborate rules of procedure and rules of evidence designed "to produce a climactic confrontation between the parties" in a legal dispute.[27] As the complexity of these rules increased, and as the outcome of these confrontations became dependent on increasingly refined forensic skills, the parties in legal disputes became increasingly dependent on skilled legal attorneys. In turn, as the number

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[25] In *The Adversary System*, Landsman provides a concise overview of the historical development of the legal adversary system, including the reformation of the jury structure and the rejection of the Roman-canon system referred to above. For additional background, including discussions of the tradition of disputation and debate, refer to Moulton, "Adversary Method"; Maieru, *University Training in Medieval Europe*; Menkel-Meadow, "Trouble With the Adversary System"; Ong, *Fighting For Life*; and Strick, *Injustice For All.*

[26] For an insightful discussion of this point, refer to Strick, *Injustice For All*, Chapter 11. See also Franklin, *Legal Dispute*, p. 94; and Cound, Friedenthal, and Miller, *Civil Procedure*, p. 2.

[27] Landsman, *The Adversary System*, pp. 4-5. As Landsman points out, "the forensic clash of parties in the adversary system seems so like combat, it is tempting to suggest that the real source of the adversary process was the ancient mode of resolving disputes referred to as trial by battle" (p.8). In defence of the adversary system, however, Landsman goes on to argue that there is little evidence to support a direct link between the "trial by battle" and the evolution of the legal adversary system. What he fails to consider, however, is the larger cultural milieu of adversarialism that made them both possible. This cultural milieu was characterized, for instance, by the coexistence of the legal adversary system and the duel – the latter of which was considered a culturally acceptable dispute resolution practice well into the nineteenth century. For discussions of the many cultural links between trial by battle and the legal adversary system, refer to Strick, *Injustice For All.*

and prominence of legal attorneys increased, so did the vigor of their advocacy. Commitments to "zealous advocacy" replaced commitments to "truth" as lawyers devoted themselves solely to their client's interests, attempting to "win" judicial contests on their behalf.[28] In such an environment, truth-obscuring tactics – such as the omission of relevant but potentially harmful information, the advancement of exaggerated or false representations, the obfuscation and distortion of evidence, and the coaching of witnesses – have flourished.[29] Thus Freedman, in his classic text on *Ethics in the Legal Adversary System*, could unabashedly assert that lawyers have "a professional obligation to place obstacles in the path of truth".[30]

Within this system, legal advocates have, in essence, become "legal mercenaries" hired by clients to do battle on their behalf.[31] Moreover, the forensic skills and expertise of the best legal advocates as well as the investigative research that is often required to build their cases does not come cheap. Even though all people may be equal before the law in an abstract

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[28] For a classic articulation of zealous advocacy and the lawyer's goal of winning a contest on behalf of a client, regardless of truth, refer to Dershowitz, *The Best Defence.*

[29] In fact, in countries like the United States, modern lawyers can make patently false and destructive (but strategically effective) statements in a court of law with full impunity, because they enjoy the same "absolute immunity" from slander or libel that applies to witnesses. Unlike witnesses, however, they are not required to swear an oath of truthfulness and cannot be prosecuted for perjury – a privilege that is increasingly abused by lawyers who defame innocent victims and third parties in order to bias a jury in favour of their own client. Among the most troubling examples of this is the re-victimization of rape victims in adversarial cross-examination. As Taslitz concludes in *Rape and the Culture of the Courtroom,* these processes of revictimization are structured into the legal adversary system. For discussions of many other destructive and truth-obscuring practices in the legal adversary system, refer to Sparkman, *Failed Justice*; Menkel-Meadow, "Transformation of Disputes"; Strick, *Injustice For All*; Gorsky, "The Adversary System"; Pye, "Suppression of Truth"; Frankel, *Partisan Justice* and "Search for Truth"; Shuchman, "The Question of Lawyers' Deceit"; and Zacharias, "Reconciling Professionalism and Client Interests".

[30] Freedman, *Lawyers' Ethics in an Adversary System*, p. 3. As the legal scholars Zitrin and Langford conclude in *Moral Compass*, p. 168, "the adversary system fosters deceit whether the lawyers are involved in negotiation, litigation, or the day-to-day advice they give while putting deals together, drafting wills and estate plans, or helping clients comply with government regulations".

[31] For an insightful analysis of the countless adversarial metaphors that shape the legal adversary system, refer to Thornburg, "Metaphors Matter".

sense, the political economy of the legal adversary system clearly favours those who can afford the best legal advocacy (not to mention those who can afford to influence the legislative processes through which laws themselves are articulated).[32] Simply put, the legal adversary system tends to privilege more powerful social groups. As Strick explains in his critique of this adversarial system, this "fight ethic"

> serves not only the lawyers and judges who directly administer it, but society's power-holders down the ranks. For adversariness is a mode that singularly advantages power. Most of its beneficiaries therefore worship adversary procedure "like motherhood itself", and either remain blind to its defects, hold that despite those defects it serves a higher good, or work at screening its fraud from public gaze. Yet fraud it is. For by its nature the adversary approach to dispute settlement disserves the rest of us – almost totally.[33]
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> Indeed, the non-litigious are emotionally disadvantaged in the adversary courtroom as surely as the impecunious are financially disadvantaged.[34]
>
> [Yet] our adversary legal system, its assumptions and values, is one of the major taken-for-granted, practically never questioned institutions of our culture. More, I believe it is an anachronism, a relic of a primitive way of seeing and thinking about the world.[35]

Of course, apologists of the legal adversary system again defend it as a rational alternative to the arbitrary judgments of an elite judiciary, on the one hand, or to violent means of dispute resolution, on the other. Based on this common sense assertion, we structure our (Anglo-American) legal systems as rational, non-violent contests, even though most people recognize that the political economy of these contests again tends to favour more powerful social groups. Again, this tradeoff is widely accepted as a "necessary evil", based on the premise that rational advocacy is more desirable than its irrational or violent alternatives. But this common sense assertion again embodies a false choice because it

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32 Refer, for example, to discussions in Galanter, "Why the 'Haves' Come Out Ahead"; Aaseng, *The O.J. Simpson Trial*; Saltzburg, "Lawyers, Clients, and the Adversary System"; Sparkman, *Failed Justice*; Strick, *Injustice For All*; Smith, *Courts and the Poor*; and Curtin, *Class Justice*.

33 Strick, *Injustice For All*, pp. 16-17.

34 Ibid., p. 110.

conceals the possibility that other alternatives might be more desirable than any of the above options.

Like the political system, the legal adversary system is therefore also linked to the competitive economy in a way that permits disparities of wealth and power to influence judicial processes. In this regard, while legal adversary systems clearly situate judicial practice on the left side of the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2 (the domain of "power against" relations), they also tend to reinforce the "power over" relations that are situated in the bottom left quadrant of that figure. Moreover, even when relative equality is present between opposing parties within a legal contest, the adversary system still tends to result in high degrees of inefficiency, mutual frustration, and alienation – as expressed within the upper left quadrant of Figure 2.[36] In all of these ways, the legal adversary system articulates with partisan politics and capitalist economics within a larger cultural formation characterized by a range of adversarial structures and practices – many of which are oppressive and exploitative – across each of these spheres.[37]

Mass Media

Mass-mediated discourse at the end of the twentieth century also tends to embody the codes of adversarialism. Significant portions of both news and entertainment content are

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[35] Ibid., p. 21. For a feminist discussion of this same phenomena vis-à-vis the revictimization of rape victims within the legal adversary system, refer to Taslitz, *Rape and the Culture of the Courtroom*.

[36] For discussions of these and many other problems inherent in the legal adversary system, as well as proposals for non-adversarial reform, refer to Sparkman, *Failed Justice*; Taslitz, *Rape and the Culture of the Courtroom*; Strick, *Injustice For All*; Olson, *Litigation Explosion*; Menkel-Meadow, "Trouble With the Adversary System"; and Rehnquist, "The Adversary Society". See also Valparaiso University, "State of the Adversary System".

[37] For an insightful discussion of how the legal adversary system is contributing to this larger culture of adversarialism, refer to Garry, *Nation of Adversaries*.

made up of conflict, competition, and violence. Adversarial contests in the political, legal, and economic arenas provide much of the raw material for this content. In turn, this raw material is selected, framed, and emphasized in a manner that distorts, exaggerates, and over-represents the already high levels of adversarialism in Western societies.[38] In this way, the mass media help to construct, amplify, and reinforce adversarialism throughout the public sphere. Public life, as viewed through most commercial media, is little more than an adversarial spectacle.

The commercial logic that drives these adversarial representations is multifaceted. First, most contemporary mass media earn a significant portion of their profits through advertising revenue. The primary goal of advertising-supported media is the "manufacture" or "harvest" of audiences in order to sell their attention to advertisers in a competitive market for audiences.[39] In this context, adversarial spectacle provides much of the bait that media industries use to attract audiences. And as the competition for audiences becomes more competitive due to the proliferation of new channels and new media, increasingly spectacular contests and controversies are used to attract the attention of increasingly distracted audiences.

In addition, in commercial media that are not primarily advertising supported, such as the film industry, the globalization of the market has exerted its own pressures for increasing conflict and violence in media content. This is not because international audiences have

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[38] Refer, for example, to Gerbner and Gross, "Violence Profile"; Allen and Seaton, eds., *Media of Conflict*; Arno and Dissanayake, eds., *News Media in National and International Conflict*; Rubenstein, Botes, Dukes, and Stephens, *Frameworks for Interpreting Conflicts*; and Glassner, *The Culture of Fear*.

[39] Refer to discussions in Smythe, *Dependency Road*; Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*; and Jhally, *Codes of Advertising*.

baser tastes in film content than domestic ones. Rather, it is largely a result of the need for films that are easily translated.[40] The production expenses of many modern films are barely offset by domestic sales and profits often come through international redistribution. Films constructed around violence and action (as well as sex) are most profitable because the dialogue they contain is simple, and thus easily translated, and the narrative is delivered primarily through universally interpretable and highly visual action sequences (fights, car chases, sex, etc). Conflict and violence are thus the most profitable forms of content to produce and export in an increasingly competitive global market.

Adversarial spectacle is not limited, however, to the traditional entertainment media. Pressures on contemporary journalism also compel it toward the exaggeration and over-representation of contest and conflict. On the one hand, most journalism is also advertising supported, and the same pressures to attract audiences through the manufacture of spectacle also apply. In addition, in their efforts to appeal to the broadest possible mass market, modern journalists have adopted a creed of "objectivity" and "balance" that involves the routine framing of complex issues in terms of two diametrically opposed sets of interpretations and interests. Journalists thus construct "adversarial news frames" by composing news stories in terms of "dueling" interpretations and interests.[41] The reduction of complex forestry issues into a "war in the woods" between loggers and environmentalists is a classic example. Moreover, beyond these discrete news stories, entire news-analysis programs have emerged in which pundits from "the right" and "the left" square off against

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[40] Dyson, *Mind Abuse*. Refer also to interviews with George Gerbner in Jhally, "Crisis of the Cultural Environment".

[41] Karlberg, "News and Conflict".

each other as they acrimoniously debate the current issue of the day from polarized oppositional perspectives.[42]

In all of these ways, the commercial mass media fully articulate with the economic, political, and judicial systems discussed above. Each of these adversarial systems provides a steady supply of raw material with which adversarial media content – whether news or entertainment – is constructed. Thus the conflicts between and among capitalists and labourers, the confrontations of partisan politicians and pundits, the courtroom dramas of prosecutors and defence lawyers, as well as any other available social conflicts (including many social advocacy efforts, as discussed below), are all processed and packaged as media content, reinforcing and amplifying adversarial representations of human nature and society.

Like its political and legal counterparts, the commercial media system tends to manufacture content that falls on the left side of the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2: the domain of "power against" relations. Moreover, given that media representations have significant social and political consequences,[43] that many social groups therefore vie with one another to shape these media representations,[44] and that a hierarchy of media access allows some groups to shape media content more effectively than others,[45] the

[42] CNN's "Crossfire" and the CBC's "Face Off" are both prime examples of this genre.

[43] For discussions of various social and political consequences of media representations, refer to Altschull, *Agents of Power*; Heibert, ed., *Impact of Mass Media*; Kellner, *Crisis of Democracy*; Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*; Hall, "Rediscovery of 'Ideology'"; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*; Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*; Gitlin, *Whole World is Watching*; Gandy, *Beyond Agenda Setting*; Hackett, *News and Dissent*; Hackett and Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy*; Morgan and Signorielli, "Cultivation Analysis"; and Gerbner, "Epilogue".

[44] Refer, for example, to Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, *Negotiating Control*; Gandy, "Structuration of Dominance"; Anderson, "Source-Media Relations"; Dale, *Greenpeace*; and Nelson, *Public Relations*.

[45] This is one of the most widely supported conclusions of the sociology of media production. Refer, for example, to Hackett, "Hierarchy of Access"; Gandy, "Subsidized News" and "Structuration of Dominance"; Schlesinger, "Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism"; Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, *Negotiating Control*; Gans, *Deciding What's News*; and Sparks, "The Media and the State".

mass media tend to operate as yet another field of social domination. In this regard, contemporary media discourses, like their economic, political, and judicial counterparts, further reinforce many of those same "power over" relations that are situated in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 2. Even at its best, when various social groups are relative equals in their ability to shape media representations, the result is often mutual aggravation between contesting social groups as well as cynicism and frustration among audiences who are left to view public life as an unending stream of polarized and apparently intractable conflicts.[46]

Social Advocacy

With the many cultural shifts that have occurred throughout the world in recent centuries, struggles against oppression, domination, and exploitation of all forms have expanded and diversified. Labour, civil rights, feminist, environmentalist, post-colonial, and other social advocacy movements have emerged as prominent features of the contemporary cultural environment. In their pursuit of social reforms, these movements have employed a wide range of methods. And like many of the institutions and practices that are the targets of reform, many of these methods have been adversarial. Partisan-political organizing, litigation, strikes, protests, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience have become the tools of the trade within many social advocacy movements. In more extreme cases, violence and terrorism are also employed in the pursuit of social change.

Of course, the legitimacy and urgency of many of these movements, the histories of oppression that have prompted them, and the desperation that often fuels them is not in

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[46] Refer, for example, to Cappella and Jamieson, "Political Cynicism" and *Spiral of Cynicism*; as well as Fallows, *Breaking the News*; Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*; Rosen, *Getting the Connections Right*; Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life*; and Mathews, *Politics For People.*

question here. What is being questioned is the manner in which they have internalized the codes of adversarialism that inform the systems they are attempting to reform. For these movements, adversarialism creates a paradox. On the one hand, adversarial strategies often appear to be the only means available for the pursuit of social reform. How else can social activists bring about change but through partisan organizing, litigation, or "taking to the streets"? On the other hand, these same adversarial strategies often prove to be self-limiting. As the discussion below illustrates, adversarial strategies of social change frequently degenerate into political infighting and factionalization, which undermines the capacity of social advocacy movements to accomplish their goals. At the same time, adversarial strategies also tend to legitimate the codes of adversarialism underlying the social structures and practices these movements are attempting to reform.

This is not to suggest that adversarial strategies of social change are entirely ineffective. Indeed, limited gains have been made by many adversarial movements throughout history. Nor is it to suggest that such strategies are problematic under all circumstances. Adversarialism may be a necessary and appropriate response in some contexts. Furthermore, if strategies of social reform are viewed on a continuum ranging from highly adversarial to relatively cooperative, the threat of extreme conflict may sometimes promote more moderate or cooperative approaches to social change. However, as the discussion below suggests, the normalization of adversarial strategies comes with a high price that is often overlooked, and routine reliance on such strategies may not be the most effective long-term approach to social change.

Consider the internal factionalization that adversarial movements tend to suffer from. Virtually all of the social projects of the "left" throughout the twentieth century have been

plagued with internal conflicts. The opening decades of the century were marked by political infighting among vanguard communist revolutionaries. The middle decades of the century were marked by theoretical disputes among leftist intellectuals. And the closing decades of the century have been marked by the fracturing of the "new left" under the centrifugal pressures of identity politics. Underlying this pattern of infighting and factionalization, it appears, is the tendency to interpret differences – of class, race, gender, perspective, or political approach – as sources of antagonism and conflict.

Reflecting on more than three decades of experience as a leading activist and scholar of the new left, Todd Gitlin has written extensively on this phenomenon.[47] As Gitlin observes, the initial unity of the new left was forged by the exigencies of the Vietnam War and the commonalities of 1960s youth culture. Gradually, however, differences of race, sex, class, and so forth began to split the movement along increasingly narrow identity lines. The one thing that each new identity group claimed, Gitlin explains, were adversaries among the ranks of the different.[48] According to Gitlin,

> the very language of collectivity came to be perceived by the new movements as a colonialist smothering – an ideology to rationalize white male domination... Soon, difference was being practiced, not just thought, at a deeper level than commonality. It was more salient, more vital, more present... It was more than strictly intellectual; it was more a whole way of experiencing the world. Difference was now lived and felt more acutely than unity.[49]

Reflecting on the self-limiting nature of these divisive attitudes, Gitlin concludes that "the politics of difference is built on a deep philosophical error: the insistence that people are

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[47] For a concise summary, refer to Gitlin, "Rise of Identity Politics". For a more extended critique of the experience of the new left, as well as the wider "culture wars" that characterize American society at the close of the twentieth century, refer to Gitlin, *Twilight of Common Dreams*.

[48] Gitlin, *Twilight of Common Dreams*, p. 34.

[49] Gitlin, "Rise of Identity Politics", pp. 175-77.

and must remain incomprehensible to one another, and what divides people must overwhelm what unites them".[50]

What even Gitlin appears to overlook, however, is that the distinctions between "left" and "right" that he continues to invoke (while condemning the factionalization of the left) are expressions of the same underlying codes of adversarialism. The political left and right both define themselves in terms of a common adversary – the other – defined by political differences. In turn, advocates of both the left and right frequently invoke the need for internal unity in order to prevail over their adversaries on the other side of the alleged political spectrum. However, because the terms "left" and "right" are both reified categories that do not reflect the complexity of actual social relations, there is no way to achieve lasting unity within either camp because there are no actually existing boundaries between them. In reality, social relations, attitudes, and ideas are infinitely complex and variable. But once an adversarial posture is adopted by assuming that differences are sources of conflict, initial distinctions between left and right are inevitably followed by subsequent distinctions within left and right. And once this centrifugal process is set in motion, it is difficult, if not impossible, to restrain.

In addition to this self-limiting tendency toward factionalization, when social advocates employ adversarial methods, they also legitimate the codes of adversarialism that underlie the structures of domination they are attempting to reform. For instance, when social advocates engage in partisan political organizing, they legitimate the adversarial models of governance that keep them at a perpetual disadvantage in the political arena due to the

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[50] Gitlin, "After the Failed Faiths", p. 66.

political economy of partisan politics.[51] Likewise, when social advocates engage in litigation, they legitimate the adversarial systems of jurisprudence that keep them at a perpetual disadvantage in the courts due to the political economy of legal adversary systems.[52]

Granted, social advocates of various causes do "win" occasional "battles" in these adversarial arenas, but the root causes of their concerns largely remain unaddressed, and the larger "wars" arguably are not going well. For example, consider the case of environmental lobbying and litigation. Countless environmental lobbies and lawsuits have been mounted by advocates throughout the Western world, and many small victories have been won. Yet environmental degradation on the whole continues to accelerate at a rate that far outpaces the highly circumscribed advances made in these limited battles.[53] The political economy of these adversarial institutions does not lend itself to the long-term, holistic decision making that is a requisite of environmental sustainability.

A similar case can be made for the labour movement, which, despite over a century of strikes, protests, and political organizing, has witnessed steadily increasing disparities between rich and poor, capitalists and workers, both within and between countries.[54] Granted, limited victories (e.g., minimum wage laws and 40-hour work weeks), have been won in various countries. But in ongoing contests against capital, workers are generally

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51 Refer to the discussion earlier in this chapter on partisan politics.

52 Refer to the discussion earlier in this chapter on the legal adversary system.

53 Refer, for example, to Brown, Renner, and Halweil, eds., *Vital Signs*; and Brown, Flavin, and French, eds., *State of the World 2000,* for excellent overviews of these environmental trends.

54 Refer, for example, to Ackerman, *The Political Economy of Inequality*; Shapiro and Greenstein, *The Widening Income Gulf*; Fishlow and Parker, *Growing Apart*; and Haseler, *Unjust New World of Global Capitalism.*

unable to compete. Of course, it may be true that workers' status and rights have historically improved more in the presence of militant trade unions than in their absence. However, in the context of an emerging global economy, these adversarial strategies may have reached the limits of their effectiveness because they fail to account for new global conditions. The current global political economy is characterized by sovereign nations that compete against one another for capital investment and accumulation within an arena that is devoid not only of international labor standards but of institutions capable of formulating or enforcing them. Within this environment, national governments cannot develop or enforce meaningful labor standards even within their own domestic economies for fear of massive capital flight to more "competitive" regions without such standards.

In addition, because national governments themselves are structured according to partisan models, their internal political economies tend to subordinate decision making to the dictates of corporate capital, including multi-national corporations that wield more political and economic power than many domestic governments, thus making the possibility of meaningful domestic labor standards and regulations even more remote. Even the progressive taxation schemes needed to reduce extremes of wealth and poverty by redistributing resources within a capitalist economy are virtually impossible to establish under these circumstances. This is due, on one hand, to the subordination of domestic governance to the logic of capital accumulation, as discussed above. On the other hand, it is also due to the constant risk of capital flight in a system of competing nation states with no international taxation standards. Within these national and international political economies, each structured according to adversarial models, all localized labor strategies are highly circumscribed in their effectiveness – and they are likely to become increasingly irrelevant as

long as unrestrained global capitalism continues to outpace the development of integrative, coordinated, and responsive political structures at both the national and international levels (as discussed, for instance, in Chapter V).

Aside from these socio-structural considerations, relations between capital and labour also have psycho-cultural dimensions. That is, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are socially cultivated but individually expressed also play a role in class conflict. In this context, eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty and improving the conditions of working people in all sectors of the economy will require a twin strategy of external (socio-structural) change and internal (psycho-cultural) change. These latter changes require concerted efforts to cultivate new values, attitudes, and beliefs on a society-wide scale. Such a program, in turn, requires the active support and participation of the public-policy-making bodies that fund public education, public broadcasting, and so forth. However, in the current political economy of our capitalist/partisan systems, such support is again virtually impossible to achieve or sustain. Integrative, coordinated, and responsive political structures are again needed.

On a closely related note, labour and other social advocacy groups have also been unable to compete with dominant social groups within the political economy of the commercial mass media – an institution that also plays a central role in the cultivation of psycho-cultural dispositions. In this context, some of the most significant contests that play out in democratic societies are commercially driven mass-mediated contests to influence public attitudes and opinions. As discussed in the previous section, however, most advocacy groups have to engage in extreme and confrontational tactics in order to gain any voice at all in the commercial mass media. By providing raw material for the manufacture of adversarial

spectacle, these groups end up simplifying and distorting their messages, which in turn simplifies and distorts public perceptions regarding the issues they are trying to address. Packaging social advocacy as adversarial spectacle thus undermines the ability of any group – labour, environmentalists, feminists, and so forth – to address complex and subtle problems.

Greenpeace media campaigns provide classic illustrations of this Faustian bargain that social advocacy groups face when they seek a voice in the public sphere.[55] Even Greenpeace staff recognize that their campaigns often result in the "dumbing down" of complex issues, as well as the obfuscation of important connections between issues.[56] Moreover, as one of the original media-savvy advocacy organizations, Greenpeace and its media strategies have served as models for countless other social advocacy groups. But as these strategies proliferate, the political currency of any given adversarial spectacle is devalued, which results in the escalation of increasingly extreme and dramatic media strategies. This process of escalation further simplifies and distorts the concerns of social advocates. In addition, it alienates segments of the population who might otherwise be sympathetic. Adversarialism thus keeps social advocates at a perpetual disadvantage in the arena of public opinion formation while simultaneously legitimizing the commercial media structures that dictate the terms of entrance into the public sphere.

For all of these reasons, adversarial strategies of social change may have reached the limits of their effectiveness. Granted, a detailed comparative analysis of particular adversarial strategies would reveal significant differences between them, including the fact

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[55] Refer to Dale, *Greenpeace*, for an in-depth discussion of this theme.

[56] Refer, for example, to Peerla, quoted in Dale, *Greenpeace*, pp. 183-89.

that some may still be relatively more effective than others. For instance, there are obvious differences, in both practical and moral terms, between the non-violent, non-cooperative resistance advocated by Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King and strategies of violent revolution or terrorism. Indeed, the category "adversarial strategies" could be broken down into a nuanced typology that distinguishes between strategies that are violent or non-violent, anarchist or organized, popular or vanguard, and so forth. Such a typology might be very revealing. Unfortunately, such a project is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In the meantime, the category of "adversarial strategies" at least brings into focus a significant common property of these otherwise diverse strategies. Provided internal distinctions are acknowledged within this broad category, it is an analytically useful category because it points to the existence of an entire domain of non-adversarial alternatives that are frequently overlooked (as discussed in Chapters IV and V).

Moreover, even if adversarial strategies may have been necessary and viable in the past, when human populations were less socially and ecologically interdependent, such conditions no longer exist. Because our reproductive and technological success as a species has led to conditions of unprecedented interdependence, no social group on the planet is any longer isolated. Under these new conditions, new strategies are not only becoming possible, they may have become essential. An interdependent social body cannot coordinate its collective actions as long as its component members are locked in adversarial relationships. Yet pressures for coordinated collective action are mounting daily. Threats of ecological degradation, of nuclear and biological contamination (both military and industrial), of global health pandemics, and of unrestrained capital growth and economic exploitation, are all pressing us to find new modes of collective and coordinated action. Under these conditions,

adversarial strategies may have reached a point of diminishing social and ecological returns (a point that will be taken up again in Chapter V).

It could be argued, of course, that adversarial strategies actually complement non-adversarial strategies. For instance, the extreme adversarial fringe of a social movement can raise public awareness of an issue and then make the moderate centre of the movement look attractive by comparison, thus providing an incentive to those who would otherwise resist reform to cooperate with more moderate reformers. Adversarial groups may thus serve as the cutting edge of a social movement, even though substantial change is often achieved through more collaborative means. However, even if this is true, one needs to weigh the potential gains against the potential costs. If adversarial tactics simultaneously marginalize a social movement, simplify its message, and alienate many potential supporters, the costs may outweigh the gains. Moreover, if such tactics end up legitimating the adversarial structures and practices that lie at the root of the problems that social advocates are seeking to address, the net costs be even more substantial. Unfortunately, there is no empirical calculus by which we can easily measure the net costs or gains in such circumstances. In the absence of such a calculus, the analysis above at least raises some red flags about the potentially counter-productive implications of adversarial strategies that tend to be widely taken for granted.

In summary, the paradox of social advocacy is that adversarial strategies of social change articulate fully with the adversarial structures and practices (e.g., partisan politics, legal advocacy, unregulated capital accumulation, media as adversarial spectacle) that keep social reformers at a perpetual disadvantage. By buying into the adversarial rules of the game – or the codes of adversarialism – many social advocates end up legitimating the social structures

that underlie the problems they are addressing. At the same time, they often end up simplifying and distorting their messages, marginalizing and discrediting themselves, and alienating potential supporters.[57] For all of these reasons, normative adversarialism may not be the most effective long-term strategy of social change. Granted, not all adversarial strategies are equivalent, and many limited battles have been won. But the larger wars may not be going well.

Academia

To bring this discussion around full circle, modern scholarship has also internalized many of the same codes of adversarialism discussed above. These can be seen, on one hand, in the prevailing theories of power discussed in Chapter II, as well as the political, economic, and other academic theories underlying many of the arenas discussed above. But beyond the content of particular theories, adversarialism is also part of the structure and practice of modern academia. Its milder expressions can be seen, for instance, in the structure of competitive grade-based evaluations. Rather than recognizing and building upon the unique strengths and weaknesses of individual students, these evaluative systems pit students against one another in ongoing series of academic contests. More significantly, however, adversarialism is also deeply embedded in Western epistemology. In this context, knowledge

[57] A case could also be made that adversarial struggles for power tend to be self-corrupting as a strategy of social or political change. History provides countless examples of adversarial movements that have overthrown one oppressive class or regime merely to replace it with another. This experience has been repeated across the full spectrum of revolutionary movements, from vanguard communism to Islamic fundamentalism. Even the American revolution largely replaced one privileged class with another, as the property-owning European men that led it subsequently excluded women and other minorities from the sphere of public decision making, pursued a systematic program of exterminating and displacing native peoples, and established an economic order that has increased the disparity between the wealthiest and poorest segments of the population.

is widely pursued through a contest of ideas. Granted, Western scholarship is also characterized by a degree of collaboration and collegiality. Nonetheless, the contest of ideas has deep roots in Western culture and these roots continue to nourish much contemporary scholarship.

In tracing the roots of this adversarial epistemology, one can begin with one of the earliest literate Western civilizations: the Greeks. In a general sense, Greek literature reveals a remarkable propensity for thinking in polar opposites.[58] Of course, such oppositional dualisms were not unique to the Greeks. Indeed, ancient Semitic and Zoroastrian cultures also had highly oppositional or dualistic worldviews. Nor are dualisms entirely without basis. They can and do provide useful models for thinking and talking about many things. More than any other ancient culture, however, the Greeks translated these oppositional modes of thought into oppositional approaches to knowledge. And these oppositional or adversarial epistemologies have left a lasting legacy in the Western world. As Ong has written,

> the Greeks seem to have made more careful use of adversativeness than did other cultures, both as an analytic tool and as an operational intellectual procedure. Adversativeness sets the stage for the central Greek development that has changed the world: formal logic and all that goes with it.... With logic, ancient Greece formalized adversativeness as no other culture had done.[59]

Formal logic, Ong points out, did not grow out of a dispassionate or contemplative search for truth but out of a tradition of verbal disputation and intellectual contest that was closely intertwined with Greek political and rhetorical practices. The center of political and economic activity in ancient Greece was the *agora* – a combined political forum, market

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58 Refer, for instance, to Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy*.

59 Ong, *Fighting For Life*, pp. 21-22.

place, and meeting place in which citizens gathered for many purposes, including to discuss and debate issues of public policy, morality, and even philosophy. To glimpse the tone of this discussion and debate, consider that the word *agora* derived from the Greek word *agon*, which literally meant *contest* – a word that in turn passed into English usage through words like *agonistic* (characterized by contest or struggle) or the more familiar *antagonistic* (acting in opposition or hostility). The world of the agora, then, was characterized by varying degrees of verbal and intellectual contest.

This agonistic tradition was best exemplified by the Sophists – itinerant philosophers or sages noted for their mastery of persuasive and argumentative rhetorical techniques. At the height of their influence, the Sophists were sought out for rhetorical training by citizens with legal and political aspirations. Among the most famous of the Sophists was Protagoras, who was reputedly the first person to write a formal treatise on the techniques of argument and who claimed that through these techniques, even the weaker side of any argument could be made to prevail (an objective which is still pursued today by students who engage in competitive debate or "forensics" tournaments, as well as by lawyers in the Anglo-American legal system).[60]

It was within this intellectual and rhetorical milieu, then, that formal logic emerged in ancient Greece.[61] Aristotle, the first Greek philosopher to devise and publish a formal system

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[60] Of course, not all Greek philosophers engaged in this style of argumentative persuasion or debate. It appears that Socrates, for instance, engaged in much more dialogical and cooperative methods of instruction and inquiry, in which he prompted others to reevaluate their own assumptions and beliefs by posing questions (in a relatively self-effacing manner) in order to encourage critical thinking (as recorded in Plato's *Dialogues*). For an insightful discussion of the way that the "Socratic method" has since become confused with more adversarial modes of logic and inquiry, refer to Moulton, "Adversary Method", pp. 155-57.

[61] Ong, "Agonistic Structures in Academia" and *Fighting For Life*.

of logic, drew on a number of Greek intellectual traditions, including the body of argumentative techniques referred to above.[62] To this day, both formal and informal systems of logic continue to be expressed in terms of logical "arguments". The term *argument* refers, on one hand, simply to a thesis or a set of logical propositions. On the other hand, it simultaneously refers to the logical process whereby different parties set out to justify their own theses or propositions and refute others. Thus the seeds of an adversarial epistemology were planted in Greek formal logic. As Ong writes:

> This seemingly most neutral and objective of subjects [formal logic] had its origins not in isolated scholarly musings, but in the analysis of dispute. It was a product of the rhetorical world of the agora. When the question was asked, "Why does what you say refute what I say?" the stage was set for formal logical analysis.[63]

In this context, it is also important to note that the world of the agora, as well as the Greek academies within which formal logic was conceived, were almost exclusively populated by men. The agonistic model of inquiry described above thus originated, not surprisingly, in a highly masculine (and often misogynistic)[64] culture of learning.

This male culture of learning, with few exceptions, continued to characterized Western scholarship from the ancient Greeks to the mid-twentieth century. As historian David Noble notes in the title of his history of Western science, science has emerged largely in *A World Without Women*.[65] The modern origins of this exclusively male world can be traced most directly to the rise and consolidation of the Latin Church and the emergence of all-male

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62 Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 496.

63 Ong, "Agonistic Structures in Academia", p. 2.

64 Aristotle, for instance, viewed the female state as a deformity of the human condition.

65 The following historical synopsis is heavily indebted to Noble, *A World Without Women*.

monasteries around the fourth century.[66] Shunning women as temptations and distractions on the path to both knowledge and redemption, these monasteries served as the primary sites for the pursuit and preservation of knowledge throughout the early medieval period. In time, these early monastic schools gave rise to more sophisticated cathedral schools, housed and supported directly by the church, run by the clergy, and dedicated to clerical training. Still all-male, these cathedral schools represented the height of medieval learning during the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the seedbeds of the earliest Western universities.

By the time the earliest European universities emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a familiar pattern was merely repeated in more sophisticated form. Although the function of these new institutions was expanded beyond clerical training to include training for an expanding church bureaucracy and a wide range of church-dominated and controlled professions, they continued to function as ecclesiastical institutions with all-male populations, run by celibate male clerics (it was not until 1882, for instance, that Fellows at Oxford and Cambridge were no longer required to remain celibate). These birthplaces of the modern sciences remained exclusive male strongholds until well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As monastic schools evolved into cathedral schools and cathedral schools evolved into universities, one could also see a common thread of misogynistic beliefs and attitudes – most notably a distrust and dread of women as earthly and sinful and a corresponding belief that men could be purified through the shunning of women. Another common thread was a

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[66] Though Western science is often understood as a reaction against religious authority, and a departure from the Christian clerical tradition, this view is profoundly ahistorical, for Western science emerged squarely within the Christian clerical culture.

highly militaristic culture. These institutions were typically characterized by rigorous discipline and military-like regimens. Indeed, their members frequently conceived of themselves as "warriors" trained for spiritual and sometimes even physical battle against "heretics" and "heathens" – as exemplified not only by spiritual missions but also by crusades and inquisitions. In the earliest universities, students also divided themselves internally into "nations" and engaged in ritualized armed contests with one another. At times, this ritualized aggression spilled over into surrounding communities as armed students took to the streets at night, terrorizing local inhabitants – especially women.

It was within this masculine, misogynistic, and militaristic environment, that Western science incubated for over one thousand years. Little wonder, then, Western science came to embody an adversarial epistemology. By the time the earliest universities had been founded, scholarly *disputation* – reminiscent of the agonistic Greek tradition but more formalized and ritualized in its new institutional setting – was a primary method of intellectual training and inquiry.[67] Within this setting, knowledge or truth naturally came to be assayed through the proposal and refutation of ideas within intellectual contests.

Once firmly established by the early clerical culture of Western science, these adversarial practices were retained largely intact through the secularization of learning that eventually followed. With the emergence of the humanist movement in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, relatively secularized Renaissance academies began to emerge under aristocratic rather than church sponsorship. In turn, secular universities were founded and increasing numbers of ecclesiastical universities were gradually secularized as well. In all

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[67] See also Maieru, *University Training in Medieval Europe*, and Ong, "Agonistic Structures in Academia", for discussions of formal disputation in medieval pedagogy.

cases, these institutions remained almost exclusively male well into the nineteenth and in many cases the twentieth century, and the adversarial heritage of the Latin clerical culture was retained.

In the all-male world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western colleges and universities, ritualized enmity between teachers and students was a well-established tradition, including adversarial methods of teaching and testing as well as frequent threats of corporal punishment.[68] Beyond the manner of instruction, the content was also shaped by agonistic traditions. Subjects that lent themselves to scholarly disputation were favoured over subjects that did not. Moreover, texts were filled with histories of violence and tales of valor, together with orations pitting one speaker against another, in order to train the young scholars' minds accordingly. As Ong describes it, "the combined effect of physical threat from switching, agonistic methods of teaching and testing, and highly martial subject matter could often be an academic setting something like that of a present-day survival course"; indeed, those who survived tended to develop a strong sense of "male bonding" based on an experience of shared hardships.[69]

When women finally began to gain entrance into the male world of learning in the mid-nineteenth century, some of these more extreme traditions began to gradually fade.[70] But agonistic modes of thought and inquiry continued to shape contemporary scholarship in subtle ways. Among the most conspicuous expressions of this are the public "defenses" of

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68 Refer to Ong, "Agonistic Structures in Academia" for a more detailed discussion of this theme.

69 Quotation is from Ong, "Agonistic Structures in Academia", pages 5-6. For more detailed discussions of this theme, to which the above summary is indebted, refer also to Ong, *Fighting For Life*.

70 It should be pointed out, however, that even when women gained entrance into the modern world of university education, they were soon confronted by the emergence of all-male professional societies that more or less held the line against women until the middle of the twentieth century.

theses, dissertations, and comprehensive examinations that most graduate schools still require. The more general underlying expression of this, however, is what Janice Moulton refers to as the "adversary paradigm" that still characterizes much contemporary scholarship. Describing the expression of this paradigm within her own discipline of philosophy, Moulton explains that

> under the Adversary Paradigm, it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest or most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imaginary opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it. The justification for this method is that a position ought to be defended from, and subjected to, the criticism of the strongest opposition; that this method is the only way to get the best of both sides; that a thesis which survives this method of evaluation is more likely to be correct than the one that has not; and that a thesis subjected to the Adversary Method will have passed an "objective" test, the most extreme test possible, whereas any weaker criticism or evaluation will, by comparison, give an advantage to the claim to be evaluated and therefore not be as objective as it could be.[71]

As Moulton concludes, the adversary paradigm is a "methodology that accepts a positive view of aggressive behaviour and uses it as a paradigm of philosophic reasoning".[72] This conclusion is echoed by Burtt in an article entitled "Philosophers as Warriors". Describing this process of scholarly debate, Burtt explains that

> each debater's part is presented in a systematic logical sequence aimed at convincing those who listen or read that if certain plausible premises are accepted certain important conclusions follow. Philosophers have carried on their discussions through the centuries in this fashion; their meetings, journal articles, and books consist mainly (and often wholly) of argumentative debate.[73]

Intellectual contests thus continue to serve as normative models for the contemporary pursuit of knowledge and understanding.[74] And the implications are complex. On the one hand, this contest model of scholarship has advanced the pursuit of human knowledge and

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[71] Moulton, "Adversary Method", p. 153.

[72] Ibid., p 149.

[73] Burtt, "Philosophers as Warriors", p. 33, parentheses in the original.

understanding to previously unattained heights. Much of the science and technology we take for granted in this age is the product of this model. We are all familiar with these accomplishments, and they need no elaboration here. On the other hand, an adversarial epistemology comes with a number of costs that are all too frequently overlooked in the shadow of these tremendous accomplishments.

Among the costs of a contest model of scholarship are the many voices who are excluded or withdraw from the arena of scholarship due to its frequently adversarial atmosphere. Such an atmosphere can exclude or inhibit individuals who, by nature or nurture, are neither inclined toward nor comfortable with adversarial contests – even though they may have important scholarly insights to offer. In this regard, adversarial debate can undermine lucid reasoning even among the most confident and aggressive people.[75] Such conditions can entirely silence less confident and less aggressive individuals.

By extension, adversarial contests arguably tend to privilege many male scholars who, whether by nature or nurture or some combination of the two, have historically tended to be more aggressive than women and thus frequently find themselves at a relative advantage within this contest model.[76] The resulting disadvantage experienced by many women may also be experienced by many minority groups who have often had to learn to adopt subordinate postures in relation to dominant social groups. Moreover, women and minorities may be further disadvantaged because even though male or dominant-group expressions of

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[74] Refer also to Tompkins, "Fighting Words", Cope-Kasten, "Domination Rationality", and Tannen, *The Argument Culture*, for similar conclusions by scholars in a range of disciplines.

[75] As Moulton states, "conditions of hostility are not likely to elicit the best reasoning" ("Adversary Method", p. 153).

[76] Refer, for example, to discussions in Moulton, "Adversary Method", and Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*.

aggression are often considered natural and appropriate, the same kinds of expressions, when employed by women or subordinate minorities, are often viewed as unnatural and inappropriate. Thus the same rewards do not necessarily accrue to women and minorities for the same adversarial behaviours.[77]

Beyond the exclusions, inhibitions, and double standards identified above, the adversary paradigm also tends to limit and/or isolate the diversity of perspectives available even among those who are willing and able to play by adversarial rules. Adversarial debate assumes that some theories will be proved right and others wrong – or some will win, while others lose. Ideally, of course, the theory that most adequately explains reality prevails. This assumes, however, that reality can adequately be explained though a single theoretical framework. But if there is one epistemological lesson that should have been learned throughout the past century, it is that an adequate grasp of any given phenomenon often requires multiple complementary theoretical frameworks – each of which illuminates different facets of the same phenomenon.

This insight applies not only in the social sciences but even within physics and other natural sciences. The classic example of this is particle/wave duality in subatomic physics. In fact, the original debates about whether electromagnetic energy could best be understood in terms of particle theory or wave theory are perfect illustrations of the exclusive and reductionistic tendencies of the adversary paradigm. Only after a generation of debate between particle theorists and wave theorists, did physicists eventually accept that an adequate grasp of the subject required the use of both apparently contradictory models.

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[77] Refer again to Moulton, "Adversary Method", and Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*.

Parallel debates have since played out in many other fields – most recently in the field of ecology.[78] The manner in which those debates have been resolved provides a glimpse of an epistemological alternative to the adversary paradigm. An adversarial epistemology, however, tends to militate against the consideration of complementary perspectives, for complementarity implies that there is no clear winner or loser, no single right or wrong. By privileging single perspectives over multiple perspectives, the adversary paradigm favours reductionistic and absolutist thought.

Another set of costs associated with the adversary paradigm are the emotional, psychological, and relational costs to those who participate in it. Intellectual skepticism and constructive critique can undoubtedly be important tools of intellectual inquiry when exercised within an atmosphere of personal detachment and a sincere desire for truth. In the abstract, the adversary paradigm is generally understood in this manner – as a contest of ideas rather than a contest between people. In practice, however, the line between ideas and egos is a fine one, and intellectual debates frequently become personalized and hostile. Indeed, such a tone of personalized hostility has become commonplace within many academic conferences and journals.

In an essay entitled *Fighting Words*, Jane Thompson eloquently captures this tendency. Recalling a familiar scene at a recent academic conference, she describes a scholar delivering a paper that is critical of another scholar's work. Her description is quoted at length here for the insight it offers into the frequently adversarial world of contemporary scholarship:

> A woman is giving a paper. It is an attack on another woman's recent book; the entire paper is devoted to demolishing it, and the speaker is doing a superb job. The audience has begun to catch the spirit of the paper, which is witty, elegant, and razor sharp; they appreciate the deftness, the

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[78] Refer to discussion in Chapter IV.

> brilliance, the grace, with which the assassination is being conducted; the speaker's intelligence flatters their intelligence... They are inside her paper now, pulling with the speaker, seeing her victim in the same way she does, as the enemy...
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> Listening to the paper, which I admired very much for the performance values I've mentioned, I began to feel more and more uncomfortable... I was afraid this woman might one day turn her attack on me – indeed, in one of her devastating sideswipes, I thought I had already been anonymously grazed by her dagger – and I imagined the audience, which only the day before had enthusiastically applauded my own presentation, turning on me like a pack of dogs. By the time the paper was over, I felt as if I had been present at a ritual execution of some sort, something halfway between a bullfight, where the crowd admires the skill of a matador and enjoys his triumph over the bull, and a public burning, where the crowd witnesses the just punishment of a criminal. For the academic experience combined the elements of admiration, bloodlust, and moral self-congratulation.
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> Afterwards, I began to recall in a kind of phantasmagoria all the essays I had read where similar executions had occurred. It wasn't the essays themselves that came to mind as much as the moves they characteristically made... I remembered the times I had seen someone's diction ridiculed, or their unhappy choice of metaphor derided... the innumerable times people had been garroted by their own self-contradictions. But most vivid of all were the moments when the characterological defects implicit in someone's style or point of view were indignantly paraded by. Following traditional lines of thought was translated into cowardice; dependence on another scholar's work into toadyism; failing to mention another scholar's work into lack of generosity, and so on. The list is practically endless. In veiled language, I realized, we accuse one another of stupidity, ignorance, fear, envy, pride, malice, and hypocrisy...
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> [Then] I remembered something else, an essay I had published in 1981 that, twice anthologized since then, had been in many ways the making of my career... The essay began with a frontal assault on another woman scholar. When I wrote it I felt the way a hero does in a Western. Not only had this critic argued *a*, *b*, and *c*, she had held *x*, *y*, and *z*! It was a clear case of outrageous provocation. Moreover, she was famous and I was not... In this David and Goliath situation – my slingshot against her ca(n)non – surely I was justified in hitting her with everything I had. And so, casting myself as the champion of the oppressed, and wielding scare quotes and withering sarcasm, I showed the world the evil of her ways and out of the shambles of her position went on to build the temple of my own.[79]

Granted, this relatively extreme mode of intellectual contest (or combat) is not commonplace in all disciplines. As Tompkins concludes, however, "it's practiced at some time or other by virtually everyone" in the more critical social science and humanities disciplines.[80] The irony, moreover, is that such combative approaches might not only be judged offensive on moral or humanitarian grounds, but those who engage in them also tend

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[79] Tompkins, "Fighting Words", pp. 587-89.

[80] Ibid., p. 589.

to entrench rather than convince their "opponents". As Burtt points out, adopting such an approach "reveals a lack of awareness that the hostile and pugnacious urge, which cannot be wholly hidden if it is there, instead of cowing people into submission provokes a similar urge in response… [with] the opponent almost sure to remain unconvinced".[81]

Aside from these more extreme modes of adversarialism, the competitive nature of the entire academic environment and the political economy of knowledge associated with it influence scholarly activity in all disciplines. In Western-liberal democracies, material contests over scarce resources shape and constrain all scholarly activity. These contests play out first in partisan legislative systems that determine public spending priorities which in turn impact research and education. They also play out in capitalist free markets, as powerful corporations exert lobbying pressures to influence the public spending priorities alluded to above, and as crises in public financing force scholars to turn directly to private corporations for grants and research support. Finally, they play out most conspicuously on college and university campuses as individual scholars, as well as entire departments, compete with one another for funding, recognition, career advancement, and so forth.

In this context, the abstract ideal of an impersonal and detached contest of ideas translates, in practice, into a wide range of motivations and expressions that often have little to do with the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Thus the internal politics of academic institutions are frequently characterized by adversarial negotiation and posturing, as battles over theoretical, disciplinary, or ideological primacy combine with "turf wars" over funding to create environments within which the activities of teaching and research are

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[81] Burtt, "Philosophers as Warriors", p. 35.

carried out. In this atmosphere, the politics of ambition frequently prevail, and winning, rather than the collective pursuit of knowledge and understanding, becomes the primary goal. This atmosphere, moreover, is further promoted and reinforced by values and attitudes that are imported from the larger culture of adversarialism that exists outside of academia.

In summary, even though scholarly contests of ideas have advanced human knowledge and understanding to previously unattained heights, they come with a number of costs that are all-too-frequently overlooked in the shadow of these accomplishments. Granted, intellectual debate is a far cry from physical violence. But by fostering an atmosphere of intellectual conflict and competition, it can exclude or inhibit less confident and aggressive people from participating in scholarly inquiry. By militating against the consideration of complementary truths, it can limit or isolate the diversity of perspectives available even among those who are willing and able to play by adversarial rules. By normalizing a tone of personalized hostility, especially in more critical scholarly discourses, it can exact a high emotional, psychological, and relational toll within these disciplines. And finally, within the context of the competitive political economy that characterizes all contemporary disciplines, it can foster an atmosphere in which winning, rather than the collective pursuit of knowledge and understanding, becomes the primary goal. Of course, apologists of this adversary paradigm defend rational debate on the basis that it is more desirable than irrational or even violent alternatives. Thus the costs identified above can be written off as necessary tradeoffs. But this common sense assertion again embodies a false choice because it conceals the possibility that equally rational yet non-adversarial alternatives might be possible.[82]

[82] While a full-fledged discussion of such alternatives is beyond the scope of this paper, elements of such alternatives are discussed in subsequent chapters. Refer, for instance, to the discussion in Chapter IV under

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Adversarialism as a Comprehensive Cultural Formation

As the survey above illustrates, the codes of adversarialism find relatively ubiquitous and indiscriminate expression throughout the contemporary Western public sphere. In this regard, each of the social arenas discussed above are mutually compatible and mutually reinforcing. No matter which direction one turns, adversarial structures and practices tend to dominate one's view. Even the adversarialism of many social activists is consistent with, and reinforces, the adversarialism of those social structures and practices that are the objects of their critiques or reforms.

In this context, each of the social arenas above articulate into a comprehensive discursive or cultural formation, as defined in Chapter I. Recall: a comprehensive discursive formation is constituted by the articulation of distinct but mutually compatible discourses in a manner that reinforces similar ways of thinking, talking, and acting throughout diverse social arenas – in this case adversarial ways of thinking, talking, and acting throughout the economic, political, judicial, mass media, social advocacy, and academic arenas among others. In this manner, these discourses constitute a larger discursive universe – a constellation of discourses – within which Western populations are born, develop, and learn that it is normal and natural to think, talk, and act in largely adversarial ways. These discourses embody adversarial "truths" about human nature and society that appear to be self-evident within the social realities they construct. They define human beings in adversarial ways that we then

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the Ecological / Environmentalism section. Refer also to the brief discussion of a "consultative epistemology" – in which diverse perspectives are seen as potentially complementary and inquiry proceeds in a cooperative manner, through informed dialogue rather than argumentative debate – touched on in Chapter V. For an insightful and in-depth discussion of this consultative epistemology, refer to Smith, "The Relativity of Social Construction".

tend to enact or personify in our roles and behaviours. They also construct social institutions that organize and regulate our collective practices accordingly. In short, they construct a general culture of adversarialism – in both its psycho-cultural and socio-structural dimensions – that appears natural and inevitable to those within it.

The Question of Human Nature

Skeptics argue, of course, that human nature *is* fundamentally selfish and adversarial and that Western-liberal models of social organization simply reflect our genetic inheritance. Indeed, this has been the conventional wisdom within many of the social sciences throughout the twentieth century.[83] But the roots of these assumptions about human nature run much deeper.[84] As Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin point out:

> Philosophically this view of human nature is very old; it goes back to the emergence of bourgeois society in the seventeenth century and to Hobbes's view of human existence as *bellum omnium contra omnes*, a war of all against all, leading to a state of human relations manifesting competitiveness, mutual fear, and the desire for glory. For Hobbes, it followed that the purpose of social organization was merely to regulate these inevitable features of the human condition. And Hobbes's view of the human condition derived from his understanding of human biology; it was biological inevitability that made humans what they were.[85]

These assumptions regarding human nature, however, are increasingly being challenged by scholars from diverse disciplines.[86] As anthropologists Howell and Willis state:

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[83] The more prominent and explicit proponents of this view include, for instance, Lorenz, *On Aggression*; Morris, *The Naked Ape*; Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative*; Storr, *Human Aggression*; Konner, *Tangled Wing*; Tiger and Fox, *The Imperial Animal*; and Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *The Biology of Peace and War*. For insightful critiques of these and similar views, refer to Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*, as well as Lewontin, *Biology as Ideology*.

[84] Refer, for example, to Kehoe, "Conflict is a Western Worldview", for a discussion of these assumptions in Western philosophy.

[85] Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*, p. 5. Refer also to Ryan, "The Nature of Human Nature", for a more detailed examination of Hobbes's views on human nature.

[86] For an excellent edited collection of essays and articles on this subject, refer to Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond Self-Interest*. See also Brocke-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives*; Ross, *Culture of Conflict*; Bandura,

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> The great majority of researchers assert that "aggression" is an integral part of human nature; and that aggressive impulses and behaviour have somehow to be directed and controlled for human relations to be sustained over time in a social setting. Scientists present their ideas to the general public, contributing directly or indirectly to debates in social, legal, and religious domains. Their views on questions of human nature therefore assume major importance in the moral community of which they form a part...
>
> We wish to propose an alternative approach, challenging the assumption that aggression is an innate human drive. It is undeniably the case that in Western society aggression is regarded as part of human nature. But perhaps this tells us more about Western society than about human nature. We wish to suggest that we cannot assume an *a priori* aggressive drive in humans. The presence of innate sociality, on the other hand, has much evidence in its favour. Humans are *a priori* sociable beings; it is their cooperativeness that has enabled them to survive, not their aggressive impulses.[87]

Other prominent anthropologists, including Leakey and Lewin, have echoed these conclusions regarding the cooperative capacities of the human species:

> Throughout our recent evolutionary history, particularly since the rise of a hunting way of life, there must have been extreme selective pressures in favour of our ability to cooperate as a group... The degree of selective pressure towards cooperation, group awareness, and identification was so strong, and the period over which it operated was so extended, that it can hardly fail to have become embedded to some measure in our genetic makeup.[88]

Of course, assertions such as these need not deny the existence of conflict and aggression in human societies. Rather, it is increasingly recognized that human beings have the developmental potential for both conflict and cooperation and that how we act in this regard is shaped largely by our cultural environment – as demonstrated by the fact that different societies vary considerably in their expressions of conflict and cooperation.[89]

Outside of anthropology, many economists are arriving at parallel conclusions. Rejecting

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Aggression; Montagu, ed., *Learning Non-Aggression*; Kemp, "Nonviolence"; Montagu, *The Nature of Human Aggression*; Kohn, *Human Nature*; and Mark and Ervin, *Violence and the Brain.*

87 Howell and Willis, *Societies at Peace*, pp. 1-2.

88 Leakey and Lewin, *Origins*, p. 209. Refer also to Bateson, "Co-operation", and Carrithers, "Sociality", for similar assertions.

89 For an excellent statement of this conclusion, refer to Seville, "Statement on Violence" – a joint statement of twenty social and biological scientists from around the world, gathered during the United Nation's International Year of Peace to explore, among other things, the relationship between peace, war, and human nature. Refer also to Ross, *Culture of Conflict*, and Masters, *The Nature of Politics*.

the fundamentally self-interested and competitive understanding of *"Homo economus"* that has dominated for several centuries, these economists subscribe to an expanded understanding of human nature that accounts for cooperative, altruistic, and even self-sacrificing behaviour.[90] In fact, a growing body of economic theory and research suggests that the competitive pursuit of self-interests is often a less effective strategy than mutual cooperation – even when measured strictly by indicators of material gain.[91] In this context, game theorists and other economists have demonstrated that cooperative strategies may have been selected for in human evolution due to the advantages they confer relative to adversarial strategies.[92] Thus some economists are converging with the anthropologists discussed above in their conclusions that natural selection may have favoured cooperative traits in human beings.

In addition, many economists (as well as scholars in other disciplines) have begun expressing concern about the self-fulfilling or generative nature of assumptions that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. Numerous studies suggest, for instance, that economists themselves tend to behave in more self-interested ways than non-economists, due in part to their continual exposure to these assumptions.[93] In turn, given the predominant

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90 Refer, for example, to Becker, "A Theory of Social Interactions" and "Genetic Fitness"; Collard, *Altruism and Economy*; Frank, "Homo Economus"; Hammond, "Charity, Altruism or Cooperative Egoism?"; Hollander, "Voluntary Cooperation"; Margolis, *Selfishness, Altruism, and Rationality*; Sugden, "On the Economics of Philanthropy"; Zamagni, ed., *The Economics of Altruism*; and Lunati, "On Altruism and Cooperation".

91 Refer, for example, to Akerlof, "Loyalty Filters"; Frank, *Passions Within Reason*; Hirshleifer, "Threats and Promises"; Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*; and Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond Self-Interest.*

92 Refer, for example, to Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*; Bergstrom and Stark, "How Altruism Can Prevail"; Becker, "Genetic Fitness"; Samuelson, "Altruism"; Casti, "Cooperation"; and Simon, "Successful Altruism".

93 For an excellent overview of these studies, refer to Frank, Gilovich, and Regan, "Does Studying Economics Inhibit Cooperation?". Ironically, many of these studies also show that in standard ultimatum bargaining scenarios, economists tend to be less successful than non-economists because the latter place a higher value

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influence of economics within the contemporary public sphere, these traditional economic assumptions tend to translate into public policies and practices reflecting the view that "competition is healthy, cooperation is not feasible".[94] As Zamagni explains:

> Our beliefs about human nature help shape human nature itself, in the sense that what we think about ourselves and our possibilities determine what we aspire to become. In this precise sense, the self-interest theory is not morally neutral, contrary to what most economists seem to believe. There is growing evidence that the self-interest paradigm may be self-fulfilling... subjects come to perceive self-interest as a normative characterization of rational behaviour and come to act accordingly. It is here that the effects of the self-interest theory are most disturbing.[95]

Moreover, similar concerns can be expressed about the self-fulfilling nature of the assumptions that underlie each of the other arenas – politics, law, media, social advocacy, and scholarship – discussed earlier in this chapter. By naturalizing conflict, competition, and other adversarial expressions within their respective spheres, these discourses may well generate and perpetuate the realities they merely purport to reflect – thus *cultivating* the empirical evidence with which they in turn legitimize themselves.[96]

The Culture of Adversarialism as a Hegemonic Formation

By confusing a relatively adversarial human culture with human nature itself, it becomes difficult to recognize, let alone imagine, other cultural possibilities. As a consequence,

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on mutualism and cooperation, which tends to be a more successful strategy. Refer, for example, to Lattimore, "Is It Rational to Be Rational?".

94 Lunati, "On Altruism and Cooperation", p. 69.

95 Zamagni, "The Economics of Altruism", p. xxi . See also Rushton, "Altruism and Society", for a parallel discussion.

96 *Cultivation theory* suggests that repeated exposure to a consistent and pervasive set of representations can incrementally influence human perceptions and behaviour in a collective and cumulative manner. In other words, cultures are cultivated in part through the "stories" we tend to tell about ourselves. Cultivation theory also suggests that processes of cultivation can reinforce existing cultural perceptions and behaviours once established. Despite the obvious difficulty of empirically verifying these claims, cultivation analysis has yielded impressive support for both of these hypotheses. For an excellent overview of cultivation theory, methodology, and findings, refer to the edited collection of articles on this theme in Morgan and Signorielli, "Cultivation Analysis".

alternative ways of thinking, talking, and acting are marginalized by the common sense "realism" or "realpolitik" that the culture of adversarialism constructs.[97] From the vantage point provided by this adversarial-realism, non-adversarial alternatives appear naïve or utopian.

In this context, the culture of adversarialism can be seen as a *hegemonic* cultural formation. As discussed in Chapter I, hegemonic dominance is achieved when specific interpretations of reality become the accepted "common sense" within society, even among groups whose interests are subordinated by them. As demonstrated by the anti-suffragist women discussed in Chapter I, it is often difficult to step outside of a discursive universe you have been born and raised in, even when your own interests are subordinated by it. Moreover, it can be difficult even to recognize that one is living in a historically specific cultural formation at all because to the extent hegemonic dominance has been effective, that formation will appear not as a cultural construct but simply as "reality" itself – normal, natural, and inevitable.

In this context, we have arguably been born into a culture of adversarialism that was not of our own making, prefigured to some degree by cultural codes that are widely accepted as common sense. Moreover, these cultural codes may subordinate many of our broadest collective interests to the narrow interests of privileged groups who benefit most from them. Of course, in light of the ultimate fluidity of cultural codes, change is always possible. As

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[97] As Kehoe argues in "Conflict is a Western Worldview", p. 59, "*realpolitik*, like any image of 'reality,' is the product of a particular culture… it stands as itself hegemonic, a discourse that 'disables' its challengers by… 'portraying parochial categories as if they are universal'". For parallel discussions, refer also to Rubinstein, "International Security"; Satha-Anand, "From Violent to Nonviolent Discourse"; and Walker, "Contemporary Militarism".

alluded to above, however, change is contingent upon our ability to step outside the culture of adversarialism (if only in our imaginations at first), in order to admit the possibility of alternatives.

CHAPTER IV: ALTERNATIVES TO ADVERSARIALISM

Historical Expressions

As the introductory chapter of this dissertation points out, adversarialism has never been the sole characteristic of any culture, including contemporary Western-liberal cultures. Strands of mutualism have also been present in all human cultures – from the earliest human societies to the present. Indeed, as the discussion in Chapter III notes, many anthropologists attribute the evolutionary success of our species to these cooperative tendencies and capacities. They are clearly part of our evolutionary heritage.

With this said, it is important not to romanticize our distant past by constructing false images of an idyllic era in which human beings lived in peace and harmony, untroubled by aggression, conflict, and competition. There is no strong evidence to suggest that a golden age of mutualism and cooperation has ever existed. For instance, though the "partnership cultures" described by Riane Eisler have a certain romantic appeal, they appear to be a slightly wishful re-interpretation of Neolithic history.[1] Since the original publication of Eisler's work, other scholars have pointed out a number of unwarranted inferences that Eisler has made from very sketchy archeological data, as well as a body of contradictory data that she overlooked.[2] In her effort to construct an image of the past that would offer hope for the future, Eisler may have overstated her thesis.

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1 Eisler, *Chalice and the Blade.*

2 Refer, for instance, to Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics.*

To Eisler's credit, however, she did expose the spurious nature of contrary assumptions that "primitive" cultures were necessarily hostile and aggressive – the anthropological version of a Hobbesian worldview. If that is all one is looking for in the archeological data, then that is what one will tend to find. By re-examining the archeological data from a feminist perspective, Eisler does find evidence for a degree of peace and cooperation that has typically been overlooked by other anthropologists. Studies of surviving hunter-gatherer societies lend additional support to this general conclusion. In an extensive meta-analysis of such studies, Ross demonstrates that known hunter-gatherer cultures also weave strands of mutualism and adversarialism together in complex yet diverse ways.[3]

In addition to these relatively early forms of social organization, strands of mutualism and cooperation have also been present in more complex pre-industrial societies. For instance, many traditional Asian and other non-Western civilizations have placed a strong value on harmony and interdependence rather than conflict and competitive individualism. Such cooperative and mutualistic attitudes have in turn supported the development of sophisticated arts, sciences, and technologies, as well as complex and extensive systems of public administration. Again, it is important not to romanticize such cultures or overstate their cooperative and mutualistic dimensions. The same cultures were also frequently characterized by feudal warfare, the oppression of women, and significant disparities of wealth and poverty. Thus mutualism and cooperation have coexisted with adversarialism and oppression in such societies.

In recent Western history, strands of mutualism and cooperation have also clearly been

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[3] Ross, *Culture of Conflict.*

present. In the sphere of private or personal relations, much human interaction has obviously been cooperative and mutualistic. But even in the public sphere, which is the focus of this dissertation, strands of mutualism and cooperation can easily be identified. The historical process of nation building, the emergence of democratic systems of government, and the establishment of the rule of law within these democratic nations all reflect (in part) expressions of mutualism and cooperation on historically unprecedented scales. The emergence of the United Nations system, along with other international institutions in the latter half of this century, also represent expressions of mutualism and cooperation, now playing out on a global scale. Despite the current imperfections of these institutions (which can be attributed to the fact that they have been forged within and subordinated to competitive systems of national sovereignty and unregulated global capitalism), they have yielded declarations of principle (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), that are beginning to exert a significant influence on political discourse both within and between nations.

Intertwined with these broader geo-political accomplishments have been diverse social movements that all reflect commitments to more mutualistic and cooperative patterns of social life. Struggles to abolish slavery have been prime examples of this, as have various women's suffrage movements throughout the world. The American civil rights movement provides another clear example, as do the countless grassroots peace movements that have emerged over the course of this century.

Expressions of mutualism and cooperation can also be seen in the economic sphere. The cooperative movement, for example, represents a distinct effort to transcend exploitative relations between capitalists and workers through the articulation of cooperative models of

economic ownership. And many practical cooperative experiments have been remarkably successful in this regard. Of course, cooperative ventures still compete with other ventures within the larger framework of competitive market relations. Nevertheless, they do represent a relative shift from the domain of adversarialism and inequality to the domain of cooperation and equality.

Spanning both the political and economic spheres, various socialist movements have also been motivated by cooperative ideals and commitments. Though socialism takes many forms, most socialists have sought to replace the competitive structures of capitalism with more cooperative or communal alternatives. Of course, some socialist movements have adopted relatively confrontational strategies for pursuing their goals. Others, however, have pursued non-adversarial strategies of social change. Fabian Socialists, for instance, have generally rejected confrontational or revolutionary strategies in favour of gradual reform within existing institutional structures.[4] Regardless of the strategies adopted, virtually all advocates of socialism maintain that human beings can and must learn how to function together in fundamentally mutualistic and cooperative ways. Even Marx, while interpreting history primarily through the lens of class conflict, did not hold that human beings were incorrigibly selfish or aggressive. Rather, he maintained that antagonism between social groups had structural causes, and it would end when those structural causes were eliminated.[5]

Likewise, modern anarchist movements have derived from generally similar views and commitments. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the founding figures of modern anarchism,

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[4] Refer, for instance, to Cole, *Fabian Socialism*.

[5] For insightful discussions regarding Marx's view of human nature and social antagonism, refer to McMurtry, *Marx's Worldview*, and Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*.

advocated a system of "economic mutualism" in which the exchange of goods and services would occur at cost (i.e., without profit) within a sphere of voluntary economic association.[6] The Russian anarchist Petr Kropotkin wrote a lengthy treatise refuting social Darwinist views regarding the inevitability of human struggle and conflict and pointing out that human beings had inherited a genetic capacity to work together toward their common good.[7] And though Kropotkin advocated relatively adversarial strategies for overthrowing existing social structures, in order to clear the ground for a new cooperative society characterized by free association, Proudhon and many other anarchists have been committed to relatively peaceful strategies of change. Whatever the strategies, the ultimate goals have generally been to replace authoritarian or oppressive state structures with some system of free association and cooperation. Moreover, as the anarcho-syndicalist movement illustrates, these goals have often been linked with the socialist goals of creating an alternative to the dominant system of competitive capitalism.

In summary, adversarialism has never been a monolithic expression within any culture. Strands of mutualism and cooperation co-existed in the earliest human societies. They have been present in many complex non-Western civilizations. They were present throughout the recent history of Western civilization. And as the discussion below illustrates, they are still present today – even if they are frequently marginalized by the dominant structures of adversarialism.

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6 Proudhon, *What Is Property?*

7 Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid.*

Contemporary Prescriptions

The remainder of this chapter will survey a number of contemporary critiques of adversarialism and the non-adversarial prescriptions that derive from them. As in the last chapter, this survey is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Other critiques and prescriptions can certainly be found. However, each of the critiques below has been selected for the theoretically informed insights they offer into the dominant culture of adversarialism.

Feminism

Given the association between adversarialism and masculinity discussed in the beginning of Chapter III, alternatives to adversarialism have frequently been articulated within feminist discourses. Of course, feminism embodies diverse currents of thought and practice, and some of these currents have been quite adversarial. At the same time, however, many feminists have articulated insightful critiques of adversarialism.[8]

Feminist critiques of adversarialism take several forms. What they tend to share, however, is the assertion that models of aggression, competition, and power struggles have historically served, in various ways, as structures of male domination over women.[9] On the most obvious level, this has occurred through direct physical aggression of men against women. In many historical periods and cultures, male aggression against women has been accepted as normal and natural, and given the greater physical strength of many men, these

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8 The following discussion is not intended to imply that all feminists speak with one voice and from one perspective. Rather, the specific feminist perspectives outlined below have been included because they articulate clear critiques of, and alternatives to, the normative adversarialism that dominates much contemporary discourse.

9 Refer, for example, to discussions in Hartsock, *Feminist Historical Materialism* and "Political Change"; Moulton, "Adversary Method"; Brocke-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives*; McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life*; Taslitz, *Rape and the Culture of the Courtroom*; and Warren and Cady, "Feminism and Peace".

cultural norms have served as obvious structures of male domination. Moreover, despite the recent criminalization of many forms of violence against women in many countries, the residual influences of these historical norms can still be widely seen throughout the world, including the West.

In addition to physical aggression against women, many feminists argue that aggression, competition, and the valorization of power struggles have served as structures of male domination in more subtle ways as well. Throughout the public sphere, in our economy, our political institutions, our judicial systems, our educational systems, and so forth, systems of reward tend to privilege traditionally "masculine" adversarial traits over traditionally "feminine" traits such as caring and cooperation.[10] In turn, given the historical association of aggression and competition with masculinity, these systems of reward often serve as systems of male privilege.[11] Moreover, this appears to be the case regardless of whether the association between adversarialism and masculinity is biologically determined, socially learned, or a combination of the two. On the one hand, if males tend to be biologically more aggressive and competitive than females, then a system that rewards masculine traits above feminine traits privileges males based on biological differences. On the other hand, if these differences tend to be the results of gender socialization, then a system that rewards

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[10] This statement is not meant to imply any *necessary* or *essential* correspondence between male and female biology on the one hand and "masculine" and "feminine" qualities on the other. Debate over the biological basis for these associations is far from resolved – and it need not be resolved for the purpose of this discussion. Rather, the terms "masculine" and "feminine" are used here to denote traditional *cultural associations* rather than necessary *biological associations* – or what some would call *gender types* as opposed to *sex types*.

[11] Of course, whether these associations are biological or cultural, they are not absolute. Nurturing and cooperation are displayed by men, even as aggression and competition are displayed by women. For a discussion of these cultural and historical complexities and contradictions, especially regarding expressions of female militarism, refer to Elshtain, *Women and War*.

masculine traits above feminine traits privileges males through differential socialization. Either way, as long as aggression and competition are rewarded, males are often advantaged and females are often disadvantaged.

In addition, even when women do engage in traditional power struggles and play by aggressive and competitive rules, they often do not receive equivalent rewards for equivalent behaviours. Male expressions of aggression and competition are rewarded in many situations because they tend to be viewed as natural and appropriate. In contrast, female expressions of aggression and competition are often not rewarded in the same situations because they tend to be viewed as unnatural and inappropriate.[12] Double standards such as these further reinforce the structures of male domination that have been constructed through the association of aggression, competition, and masculinity within systems of reward throughout the public sphere.

Furthermore, beyond the relative disadvantages that women have historically experienced within these reward structures, many feminists also express concern regarding the domination of masculine *qualities* (as opposed to male persons) over feminine *qualities* (as opposed to female persons) in our societies – regardless of whether these qualities are displayed by women or men.[13] Simply put, the flip side of a culture that privileges adversarial power struggles and qualities is a culture that devalues non-adversarial relations and qualities. Thus, within a culture of adversarialism, the nurturing relations and qualities that are requisites of effective parenthood, education, and various caring professions tend to

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[12] Refer, for example, to discussions in Moulton, "Adversary Method", and Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*.

[13] Refer, for example, to discussions in Reardon, *Women and Peace*, and Brocke-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives*.

be devalued across the board. The cooperative and reciprocal relations that are requisites of mutual accomplishment and collective capacity also tend to be devalued. And finally, the peaceful relations that are requisites of community and security also tend to be devalued. Devaluing these relations and qualities, in turn, has dual consequences. On the one hand, as discussed above, by delegating most of the roles requiring these qualities to women, women are discriminated against through their association with these devalued roles. On the other hand, the devaluation of these qualities simultaneously creates a disincentive for men to develop them, and, as a consequence, the half of the population that still largely holds the reins of public affairs brings a deficit of nurturing, caring, and cooperative skills to their positions of power in society.

In all of these ways, the culture of adversarialism tends to subordinate women to men within a gender hierarchy while simultaneously inhibiting the development of nurturing and cooperative capacities in those at the top of that hierarchy. The social implications of both of these tendencies, in turn, extend throughout both the private and public spheres. Thus we live in an era in which the nurturing work of stay-at-home parents, whether mothers or fathers, does not even register in our accounting of economic productivity and social well-being.[14] We live in an era in which two-income families are becoming the norm while child-care workers, who are increasingly caring for children during their formative years, are among the lowest paid workers in society.[15] And we live in an era in which perpetual

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[14] Refer, for example, to discussions in Folbre, ed., *The Economics of the Family*; Bakker, *Unpaid Work*; Blau, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work*; Gardiner, *Gender, Care, and Economics*; DeVault, *Feeding the Family*; and Beasley, *Feminist Economics*.

[15] Refer, for example, to Heston, Weiner, and Helburn, eds., *Silent Crisis*; Child Care Human Resources Steering Committee, *Our Child Care Workforce*; and Centre for the Child Care Workforce, *Worthy Work*.

preparations for war divert scarce resources away from public health, education, and other investments in social welfare, on a massive and unprecedented scale.[16]

However, on the margins of this (arguably male) culture of adversarialism, which valorizes aggression, competition, and power struggles, many female theorists have articulated an alternative discourse on social relations and power.[17] This discourse, which can be traced back several generations, reveals distinctly non-adversarial ways of thinking and talking about power relations. For instance, in the 1940s, in language foreshadowing the discussion in Chapter II, Mary Parker Follett articulated a distinction between "coercive" and "coactive" power, or "power over" and "power with".[18] Follett argued that the usual understanding of power relations as coercive was limited and problematic. She argued instead for an expanded understanding – a "conception of power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-active, not a coercive power" – that could serve as a new normative basis for social and political relations.[19]

This distinction was soon echoed by other female theorists, including Dorothy Emmett in the 1950s and Hannah Arendt in the 1960s.[20] In Arendt's words, "power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert".[21] The simplistic conflation of power with domination, she warned, results "in a kind of blindness" to human social reality.[22] "It is only

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16 Refer, for instance, to Sivard, Brauer, Lumpe, and Walker, *World Military and Social Expenditures*.

17 I use the term *female* rather than *feminist* here because the earliest women to articulate an alternative discourse on power did not tend to self-identify as feminists. However, the gender of these authors was not incidental to the theories they articulated, and many subsequent feminist authors explicitly drew on their work, as the discussion below demonstrates.

18 Follett, "Power", pp. 101-16.

19 Ibid., p. 101.

20 Emmet, "The Concept of Power"; Arendt, *On Violence*.

21 Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 44.

22 Ibid., p. 43.

after one ceases to reduce public affairs to the business of dominion", she thus asserted, that "human affairs will appear, or rather, reappear, in their authentic diversity".[23]

In the 1970s, this distinction was picked up again by prominent theorists such as Jean Baker Miller. The word *power*, Miller wrote, has

> acquired certain connotations [that] imply certain modes of behaviour more typical of men than women. But it may be that these modes are not necessary or essential to [its] meaning. Like all concepts and actions of a dominant group, "power" may have been distorted and skewed. It has rested almost solely in the hands of people who have lived with a constant need to maintain an irrational dominance; and in their hands it has acquired overtones of tyranny.[24]

"It is important then", Miller argues, "to look into some of the meanings of power... to see whether, as women struggle in the economic, political, and other fields, they can redefine power".[25] As she explains:

> Women have exerted enormous powers in their traditional role of fostering growth in others, and they have found that empowering others is a valuable and gratifying activity. Empowering other people, however, does not fit accepted conceptualizations and definitions of power... Women's views have [thus] not been taken into account in most studies of power.[26]

Miller, in turn, advocates a broad redefinition of power based on the "capacity to produce change", which includes activities such as "nurturing" and "empowering others".[27] "To be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others", she concludes, "is a radical turn – a very different motivation than the concept of power upon which this world has operated".[28]

In the 1980s and 1990s, efforts to redefine power in less masculine ways began to echo

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23 Ibid., pp. 43-44.

24 Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, p. 115.

25 Ibid., p. 116.

26 Miller, "Women and Power", p. 1.

27 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

28 Ibid., p. 5.

throughout an emerging body of feminist literature.[29] In a review of "the feminist theory of power",[30] Nancy Hartsock concludes that

> theories of power put forward by women rather than men differ systematically from the understanding of power as domination. While few women have theorized about power, their theories bear a striking similarity...[31]
>
> The common thread... is the writer's concern to argue against the understanding of power as dominance or domination; to attempt to point to other meanings of the term more associated with ability, capacity, and competence; to urge reconsideration of assumptions about power. Theorizations of power such as these have become widespread in the literature of the contemporary women's movement...[32]
>
> Women's stress on power not as domination but as capacity, on power as a capacity of the community as a whole, suggests that women's experience of connection and relation have consequences for understandings of power and may hold resources for a more liberatory understanding.[33]

As these authors demonstrate, numerous feminist theorists and activists have drawn distinctions between (arguably masculine) "power over" and "power against" relations and (arguably feminine) "power to" or "power with" relations. They have attempted, in other words, to articulate an alternative discourse on power – new ways of thinking and talking about human relations which validate corresponding ways of enacting such relations. Unlike many other power theorists, however, who draw such distinctions in order to dismiss "power to" conceptions as irrelevant to serious critical inquiry,[34] the feminists discussed above have drawn such distinctions precisely for the purposes of focusing attention on the relevance of non-adversarial relations of power to critical inquiry.

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29 Hence Kramarae and Treichler state in their *Feminist Dictionary*, p. 351, that the term *power* has been "conceptualized by men as assertion and aggression, by women as nurturance".

30 Hartsock's own phrase from *Feminist Historical Materialism*, p. 224.

31 Ibid., p. 210.

32 Ibid., p. 224.

33 Ibid., p. 253.

34 Refer back to discussion in Chapter II.

Moreover, in their efforts to translate theory into practice, the feminist movement has made slow but steady progress on a number of fronts. Throughout most Western cultures, at least, aggression against women, despite its lingering presence, has been dragged out of the shadows of private life and into the light of public condemnation and criminal prosecution. Likewise, the role of fathers in the nurturing of children, despite lingering cultural taboos and ongoing gender disparities in domestic labour, is gradually being recognized and valued in many segments of the population. The advancement of women in the workplace, despite the continuing legacies of male chauvinism in many sectors, is slowly bringing the goal of equal opportunity within reach for the first time in the history of Western civilization. The emergence of women at the forefront of international efforts for peace and security, despite the continued elusiveness of these goals in a world still dominated by nationalism and militarism, has lent tremendous impetus, insight, and commitment to this historical pursuit.[35] Similarly, the entrance of women into the formal political arena, despite the partisan electoral filters they must pass through and the partisan decision-making processes they must work within, is at least gradually widening the range of interests, values, and perspectives represented in many public policy-making processes.

In these and many other ways, feminist thought is increasingly expanding the contemporary social imagination even as feminist practice is increasingly permeating contemporary social institutions. Much of this thought and practice stands in stark contrast to the normative adversarialism that has characterized male-dominated Western cultures for

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[35] Refer to Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*, and Boulding, *Women*, for histories of female leadership in the peace movement. See also Reardon, *Women and Peace*, and Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, for insightful discussions of the "politics of peace" that many women are engaged in.

centuries.[36] Of course, this is not to suggest that these feminist projects are complete. Nor is it to suggest that all feminist thought and practice is non-adversarial. In general, however, contemporary feminists tend at least to be unified in their rejection of the "power over" relations that have characterized male-dominated Western cultures throughout Western history, as identified in the lower left quadrant of Figure 2. Moreover, this is generally the case whether these relations involve the exercise of power over women or any other social group.[37] In addition, many feminists also extend their critique to include more general "power against" relations, as identified in both the upper left and lower left quadrants in the same figure.[38] These feminists are working to cultivate alternative, non-adversarial models of thought and practice in their homes, their workplaces, and in the broader societies they inhabit. And although these efforts are still culturally marginalized in many respects, they provide at least a partial glimpse of, and theoretical basis for, an alternative set of cultural codes.

Systems Theory

Like feminist theorists, many systems theorists have also articulated a number of

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36 Chinn, *Peace and Power*, contains insightful discussions of several non-adversarial feminist practices.

37 This point is made by many feminists. Refer, for instance, to Warren and Cady, "Feminism and Peace"; Warren, "Power and Promise"; hooks, *Feminist Theory* and *Talking Back*; and Wood, *Gendered Lives*.

38 For instance, theorists such as Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, have articulated insightful critiques of the partisan-adversarial nature of Western political systems. As Frazer notes in "Feminist Political Theory", p. 58, "like socialists, many feminists have hoped and aimed for genuinely autonomous collective self-governance, governance by reason. In their case, though, there is an extra reason for repudiating politics in its traditional sense – that is, its historic association with masculinity. As a social and political movement, feminism has rejected traditional forms of organization, especially the party form". In addition, many female and feminist theorists have also been at the forefront of movements to create alternatives to the legal adversary system, to move from competitive to cooperative educational models, and so forth. Refer, for instance, to discussions in Menkel-Meadow, "Transformation of Disputes" and "Trouble With the Adversary System"; Taslitz, *Rape and the Culture of the Courtroom*; Brocke-Utne, *Feminist Perspectives*; and Reardon, ed., *Learning Peace*.

alternatives to the culture of adversarialism, derived from the "relational paradigms" that tend to characterize the study of complex systems. In this context, some feminist scholars have noted a clear link between systems theory and feminism. As Ellsberg and Melamed explain:

> Connections of all kinds interest women and we grasp them readily. Men find this ability mysterious and label it "women's intuition". This makes it sound like something other than thinking, but in fact it is a perfectly respectable intellectual approach called "systems thinking" when men do it.[39]

In contrast to the reductionist focus of much contemporary science, systems theory adopts a holistic or systemic focus that reveals the connections or inter-relations within a system. When applied to social systems, this focus yields valuable insights into social relations, including relations of power. Based on these insights, many systems theorists have articulated alternatives to the normative adversarialism that tends to characterize Western societies. In order to grasp the rationale for these alternatives, it is helpful to first review a number of basic premises of systems theory.[40]

The fundamental premise of systems theory is that different types of complex systems – physical, biological, psychological, social, and so forth – exhibit many structural and functional similarities. Foremost among these are the properties of *wholeness* and *interdependence*. Complex systems are integrated wholes that are more than the mere sum of their parts. In systems terminology, complex systems are characterized by *emergent properties* that do not characterize any of their component parts in isolation. These emergent properties are made possible by the internal interdependence of a system's parts, which exist

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[39] Ellsberg and Melamed, "Emperor's New Clothes", p. 88.

[40] For overviews of this field refer to Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*; Skyttner, *General Systems Theory: An Introduction*; and Englehart, *Systems Theory*.

within complex networks of relationships with one another, characterized by mutual influence and interchange.

In *dynamic systems*, these emergent properties include the capacity to *self-regulate, change,* and *adapt* by responding to positive and negative *feedback.* Some change and adaptation is incremental, linear, and determinate, as in the regulation of heat within a mammalian body or the gradual course adjustments of a predator pursuing its prey. Transformative change and evolutionary adaptation, however, tend to be characterized by sudden, non-linear, and often chaotic adaptations, as in the transformation of a liquid to a gas, the evolution of new species, or the revolution of a socio-political system. Through these punctuated and unpredictable changes, evolutionary systems adapt to changing conditions by developing new subsystems, new relations between existing subsystems, and new relations between the system and its larger environment or suprasystem.

In this regard, systems theorists assert that various teleological similarities tend to characterize evolutionary systems: They tend to develop from small scales, minimal dynamism, and low levels of organizational complexity, to larger scales, greater dynamism, and increasing levels of organizational complexity. These similarities can be seen in the growth and development of individual organisms as well as in the evolution of species. They can also be seen in the psychological development of human minds as well as the socio-political evolution of social systems.

Finally, given the emergent properties discussed above, dynamic evolutionary systems are often understood as *functional* unities. They perform various functions that their component parts could not perform alone. For instance, a cell can metabolize energy while its component elements, in isolation, cannot. An organ can perform specialized

physiological functions that its component cells, in isolation, cannot. A living organism can reproduce itself while its component organs, in isolation, cannot. And a species can evolve while individual organisms, in isolation, cannot. Each of these functions is made possible through increasing levels of system complexity and integration.

In this context, many systems theorists and others also conceptualize human societies as "functional unities" – at least potentially. Within this tradition of *functionalist social theory,* however, interpretations vary widely regarding the functionality of existing social systems. On the one hand, many conventional theorists have argued that contemporary Western social, political, and economic systems are highly functional.[41] In this context, functionalism has frequently served as a framework of apologetics for Western civilization: Capitalism has thus been described as the most functional economic system possible, due to its alleged capacity to maximize the satisfaction of diverse material interests; partisan democracy has thus been described as the most functional system of governance possible, due to its alleged capacity to maximize the satisfaction of diverse political interests; and so forth.

In contrast to this conventional functionalism, however, more critical functionalists have concluded, in essence, that contemporary Western social systems are largely *dysfunctional.* While conventional functionalists provide normative justifications for the status quo, critical functionalists provide normative justifications for social reform. They study the dysfunction and internal contradictions of existing social systems – the extent to which they are unjust, inequitable, inadequate, or unsustainable – in order to prescribe more functional alternatives.

[41] The writings of Talcott Parsons are among the most prominent examples of such conventional functionalist thought. Refer, for example, to Parsons, "Power and the Social System". For an excellent overview of Parsonian functionalism, refer also to Giddens, " 'Power' in the Recent Writings of Talcott Parsons".

For instance, many critical functionalists have asserted that contemporary systems of mass media are largely dysfunctional because they do not facilitate the flow of information and public discussion needed within systems of democratic self-government.[42] Others have aimed their critique even more broadly at the entire system of contemporary capitalist economics, which appears to be undermining the conditions of its own existence. The current economic system, they argue, must either perish or adapt, because it is not sustainable.[43] Still other critical functionalists have concluded that partisan political systems are dysfunctional as means of democratic government because, in addition to spawning citizen apathy and withdrawal from public life, political parties are not even effective at doing what they are supposed to do best, such as interest articulation and aggregation, linkage and representation, and the efficient organization of government. As Lyons asserts:

> There is far more "dysfunction" than "function" in the operation of parties... there are sufficient weaknesses in party performance to justify a search for better means to represent citizenry and to organize government... These weaknesses are evident without even venturing into the important argument that the competitive party model inhibits the development of a participant culture with the personal and social enrichment this could mean in a now excessively privatized society. The competitive party model stands condemned solely through an examination of the "strengths" claimed for it.[44]

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[42] Systems theory models have been explicitly adopted as a means of critiquing media functions by scholars such as Meadows, "Changing the World Through the Informationsphere", and Parker, *Environmental Communication*. Many other media scholars, though not systems theorists, and while often critical of the Parsonian functionalism alluded to in the previous footnote, implicitly adopt a critical functionalist perspective, as defined above. Refer, for instance, to Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*; Kellner, *Crisis of Democracy*; Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy Revisited"; Baker, *Advertising and a Democratic Press*; Gitlin, "Bifurcation of American Politics"; and Hackett and Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy*.

[43] The classic critical systems analysis of economic unsustainability was articulated by the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*. For more current analyses in the same vein, refer to Kassiola, *Death of Industrial Civilization*; Gans, *Endogenous Limits*; Stuart, "On the Limits to Growth"; Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth*; Jacobs, *Green Economy*; Douthwaite, *Growth Illusion*; and Ekins, *Green Economics*.

[44] Lyon, "The Future of Parties", pp. 115-18.

In this context, other critical functionalists have identified more generalized expressions of adversarialism as further sources of social dysfunction. For example, in a series of "heretical reflections on today's values, culture and politics", systems theorist Ervin Laslo identified a number of internal dysfunctions that characterize contemporary social systems.[45] Included among these are idealized norms of aggression, competitive acquisition, and unregulated competition. In place of these norms, Laslo calls for a reorientation of basic human relationships from adversarial "negative-sum" and "zero-sum" relations toward cooperative "positive-sum" relations.[46] Using the current international order to illustrate his point, Laslo explains that

> the remarkable feature of international relations in an age of interdependence is that the basic long-term processes present potentials for positive-sum games. Regrettably, national leaders intent on gaining short-term advantages for their own countries in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, if not hostility, are not playing such games. For example, the international balance of power gives rise to a game which is at best a zero-sum; the gains of one side balance with the losses of others. This can degenerate into a negative-sum game with the outbreak of large-scale war... Yet the situation could be transformed into a positive sum game with the establishment of a system of world security through disarmament and mutually agreed upon peacekeeping. No nation would risk being damaged or wiped out, and all could spend the major part of the huge sums which now go to defence and the military on projects of concrete human benefit.[47]

Echoing Laslo, Boulding has articulated a non-adversarial or "integrative" theory of power, which he hopes will provide a more functional way of thinking and talking about social relations in general in an age of interdependence.[48] "Integrative power", Boulding

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45 Laszlo, *Inner Limits*. Laszlo uses the phrase *inner limits* to describe these internal dysfunctions – a phrase intended to contrast with the external/environmental "limits to growth" identified in the 1972 study by the Club of Rome.

46 Laszlo, *Inner Limits*, pp. 109-15. *Negative-sum*, *zero-sum*, and *positive-sum* relations are mathematical game-theory terms that refer respectively to relationships in which both players lose, in which the gains of one player are balanced by the losses of the other, or in which both players gain or win.

47 Laszlo, *Inner Limits*, p. 112.

48 Boulding, *Three Faces of Power*. Kenneth Boulding's work is an interesting case study in marginalization within the culture of adversarialism. Through the course of his life, Boulding served as president of six major scholarly societies that spanned the social sciences. He wrote more than 30 books, published

(footnote continued on next page)

explains, is "the capacity to build organizations, to create families and groups, to inspire loyalty, to bind people together, to develop legitimacy".[49] According to Boulding, it embodies cooperation, friendship, collective identity, the growth of a sense of community, and the ability to create and pursue constructive images of the future together.[50] These depend, in turn, on even more fundamental human capacities such as reciprocity, respect, love, and the belief that one's own welfare is increased through an increase in the welfare of others.[51] Drawing on his background in systems theory, economics, and peace research, as well as his experience as a Quaker, Boulding concludes that functional social and political systems can only be constructed on the normative basis of these integrative power relations. Even though he acknowledges the appropriateness of adversarial power relations in some limited contexts, Boulding argues that contemporary world conditions demand a much wider recognition of "the great importance of integrative power" in human affairs.[52] His theory of integrative power thus represents an effort to cultivate a new discourse on power, similar to the feminist efforts discussed above, by articulating a new vocabulary for thinking and talking about social relations.

From the perspectives of Laslo, Boulding, and other like-minded theorists, adversarial relations appear as a historical anachronism in human societies. Militarism, nationalism,

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hundreds of chapters and articles, and was the recipient of 33 honorary degrees and a variety of other awards. Despite his reputation and accomplishments, however, Boulding's *integrative theory of power* has had minimal impact on the contemporary theorization of power. Social theorists might argue that Boulding's theory had little impact because it had little validity. An alternative explanation suggested by the analysis in this dissertation, however, is that it had little impact because it was not consistent with the common sense "realism" constructed by the culture of adversarialism.

49 Boulding, *Three Faces of Power*, p. 25.

50 Ibid., pp. 109, 121-122, 182, 211.

51 Ibid., pp. 110-115.

52 Ibid., p. 250.

sectarianism, racism, competitive materialism, and other expressions of social dysfunction reflect a failure to adapt to changing historical conditions – a failure to model social systems according to the "positive sum" or "integrative" relations needed to promote collective human interests in an age of increasing interdependence. Moreover, drawing on the principles of evolutionary system dynamics discussed above, these theorists offer an image of what the transition to a more functional society might look like: a non-linear and chaotic or disruptive process characterized by punctuated adaptations to changing conditions. As Laslo explains, social systems, like other complex dynamic systems,

> have definite upper limits of stability which, when reached and transgressed, produce a breakdown in their internal structure. Order is replaced by chaos, but chaos does not mean randomness and a total absence of order. Chaos is often (though not in every case) the waystation to a new form of order, arising through a sudden phase-change known as a "bifurcation". The new variety of order is often better adapted to the surroundings in which the system finds itself than the previous variety.[53]

In the context of the discussion at hand, theorists such as Laslo argue that the culture of adversarialism is reaching its "upper limits of stability" due to conditions of increasing population growth, technological development, resource scarcity, and global interdependency. At the same time, the resultant breakdown of the old adversarial order offers the possibility of radical new cultural adaptations. However, as Laslo himself points out, evolutionary dynamics are no guarantee of successful adaptation.

> The fact that we can extrapolate historical development on the basis of the new systems sciences does not mean that the extrapolation has the force of necessity in the real world. This forecast of the future offers no guarantee of its own realization. The reason is that the evolutionary logic exhibited in history, the same as the evolutionary logic in the sphere of nature, is based on probability and not on necessity.... The evolutionary prospect comes "on line" if, but only if, we transcend our inner limits – the limits that chain us to today's world, with its obsolete modes of

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[53] Laszlo, *Inner Limits*, p. 123.

thinking and acting.[54]

The new ways of thinking and acting articulated by Laslo, Boulding, and other systems theorists stand in stark contrast to the codes of adversarialism that dominate Western thought and action. The new discourse on social relations that they articulate thus rejects "power over" and "power against" relations, as identified in the left quadrants of Figure 2, as largely dysfunctional and anachronistic. In their place, they articulate non-adversarial or "integrative" alternatives. And although this alternative discourse is still culturally marginalized, it provides a further glimpse of, and theoretical basis for, alternatives to the codes of adversarialism.

Ecology / Environmentalism

Like many feminists and systems theorists, many ecologists and environmentalists have also articulated various critiques of adversarialism from which alternative cultural codes can be derived. These environmental critiques take two related forms. First, the science of ecology offers many *conceptual insights* that have been incorporated into an emerging, largely non-adversarial, ecological worldview. Second, environmental activism has yielded many grounded *political insights* regarding the ecological dysfunction of partisan/adversarial political systems and practices. Each of these sets of insights will be discussed in turn below.

Conceptually, ecology is closely related to the general systems theory discussed above. It has both drawn from and contributed to systems theory. Accordingly, concepts of holism and interdependence are also central concepts in ecology. Ecology, however, and the environmental movement it has spawned, have arguably been much more influential in

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[54] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

popularizing these insights than has systems theory. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, holism and interdependence have become central concepts in an emerging ecological worldview – an "environmental consciousness" – that is changing not only the way people think and talk about the natural environment but also the way many people think and talk about the social environment.

In this context, holism and interdependence are increasingly used as intuitive metaphors for understanding human societies. The "social ecology" metaphors that derive from these concepts focus attention on the complex webs of interconnection and mutual influence that characterize relations between individuals and groups in society.[55] In these complex webs of interdependence, adversarialism appears as a counterproductive or even destructive social norm. For instance, complex links are known to exist between oppression, poverty, population growth, environmental degradation, food scarcity, social conflict, political instability, and war. Although the exact nature of these links is disputed, many observers are beginning to conclude that through these complex interconnections, the oppression and impoverishment of any population affects all members of the larger social ecology. This can be seen, for example, in the close association between poverty and population growth, which in turn are associated with environmental degradation and food scarcity – conditions that keep societies in perpetual states of conflict and insecurity. These states of conflict and insecurity, in turn, result in police and military expenditures that burden all members of society – rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed – while merely entrenching cycles of

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[55] The idea of "social ecology" and the application of the principle of holism to human affairs has been discussed, for instance, in Porritt, *Seeing Green*; Thompson, ed., *Gaia, A Way of Knowing*; Spretnak and Capra, *Green Politics*; Seward, "Green Democracy"; and Lemkow, *The Wholeness Principle*.

conflict and insecurity without addressing their root causes. The "power over" and "power against" relations that cause and characterize these cycles thus appear incompatible with a holistic understanding of social interdependence.

In contrast to these adversarial relations, an ecological worldview tends to emphasize the fundamental importance of *mutualism* and *symbiosis* – two more key ecological concepts. For even though nature is characterized by a degree of competition, aggression, and predation, the science of ecology suggests that mutualism and symbiosis are equally if not more fundamental ecological dynamics. The conditions that sustain planetary life as we know it are only made possible through the mutualistic production and exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals. The pollination of most flowering species is made possible through mutualistic or symbiotic exchanges with pollinating insects. Symbiotic relationships permit the exchange of nitrogen and other essential nutrients within complex networks of soil micro-organisms and terrestrial plant roots that sustain entire ecosystems. Even digestion in many animals, including humans, is facilitated by the presence of symbiotic intestinal micro-organisms. As these examples illustrate, mutualism and symbiosis are fundamental ecological dynamics.

Moreover, where aggression and predation do occur in nature, they tend to characterize inter-species rather than intra-species relations. Even the aggressive intra-species mating behaviours that some animals engage in tend to be ritualized displays that seldom result in actual injury. In contrast, among all of the "social" species (from ants and bees to wolves and primates), humans are unique in the range and extent of the intra-species aggression we exhibit. Many evolutionary theorists have thus concluded that intra-species aggression among humans is culturally learned rather than biologically determined; that humans have

the cultural capacity for both mutualism and aggression; and that in an age of increasing interdependence, a shift from a culture of aggression to a culture of mutualism is imperative.[56]

Another ecological concept from which social analogies have been drawn is the principle of ecological *diversity*. In nature, diversity is generally considered a source of ecological health and stability. By analogy, the same is arguably true within the social ecology. From this perspective, culturally learned behaviours and attitudes such as racism, sexism, and nationalism are antithetical to an ecological worldview because they are intolerant of diversity. In contrast, rather than viewing difference as a cause for conflict and antagonism, an ecological worldview suggests that differences should be valued and nourished as a source of social strength and stability. Diversity, in other words, need not result in adversity.

Moreover, it is not only physical diversity that is valued within an ecological worldview, but also diversity of perspective. In this context, the science of ecology has also articulated a non-adversarial epistemology.[57] This model derives from early tensions within the discipline, when two divergent theoretical approaches arose. On the one hand, many ecologists focused on inter-relations between discrete organisms and populations of organisms and gave minimal attention to systemic factors such as nutrient cycles or energy flows. On the other hand, other ecologists focused on nutrient cycles, energy flows, and other system-level, bio-

56 These conclusions are clearly expressed, for instance, in Seville, "Statement on Violence" – a joint statement signed by twenty prominent biological and social scientists from around the world during the United Nations International Year of Peace. This statement categorically refutes the assertion that adversarial behaviours such as war, violence, and aggression are products of our evolutionary heritage and therefore innate to human nature. While acknowledging the human capacity for these behaviours, the statement asserts that humans have an equal, if not greater, capacity for cooperation and that this latter capacity can and must be more systematically cultivated.

57 The following discussion is particularly indebted to Warren and Cheney, "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology".

physical processes and paid little attention to discrete living organisms. In an effort to reconcile these tensions, many contemporary ecologists have begun to adopt a framework that views both of these approaches as complementary rather than oppositional. This inclusive framework rejects the view that there is only one way to describe ecological systems and instead acknowledges that ecosystem complexity requires diverse conceptual frameworks that yield distinct but complementary "observation sets". This more holistic epistemology allows ecologists to simultaneously talk about autonomous living organisms *and* functionally integrated bio-physical systems, even though neither can be reduced to the other. As Warren and Cheney explain, it

> permits meaningful discussion of discrete (and, in varying degrees and modes, autonomous) individual objects as well as of whole systems... it encourages a network or relational view of organisms, whether conceived as "knots in a biospherical web of relationships" or as separate (although not isolated or solitary) discrete individuals, members of species, populations, or communities. In both cases, ecosystems are networks, either networks of interacting individuals, populations, and communities or of interacting energy flows and nutrient flows and cycles.[58]

The science of ecology thus provides an epistemological model for the reconciliation of "oppositional" viewpoints. As Warren and Cheney again explain, it provides

> a framework for viewing historically opposed approaches as complementary. Dualisms fade into the complexity of multiple vantage points and find complementarity where once there was only oppositionality... This rejection of oppositional polarities is accomplished *not* by reducing population-community to process-functional accounts, or vice versa, or by reducing both to a still more basic or primitive ontological framework; it is accomplished by providing a unifying framework for studying and relating to one another various analyses, each with their own epistemology and context-dependent ontology. As a "unified theory" it is a unity which does not erase difference.[59]

The transformation of opposition into complementarity, through an appreciation of the

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58 Warren and Cheney, "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology", p. 253, parenthesis in the original. This history of competing paradigms in ecology is reminiscent of the early wave/particle debates in physics, which similarly resulted in the emergence of a complementarity model of human observation.

59 Ibid., p. 252, italics in the original.

necessity of multiple viewpoints, provides yet another non-adversarial model for social relations. Together with the other conceptual insights discussed above – holism, interdependence, mutualism, symbiosis, diversity, and so forth – this epistemological acceptance of multiple perspectives reinforces the non-adversarial nature of the ecological worldview that has been emerging in recent decades.

In addition to these conceptual insights, several decades of environmental activism have also yielded a number of grounded political insights. For instance, despite their political engagement and activism, some environmentalists have concluded that competitive/partisan political systems are basically dysfunctional as systems of ecological stewardship.[60] As Bakvis and Nevitte explain:

> The standard literature on partisanship argues that high levels of interest, education, participation, and the like are intercorrelated and collectively increase the likelihood of both acquiring a partisan identity and strengthening such an identity. The literature on environmentalism, and more broadly the "new politics" model, suggests something rather different. Not only are environmentalists disenchanted with the traditional parties, but they also have a pronounced disinclination to develop loyalties to any parties whatsoever… [in favour of an] a-partisan, even anti-partisan orientation.[61]

The reasons for this a-partisan or anti-partisan orientation among many environmentalists are manifold. On one level, most environmental issues require long-term planning and commitment. Competitive political systems, however, are generally constrained by short-term political horizons. In order to gain and maintain power, political entrepreneurs (whether they are associated with formal parties or not) must generally cater to the immediate interests of their constituents so that visible results can be realized within relatively frequent election cycles. Even when long-term political commitments are made out of principle by one

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[60] Refer, for example, to the discussion in Lyon, "Green Politics".

[61] Bakvis and Nevitte, "Greening", pp. 158-59.

candidate or party, continuity is often compromised by succeeding candidates or parties who dismantle or fail to enforce the programs of their predecessors in order to distance themselves from policies they were previously compelled to oppose (i.e., on the campaign trail or as the voice of opposition).[62] Furthermore, the focus of campaigns and political parties on constituencies-in-the-present tends to undermine commitment to the interests of future generations. Prominent among the interests of future generations, of course, is environmental sustainability. However, in the ongoing contest of gaining and maintaining political power in the present, candidates and political parties generally cannot afford to address issues of sustainability – especially when sustainability might require sacrifices from the present generation. In all of these ways, partisan political systems are not structured for effective long-term ecological stewardship.

Some environmentalists also argue that adversarial political debate is too reductionist for effective ecological decision making.[63] Environmental issues are generally highly complex issues with myriad social and ecological dimensions. Adversarial debate, however, has in-built tendencies toward reductionism. In contrast to the ecological epistemology discussed above, in which multiple viewpoints are valued and an effort is made to view apparent oppositions as complementary perspectives, the opposite tends to characterize an adversarial epistemology. Adversarial debate – especially in the political arena – is generally structured to frame perspectives in oppositional and irreconcilable terms, thus reducing complex issues

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[62] Of course, the ability to change course is an important feature of any democratic system. However, the motives for changing course must be considered. In this context, as the discussion in Chapter V suggests, non-partisan models of democratic decision making may preserve the capacity to change course without the partisan motives and posturing that underlies much contemporary decision making.

[63] Refer to Blondel, *Political Parties*, pp. 19-21, for a discussion of "the curse of oversimplification" that characterizes partisan politics.

to one-dimensional positional arguments. This reductionism is reinforced by the emotional sloganeering required of competing politicians in an age of mass-mediated sound-bite politics. Simplistic political mantras such as "jobs versus the environment" thus echo through the public sphere, distorting the complex nature of the issues at hand and constraining the social imagination. In all of these ways, the reductionism of adversarial debate within the political arena arguably renders government even more environmentally dysfunctional.[64]

Furthermore, many environmentalists reject competitive politics because of its structured subordination to the capitalist economy.[65] As discussed in Chapter III, partisan systems of government are both modeled after and closely integrated with the competitive free market economy.[66] The expenses and pressures of fund raising and campaign financing, media and public relations management , as well as lobbying and political action committees, all subordinate competitive political processes to economic imperatives – with significant implications for the environment. On the one hand, many established and powerful industries derive their profits from environmentally destructive practices, and through campaign financing, lobbying, and media strategies, these industries have tremendous power to frame the terms of environmental policy debate as well as stifle it before it arises. On the

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64 Similar arguments have also been made about adversarial litigation. For instance, Tidmarsh and Transgrud state that "in complex litigation, the adversarial process functions poorly, if at all: there are so many parties, documents, facts, and/or issues that the lawyers, the litigants, and the jury are simply incapable of performing the tasks which the adversarial process has traditionally assigned to them" (Tidmarsh and Transgrud, *Complex Litigation*, p. v). See also Strick, *Injustice For All*, for a discussion of the reductionism of the legal adversary system.

65 Refer, for example, to Barry, *Rethinking Green Politics*.

66 In Western societies that pride themselves on the separation of church and state, it is interesting to note that so little attention is given to the need to separate market and state (i.e., to shield public decision making from the dictates and pressures of powerful economic interests).

other hand, those segments of the population who tend to suffer the most from the effects of environmental degradation – namely the poor, ethnic minorities, and women (who are statistically more likely to live and work in areas of increased environmental health risks and degradation) – are least able to influence political decision making due to their relative economic disenfranchisement.[67] As a result, environmental practices that are seldom tolerated in the backyards of more affluent segments of the population are commonplace among populations that are politically and economically marginalized.[68] In these and many other ways, the subordination of the political sphere to the economic sphere renders competitive political systems even more dysfunctional as a means of environmental stewardship.

Moreover, the ecological dysfunction of competitive political systems within nations is compounded by rivalries and antagonisms between nations. As environmentalists have long pointed out, the transboundary nature of many modern environmental issues (e.g., ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, water pollution, the management of migratory species), signals the need for unprecedented levels of global cooperation and coordination.[69]

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67 One could argue, of course, that the real problem is the unequal distribution of economic resources, not adversarial politics. Indeed, in this regard many Marxist analyses suggest that structural economic reforms are a precondition of the creation of more just, humane, and sustainable systems of governance. However, as the discussion in Chapter V suggests, the reverse may in fact be the case. Because the redistribution of economic resources is fundamentally a political process (i.e., it requires a system of governance capable of regulating capital accumulation and eliminating extreme economic disparities), it is equally plausible to suggest that the structural transformation of the political sphere is a precondition of meaningful economic reform. This is precisely the analysis offered by the Bahá'í International Community, as discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

68 "Environmental Racism" and other forms of discriminatory environmental policy and practice are well documented phenomena. Refer, for instance, to Heiman, *Race, Waste and Class*; Nordquist, *Environmental Racism*; Petrikin, *Environmental Justice*; and Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism.*

69 The seminal statement of this thesis was made by the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development in their report *Our Common Future.*

Anachronistic models of national sovereignty, however, render the existing international (dis)order virtually incapable of responding to these new ecological imperatives. Within the existing international system, sustainability is sacrificed to the pursuit of immediate national self-interests, as nations aggressively compete with one another by converting long-term ecological capital into short-term economic gains.[70]

Beyond these *economic* rivalries, many environmentalists also point out the ecological dysfunction of *military* rivalries between nations. Even in the absence of actual warfare, the production and stockpiling of weapons, as well as the training and maintenance of huge permanent standing armies, exacts a tremendous ecological toll. In addition to diverting massive amounts of material and human resources from socially and ecologically productive endeavors, the military has one of the worst environmental records of any modern industry – even in times of peace.[71] In times of war, environmental costs are even higher. From the defoliation of Vietnam to the burning of oil fields in the Persian Gulf War, ecological destruction has increasingly become a legitimate military strategy. And many new military technologies, including landmines, chemical and biological weapons, nuclear weapons, and even conventional weapons now being manufactured out of radioactive waste material, are all raising the environmental stakes of war. For the first time in history, humanity has arguably developed the military capacity to render the planet uninhabitable for many species, including our own. But even if such an apocalyptic scenario never plays itself out, we are

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70 Moreover, in the absence of effective mechanisms for international regulation, economic globalization merely exacerbates these ecologically destructive trends as increasingly powerful multinational corporations operate on a global scale with almost complete environmental (as well as social) impunity.

71 Refer, for instance, to Dycus, *National Defence and the Environment*; Richardson, *Effects of War on the Environment*; Käkönen, *Green Security*; McKinnon, *Tides of War*; Mirsche, "The Earth as Peace Teacher"; and Westing, ed., *Environmental Hazards of War*.

already rendering large sections of the planet largely uninhabitable through the local and regional destruction of countless military experiments, exercises, and confrontations.

To bring the discussion of militarism around full circle, many environmentalists also point out that while war and preparation for war results in increasingly high levels of environmental degradation, environmental degradation in turn results in increasingly high levels of military insecurity and war.[72] Even many revisionist defence analysts within the dominant nationalist military paradigm are beginning to recognize that "environmental security" is becoming an increasingly important factor in national security.[73] Struggles for clean water, arable land, and many other ecological resources may well become the most significant sources of international conflict in the twenty-first century. Ironically, the dysfunction of the international political order, traceable in part to the economic and military rivalries discussed above, are root causes of this environmental insecurity. Adversarialism thus begets insecurity which begets further adversarialism, in an ecologically (as well as socially) dysfunctional spiral.

In the minds of many environmentalists, the inability of contemporary political institutions to come to terms with the environment thus reflects more than the moral or intellectual failure of individual politicians. Rather, the adversarial structures of competitive politics, competitive nationalism, and militarism also play a role.[74] This recognition suggests

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72 Refer, for instance, to Bennett, ed., *Greenwar*; DeBardeleben and Hannigan, eds., *Environmental Security*; and Käkönen, *Green Security*, and Käkönen, ed., *Environmental Conflict*.

73 Refer, for instance, to Walker, *Security*; Green, *Military Implications of Global Warming*; Lowi and Shaw, *Environment and Security*; Morris, *Security Concerns*; Myers, *Ultimate Security*; and the U.S. Department of Defence, *Defence Performance*.

74 This is not to suggest that adversarial political practices are the primary objects of most environmental critiques. Critiques of consumer culture, economic expansionism, technological/instrumental rationality, and so forth, tend to be the central concerns of most environmentalists. Moreover, many environmentalists clearly engage in various forms of adversarial politics, from organizing environmental parties (e.g., the

(footnote continued on next page)

a need for alternatives to the adversarialism that dominates the contemporary political sphere. Accordingly, many environmentalists, while working for ecological stewardship, are also working to cultivate more cooperative models of political practice. In fact, for all of the reasons discussed above, peace and ecological sustainability are inseparable goals within an ecological worldview.[75] Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the phrase "Greenpeace" – a phrase with deep symbolic resonance within the environmental movement.[76] As Jonathon Porritt explains in *The Politics of Ecology*:

> To "see green" is to see all nations and all people, however divided or different they may appear, as members of one interdependent human family, linked by their responsibility to each other and to the care and maintenance of our planet. The politics of ecology teaches us that all our problems are global. We have only one planet at our disposal; learning to live in harmony with it, and with all those with whom we share it, is the only item on today's political agenda that has any real significance.[77]

Finally, the nexus between peace and ecology is also echoed in much *ecofeminist* literature. Ecofeminism emerged through a growing recognition that the same masculine "power over" relations that result in the domination and exploitation of women also result in the domination and exploitation of nature. In their efforts to articulate alternatives, many ecofeminists implicitly link ecological concepts such as *holism* and *interdependence* with

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Greens), to protests, civil disobedience, and even industrial sabotage. On the other hand, many elements of the ecological worldview sketched above do support critiques of adversarialism, and such critiques are beginning to be articulated, both formally and informally, by environmentalists.

75 The inseparability of these issues has been explored by many writers. Refer, for instance, to Porritt, *Seeing Green*; Milbrath, "Making Connections"; Spretnak and Capra, *Green Politics*; Shabecoff, *New Name for Peace*; Walker, *Peace, Environment, and Development*; Köchler, ed., *Green Dialogue*; Newcombe, *Further Reflections on Peace*; Nordland, *Ecological and Cooperative Education*; Boggs, Shuman, and Sweig, *Conditions of Peace*; and George, *Peace and the Ecological Ethic*.

76 It is interesting to note that while Greenpeace and many likeminded organizations pursue the twin goals of peace and environmental sustainability, they still often employ confrontational (albeit generally non-violent) means in these pursuits. In fact, even among environmental activists who profess the ideals of peace and harmony in social relations, many still seem unable to transcend adversarial methods in pursuit of their goals (refer to discussion of social activism in Chapter III).

77 Porritt, *Seeing Green*, p. xiii.

feminist concepts such as *nurturing* and *coactive power relations* (discussed earlier in this chapter). In these ways, many ecofeminists use the insights of ecology to reinforce more general critiques of masculine power relations in contemporary society.[78] As Petra Kelly writes:

> Women, though closed out of male dominions of power, experience great power in the daily work of nurturing others. This is not power *over* others, but power *with* others, the kind of shared power that has to replace patriarchal power.... Throughout history, male-led social movements have always been mere exchanges of power, while the basic structure of dominant hierarchies has remained. The liberation of women and men from the bonds of patriarchy is essentially the work of building a peaceful, just, and ecological society. I often hear people arguing about the world's many evils and which should be the first confronted. This fragmentary approach is itself part of the problem, reflecting the linear, hierarchical nature of the patriarchal thinking that fails to grasp the complexity of living systems. What is needed is a perspective that integrates the many problems we face and approaches them holistically.[79]

Ecofeminists, as well as many other environmentalists and ecologists, are thus articulating alternative models of thought, talk, and practice that stand in stark contrast to the culture of adversarialism. These include strategies of education and awareness raising; the cultivation of new values and attitudes within families, schools, and communities; and the articulation of new models of social and political practice (e.g., consensus-based decision making). From conceptual models and metaphors to grounded political insights, ecological discourse thus contains numerous critiques of, and alternatives to, the "power over" and "power against" relations identified in the left quadrants in Figure 2. And although this discourse is still culturally marginalized in many respects, it provides a further glimpse of, and theoretical basis for, alternatives to the dominant codes of adversarialism.

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[78] Refer, for example, to the collections of ecofeminist essays assembled by Warren, ed., *Ecofeminism* and Warren, *Ecological Feminist Philosophies.*

[79] Kelly, "Women and Power", pp. 114, 18-19.

Communications Theory

Alternatives to the culture of adversarialism can also be found in the ways we think and talk about communication itself – in our "discourses on human discourse". Most theories of interpersonal communication, for instance, suggest that adversarialism is counterproductive within families, among friends, and between co-workers.[80] Especially in long-term relationships, where a high degree of interdependence exists, people generally cannot afford to alienate or offend others through the adoption of highly oppositional or confrontational modes of communication. As socio-linguist Deborah Tannen comments, "the aggressive style used so often in public discourse does not serve us well as a means of interpersonal communication".[81]

In this context, most people would find it absurd to suggest that interpersonal communication should be modeled after partisan political debates or legal advocacy contests. Granted, many people do have relatively adversarial styles of interpersonal communication,[82] but unlike the public sphere, adversarialism is generally not idealized in the interpersonal sphere. Even as adversarial ideals prompt us along a continuum from cooperation to confrontation in the public sphere, non-adversarial ideals tend to prompt us in the opposite direction in our interpersonal communication.

Within the public culture of adversarialism, common sense "realism" suggests that this

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80 Refer, for example, to Wilmot and Hocker's overview of the literature on interpersonal communication and conflict in Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*.

81 Tannen, *The Argument Culture*, p. 84.

82 In *The Argument Culture*, pp. 83-84, Tannen attributes at least some of this to the influence that "agonistic" models of public communication have on interpersonal communication. As Tannen writes: "Citizens pick up not only the ideas they read and hear but the attitude, the tone, the very wording... Public discourse creeps into private conversations, private minds... Public discourse provides a model for private talk: People pick up phrases, ideas, and attitudes from what they hear and repeat them as if they were their own – repeat them because they have *become* their own".

incongruity is natural and inevitable. To many people, the cooperative and mutualistic ideals associated with communication in the private sphere appear impossible, inappropriate, or even oppressive within the public sphere. The public sphere, according to Western-liberal common sense, is the sphere of conflicting interests. And conflicting interests, according to this same common sense, are best negotiated through contest and competition, as discussed in Chapter III.

On the other hand, two of the most influential philosophers of the century, John Dewey, a seminal figure in American pragmatism, and Jurgen Habermas, a seminal figure in European critical theory, both articulated theories of public communication that are models of relatively "cooperative inquiry" rather than partisan confrontation.[83] Broadly speaking, both authors call for more cooperative, inclusive, and participatory models of collective decision making in the public sphere. Both also call for the cultivation of communication competencies throughout society as a foundation for these cooperative and participatory models. Finally, both envision the transformative impact that these models, and the competencies they are built on, could have as traditional models of political communication are replaced by cooperative inquiry and rational collective problem solving.[84]

In turn, many feminist scholars have articulated models of public communication that are even more explicitly non-adversarial than the models proposed by Dewey and Habermas. First, many feminists argue that the traditional distinction between the "private" and "public"

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83 This phrase comes from the comparative analysis of Dewey and Habermas in Filson, "Cooperative Inquiry".

84 For a detailed analysis of the models of cooperative inquiry articulated by both Dewey and Habermas, refer to Filson, "Cooperative Inquiry"; especially the comparative summary in Chapter 6. For relevant works by these prolific authors, good starting points would include Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* and *Democracy and Education*; as well as Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action* and "The Public Sphere". See also the extensive bibliography on Dewey and Habermas in Filson's work.

spheres is a male construct that has functioned to exclude women from public life by defining the public sphere as a domain requiring masculine/adversarial qualities.[85] From this perspective, the common sense "realism" that rejects the possibility or appropriateness of non-adversarial norms within the public sphere appears as little more than an oppressive gender bias.

Moreover, many feminist scholars have also criticized the emphasis on rational *persuasion* that underlies virtually all models of public communication, including that of Habermas. For instance, in a critique of the Western rhetorical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to the present, Sally Miller Gearhart concludes that public communication has historically been studied and taught in a manner that is antithetical to feminist theory and practice. As Gearhart explains, "The assumption is and has been through the centuries that the concern of *rhetoric* is *persuasion*" and that the role of the "speaker/conqueror" is one of "conquest/conversion".[86] Equating this argumentative or conquest model of persuasion with violence, Gearhart goes on to assert that legal adversaries, partisan politicians, and others who are skilled in the art of rational persuasion

> may congratulate themselves that they are men of reason who have chosen civilized discourse above fighting. Yet... the difference between a persuasive metaphor and a violent artillery attack is obscure and certainly one of degree rather than kind. Our rational discourse, presumably such an improvement over war and barbarism, turns out to be in itself a subtle form of Might Makes Right. Speech and rhetoric teachers have been training a competent breed of weapons specialists who are skilled in emotional maneuvers [and] expert in intellectual logistics.[87]

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85 Refer, for instance, to Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere", and Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere.*

86 Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric", pp. 195, 201, emphasis in the original. See also Cope-Kasten, "Domination Rationality", for a parallel discussion.

87 Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric", p. 197. It is interesting to note that Gandhi also equated some forms of communication with violence. For discussions of Gandhi's theory of non-violent communication, which revolves around concepts of non-violent speech, the maintenance of human relationships, openness, and flexibility, refer to Bode, "Gandhi's Rhetorical Theory" and "Nonviolent Communication".

Granted, the link between this argumentative model of persuasion and physical violence is only metaphorical, and few would argue that the distinction between a verbal contest and a war is unimportant. On the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2, rational persuasion is clearly situated much farther to the right than physical violence. At the same time, however, feminists such as Gearhart point out that the choice between rational persuasion and physical violence is often a false choice. As an alternative to both, Gearhart advocates a more dialogical model of communication derived from what she considers a feminist interest "in atmosphere, in listening, in receiving, in a collective rather than in a competitive mode".[88] Such a model, she suggests, would reflect "the womanization of rhetoric".[89]

Following Gearhart's cue, Foss, Foss, and Griffin have articulated a model of "invitational rhetoric" that they hope will "contribute to the efforts of communication scholars who are working to develop models for cooperative, non-adversarial, and ethical communications".[90] This "feminist reconstruction" of communication theory and practice is characterized by the "offering of perspectives" within "conditions of safety, value, and

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88 Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric", p. 201.

89 The conclusions of Gearhart and other feminists need not imply an *absolute* distinction (either biological or cultural) between male and female communication styles – a distinction that would obviously be problematic in light of both everyday experience and research. For a discussion of these problematic distinctions, refer to Elshtain, *Women and War*. On the other hand, sociolinguistics and others who have studied gender differences in communication have found measurable differences in the *relative tendencies* of men and women to adopt conflict orientations. As Tannen notes in *Gender and Discourse*, p. 40, "research on gender and language has consistently found male speakers to be competitive and more likely to engage in conflict (for example, by arguing, issuing commands, and taking opposing stands) and females to be cooperative and more likely to avoid conflict (for example, by agreeing, supporting, and making suggestions rather than commands)", parenthesis in the original. See also Ong, *Fighting For Life*, p. 51, as well as Herring, "Gender and Democracy" and "Men's Language" for similar conclusions.

90 Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion", p. 15. See also Foss and Foss, *Inviting Transformation*. For a parallel discussion by another feminist author, refer to Elshtain, "Feminist Discourse".

freedom".[91] As Foss and Griffin point out, the efforts of public speakers to "demonstrate superior knowledge, skills, and qualifications... in order to dominate the perspectives and knowledge of those in their audiences", is "paternalistic" because it "devalues the lives and perspectives of those others".[92] In contrast, Foss and Griffin advocate moving "beyond persuasion" by adopting an explicitly non-adversarial framework in which all participants

> contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness, and complexity... an understanding that engenders appreciation, value, and a sense of equality.... Absent are efforts to dominate others because the goal is the understanding and appreciation of another's perspective rather than the denigration of it simply because it is different... [participants] enter the interaction with a goal not of converting others to their positions but of sharing what they know, extending one another's ideas, thinking critically about all the ideas offered, and coming to an understanding of the subject and of one another... they ask questions and make comments designed not to show the stupidity or error of the perspective presented or to establish themselves as more powerful or expert than the presenter. Instead, their questions and suggestions are aimed at learning more about the presenter's ideas, understanding them more thoroughly, nurturing them, and offering additional ways of thinking about the subject for everyone involved in the interaction. [93]

Invitational rhetoric, then, offers a striking alternative to the adversarialism that characterizes much contemporary public communication. On the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched out in Chapter II, invitational rhetoric lies even farther to the right than Habermas's "ideal speech situation" which, despite its conditions of freedom from domination, inhibition, or exclusion, is still a model of rational *persuasion.*

Despite these differences, all of these theories share a common shift away from confrontational debate and toward mutual dialogue. In this context, *dialogue* and *debate* are increasingly understood as contrasting paradigms of public communication. As the

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91 Foss, Griffin, and Foss, "Transforming Rhetoric", p. 2.

92 Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion", p. 3.

93 Ibid., pp.5-6, 8.

following comparative summary explains:

> Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding. *Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.*
>
> In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal. *In debate, winning is the goal.*
>
> In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement. *In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter arguments.*
>
> Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. *Debate affirms a participant's point of view...*
>
> Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions. *Debate defends one's original position as the best solution and excludes other solutions.*
>
> Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. *Debate creates a closed-minded attitude: a determination to be right.*
>
> In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that the other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it. *In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.*
>
> Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. *Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs...*
>
> In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions. *In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.*
>
> Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks not to alienate and offend. *Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.*
>
> Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution. *Debate assumes that there is one right answer and that someone has it.*[94]

Closely related to the concept of *dialogue* is the concept of *deliberation*. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they can be distinguished as follows: Dialogue is generally understood as an informal and often ongoing framework for the exchange of diverse perspectives and the consideration of diverse values. Moreover, in contrast to adversarial frameworks such as partisan debate, dialogue is characterized by non-confrontational relationships between its participants, in which each makes a genuine effort

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[94] Study Circles Resource Centre, *Handbook*, p. 15.

to understand, rather than belittle, the perspectives and values of others, in order to expand their own understandings and empathies. Thus diverse perspectives are viewed as complementary rather than oppositional, and mutual understanding and empathy are the underlying goals. [95]

Deliberation, in turn, is often understood as an adaptation of the general principles of dialogue for the more instrumental purpose of arriving at a specific decision or adopting a specific course of action. In this regard, deliberation tends to be a more formal process directed at the resolution of a specific problem within a finite time frame. Like dialogue, however, it is still characterized by an exchange of perspectives and values in the context of mutually interdependent and cooperative relationships.[96]

Dialogical and deliberative models thus provide practical alternatives to the adversarialism that dominates contemporary public communication. Increasingly, calls for more public dialogue and deliberation (and less adversarial debate) can be heard throughout the public sphere, even if they are still largely voiced from the margins. In addition to communications scholars, many educational researchers and theorists are also beginning to advocate the pedagogical value of dialogue and deliberation.[97] Furthermore, a wide range of non-profit organizations are beginning to support the development of growing networks of citizens dedicated to learning the skills of dialogue and deliberation through "study circles", "issue forums", and similar experiments in public life designed to cultivate skills for

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95 Refer to discussions in Bohm, *On Dialogue*, and Amy, "Environmental Mediation".

96 Refer to discussions in Mathews and McAfee, *Making Choices Together*; Briand, *Building Deliberative Communities* and *Practical Politics*; Bridges, "Deliberation and Decision Making"; Dillon, "The Questions of Deliberation"; and Genelot, "The Complex World of Deliberation".

97 Refer, for example, to the collection of essays in Dillon, *Deliberation in Education and Society*.

collectively working through contentious issues within non-adversarial frameworks.[98] To date, over 5,000 study circles, issues forums, and similar experiments have been organized by educators, community groups, libraries, religious communities, and other non-governmental organizations throughout the world for this purpose.[99]

Parallel movements can also be seen among journalists seeking to reform conventional media practices along more dialogical or deliberative lines. These efforts, which have begun to coalesce under the name *public journalism* (or *civic journalism*), are motivated by a general sense of dysfunction in the public sphere – attributable at least in part to conventional journalism.[100] In an effort to improve the quality of public communication, public journalists seek to cultivate an inclusive and participatory civic culture by addressing the public as active citizens rather than passive consumers and representing the public sphere as a deliberative forum rather than an adversarial spectacle. Public journalists seek to expand the role of journalism beyond the traditional reporting of facts to the actual facilitation of public deliberation. This expanded role involves inviting the public into the process of agenda setting; sustaining coverage while the public attempts to work through priority issues; providing relevant background information; soliciting diverse perspectives; probing and clarifying relevant public values and interests; soliciting diverse options for the resolution of the issues; and facilitating the evaluation of these options in light of the information

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98 Refer, for instance, to the Study Circles Resource Centre's newsletter *Focus On Study Circles*. See also the Kettering Foundation's newsletter *Connections* or its journal *The Kettering Review*.

99 London, *Creating Citizens Through Public Deliberation.*

100 Rosen, *Getting the Connections Right.*

available, the perspectives gained, and the values/interests needing to be reconciled.[101] None of this implies, of course, that journalists become public advocates for specific perspectives, values, or policy options. Rather, the role of public journalists is to facilitate public deliberation in as neutral a manner as possible – a role that journalists are uniquely positioned to fill as the *de facto* media(tors) of mass communication in contemporary societies.[102]

Parallel to these movements toward dialogue and deliberation in journalism are similar movements in the field of public relations.[103] For instance, public relations scholars Grunig and Hunt assert that a *two-way symmetrical* model of public relations is gradually emerging as the most recent of four successive models of practice in the field.[104] According to these scholars, the earliest model of public relations was simple publicity-seeking or *press agency* in which organizations sought to attract the attention of the masses through sensational techniques. A more sophisticated *public information* model later emerged, characterized by the management and dissemination of supposedly truthful but highly selective information designed to further an organization's self-interests. Both of these models are *one-way asymmetrical models* in that communication between an organization and the public is uni-

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[101] For discussions of these public journalism principles, refer to Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life*; Rosen, Merritt, and Austin, *Public Journalism Theory and Practice*; Charity, *Doing Public Journalism*; and Yankelovitch, *Coming to Public Judgement.*

[102] For a discussion of the *de facto* mediation roles that journalists play in social conflicts, as well as the need for the media to play more constructive roles in this regard, refer to Rubenstein, Botes, Dukes, and Stephens, *Frameworks for Interpreting Conflicts*. See also the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, *Interpreting Violent Conflict*, as well as Wahrhaftig, "Conflict and the Media" and "Journalism and Conflict Resolution". All of these discussions, while not formally associated with the public journalism movement, implicitly support the approach of public journalism.

[103] Refer to discussions in Pearson, "Business Ethics" and "Beyond Ethical Relativism in Public Relations"; Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*; Grunig, "Symmetrical Presuppositions"; and Kruckeberg and Stark, *Public Relations and Community.*

[104] Grunig and Hunt, *Managing Public Relations.*

directional and unequal. A third model of public relations emerged when public relations practitioners began to apply sophisticated research methodologies, borrowed from the social sciences, in order to collect data about the public that would help them craft more persuasive public information strategies. Though this *two-way asymmetrical model* was characterized by the two-way "flow" of data and information between organizations and the public, the flow was still unequal in that it served primarily the organization's interests. Finally, Grunig and Hunt assert that a fourth nascent model is gradually being adopted by progressive organizations, characterized by *two-way symmetrical* communication between organizations and their publics. This involves an organization's full recognition of their mutual interdependence with the public and a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue for the purposes of mutual understanding and mutual adaptation. Even though this two-way symmetrical model still exists only at the margins of the profession, public relations researchers are finding that it is not only a more ethical practice, but it is also more effective.[105]

Finally, efforts to construct a more dialogical or deliberative public sphere can also be seen in *deliberative opinion polls*, an innovative research methodology that attempts to resolve the age-old dilemma of the democratic public sphere: How to create a participatory democracy within modern populations that are far too large and too busy to assemble together in a common forum to deliberate together on every public issue? Public journalism takes a step in this direction by attempting to facilitate ongoing civic dialogue and deliberation, but by itself it cannot ensure *representative* public participation. In contrast,

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[105] Refer to surveys of these findings in Grunig and Grunig, "Models of Public Relations" and "Review of a Program of Research" as well as Grunig, "Implications of Public Relations".

traditional opinion polls gather statistically representative samples of public opinion, but these opinions are formed in the absence of meaningful dialogue and deliberation. There is a significant difference, however, between spontaneous and poorly informed responses to strategically and often contentiously worded questions and thoughtful judgements arrived at through non-adversarial processes of dialogue and deliberation.[106]

The deliberative opinion poll attempts to reconcile the values of public deliberation with the requirements of representative participation by gathering statistically representative samples of citizens together in one place and measuring the opinions they arrive at after extended opportunities to deliberate together on a specific issue.[107] As Fishkin describes it:

> The idea is simple: Take a national [or regional or local] random sample of the electorate and transport these people… to a single place. Immerse the sample in the issues, with carefully balanced briefing materials, with intensive discussions in small groups, and with the chance to question competing experts and politicians. At the end of several days of working through the issues face to face, poll the participants in detail. The resulting survey offers a representative sample of the considered judgements of the public – the views the entire country [or region or locality] would come to if it had the same experience of behaving more like ideal citizens immersed in the issues for an extended period.[108]

Of course, such a poll does not actually measure *existing* public opinion. But this is not its purpose. On the contrary, as Fishkin explains:

> A deliberative opinion poll is not meant to describe or predict public opinion. Rather, it prescribes. It has a recommending force: these are the conclusions that people would come to, were they better informed on the issues and had the opportunity and motivation to examine those issues seriously. It allows a microcosm of the country to make recommendations to us all after it has had the chance to think through the issues.[109]

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[106] Refer, for example, to the discussion of these problems in Yankelovitch, *Coming to Public Judgement.*

[107] Refer to Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation,* and *Voice of the People*, for detailed discussions of the theory and practice of deliberative opinion polls, including analyses of actual applications of the methodology on national scales in both Britain and the United States.

[108] Fishkin, *Voice of the People*, p. 162.

[109] Ibid., p. 162.

Moreover, these recommendations can be arrived at through an essentially non-partisan/non-adversarial process of collective deliberation – a process more akin to "invitational rhetoric" than partisan persuasion and debate. Deliberative opinion polls, like their counterparts in each of the other examples discussed above, thus embody potential alternatives to the culture of adversarialism that dominates the public sphere. In addition, these alternatives are potentially mutually reinforcing. For instance, if the ideals of public journalism began to replace traditional journalistic practices in an effort to facilitate civic dialogue and deliberation, and if public journalists began to turn to deliberative as opposed to traditional opinion polling as a means of sampling public opinion in a representative manner, and if other organized interest groups began to adopt two-way symmetrical approaches to public relations, one might see the emergence of much more functional, inclusive, and non-adversarial patterns of communication in the public sphere.

Of course, this scenario admittedly appears quite utopian from the vantage-point of the culture of adversarialism. Each of the alternatives discussed above are little more than marginal ideals at the moment, and their realization would require many other corresponding adjustments in the political economy of the public sphere.[110] They do, however, provide alternative ways of thinking and talking about public communication. They define human beings in terms of their capacities for collective inquiry and intersubjective agreement. They define human knowledge in a relative or perspectival manner. Finally, they suggest the need for social practices and institutional arrangements that are consistent with these alternative views of human nature. In sum, they provide another glimpse of, and theoretical basis for,

[110] The ideals of public journalism, for instance, are highly constrained within the advertising-supported media that dominate the public sphere in many Western countries.

alternatives to the codes of adversarialism.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Of all the non-adversarial models surveyed in this chapter, alternative dispute resolution has arguably emerged as the most visible and successful alternative within the culture of adversarialism to date. In response to the increasing financial costs of the legal adversary system, the high emotional costs and mutual frustrations experienced by both plaintiffs and defendants within it, the increasing backlogs of court cases, and even the disillusionment of many lawyers and judges, alternative dispute resolution is gaining increasing support in many Western countries – including the support of a former Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and other judicial leaders.[111]

While alternative dispute resolution is a very broad term that encompasses the entire spectrum between direct negotiation and imposed third-party arbitration, the paradigmatic form of alternative dispute resolution is mediation. Indeed, hybridized forms of mediation span the full spectrum of alternative dispute resolution, from "med-neg" (mediated negotiations) to "med-arb" (mediation linked to arbitration in the case of an impasse), and from interpersonal mediation to multi-year, multi-stakeholder, public dispute resolution processes.

As an alternative to the legal adversary system, mediation is thus characterized by a range of approaches. Most mediators, however, approach mediation as a non-adversarial method for maximizing the satisfaction and reducing the costs (financial and emotional) in

[111] Refer, for example, to Galanter, "Judicial Mediation".

contentious disputes. The role of the mediator is generally to help the parties reframe conflicts as collective problems and then facilitate collaborative problem-solving among the parties. This entails establishing a tone and an environment that minimizes hostility and maximizes cooperation; establishing ground rules that foster constructive exchanges; assisting the parties to probe and clarify underlying interests (the needs, desires, values, fears, and concerns that underlie their conflicting positions); and assisting the parties in their efforts to generate and evaluate integrative "win-win" solutions that maximize the satisfaction of each party's underlying interests.[112]

This problem-solving or interest-based model of dispute resolution, which is at the heart of most contemporary mediation, thus represents a clear alternative to adversarial litigation – a significant shift from the left to the right on the *adversarial↔cooperative* continuum sketched in Figure 2. In addition, interest-based mediation has proven to be more than a naïve or utopian alternative. Compared to adversarial processes, mediation has proven to be a more practical and effective means of satisfying interests and reducing costs in many types of conflicts.[113]

Beyond these pragmatic, problem-solving goals, however, some mediators also see

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[112] For overviews of the general principles and practices of mediation and alternative dispute resolution, refer to discussions in Amy, *The Politics of Environmental Mediation*; Bush and Folger, *Promise of Mediation*; Cormick, "Environmental Mediation"; Donohue, Allen, and Burrell, "Communication Strategies in Mediation"; Littlejohn, Shailor, and Pearce, "The Deep Structure of Reality in Mediation"; Fisher and Brown, *Getting Together*; and Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes*.

[113] Refer, for example, to Pearson, "Evaluation of Alternatives"; Kelly, "Mediated and Adversarial Divorce Resolution"; Lieberman and Henry, "Lessons"; Ury, Brett, and Goldberg, *Getting Disputes Resolved*; Crowfoot and Wondolleck, *Environmental Disputes*; Susskind, "Mediating Public Disputes"; Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking the Impasse*; Kolb and Rubin, "Mediation"; Rubin and Zartman, "Asymmetrical Negotiations"; and Bingham, *Resolving Environmental Disputes*.

mediation as a means of transforming the culture of adversarialism itself.[114] In this transformative approach to mediation, mediators see conflicts not simply as practical problems to be solved, but as opportunities for the development of more mature social or "relational" capacities among disputants. These capacities include, among others, the ability to view the world from the perspectives of others; the ability to experience real empathy with others; the ability to consider the moral consequences of one's choices; and the ability to transcend narrow self-interests and identities through a recognition of wider collective interests and a common human identity.[115]

This transformative approach to mediation therefore rejects a limited focus on interest satisfaction as too limiting. From this perspective, even interest-based mediation is little more than a reworking of the same liberal individualism that underlies the legal adversary system. As two of transformative mediation's most prominent advocates explain:

> The Individualist worldview gives an impoverished account of the human world and its potential. Most important, Individualism's categorical description of persons as radically separate beings fails to account for many important aspects of human life in which connection to others is the primary quality of experience; and its focus on self-satisfaction as a value is demonstrably inadequate as a basis for moral theory.[116]

In contrast, the transformative approach to mediation is derived from a "relational worldview", which defines human beings in fundamentally non-adversarial terms.

> The Relational framework, like the Individualist, views the world as made up of persons with individuated consciousness and with diverse needs and desires; but it also sees these diverse beings as possessing an inherent form of consciousness that *connects* them to each other. Specifically, every human being has two inherent human capabilities. The first is the capacity for the full range of human experience – pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, clarity and confusion, and so forth. The second is the capacity for realizing that every other person has the same kinds

[114] Refer, for example, to Folger and Bush, "Orientations to Conflict"; and Menkel-Meadow, "The Many Ways of Mediation".

[115] Folger and Bush, "Orientations to Conflict".

[116] Ibid., p. 19.

> of experiential capacities as oneself. It is this inherent and uniquely human capacity for *relating to* the experience of others that constitutes the structure – a structure of human consciousness – that connects every individual human being to every other, at least potentially.... The Relational worldview therefore sees the world as containing *both* the plurality of individual selves and the (potential) unity made up of the network of their relationships.[117]

This relational worldview, in turn, suggests that while the satisfaction of mutual interests can be an important side-benefit of mediation, the ultimate goal should be greater.

> The highest value that emerges from this vision of the human world is not the satisfaction of individual desires, but the development of the higher potential of both the individual and the world itself through activating the human capacity for awareness of and concern for both self *and* other.... instead of regarding others as things to be used for one's own ends.[118]

In this context, while the problem-solving or interest-based approach to mediation seeks to create non-adversarial structures of dispute resolution, the transformative approach seeks to cultivate a non-adversarial culture by transforming the conceptual basis for disputes in the minds of disputants.

Of course, these pragmatic and transformational goals need not be understood in mutually exclusive terms. Mediation can satisfy mutual interests in many types of disputes while simultaneously cultivating new relational capacities among disputants. Participating in a mediated problem-solving processes can, in and of itself, be an educational experience that transforms a disputant's understanding of conflict.[119] Moreover, given that dispute resolution skills and concepts are increasingly working their way into educational curricula from kindergartens to universities, the goals of cultural transformation are being widely promoted in many classrooms even as the pragmatic goals of interest-based problem solving are being

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[117] Ibid., p. 19-20, italics and parentheses in the original.

[118] Ibid., p. 20, italics in the original.

[119] For a discussion of the mutual compatibility of these goals, refer to Menkel-Meadow, "The Many Ways of Mediation", pp. 239-41.

more narrowly pursued in the shadows of the courts.

Whether in the classroom or in the shadows of the courts, and whether motivated by interest-based problem-solving or social transformation, mediation and related forms of dispute resolution illustrate clear alternatives within the culture of adversarialism. They provide alternative ways of thinking and talking about conflicts. They define human beings in terms of their abilities to resolve conflicts collaboratively, as well as develop relational capacities that will minimize the cost and occurrence of future conflicts. Also, they prescribe social structures and practices that are consistent with these alternative views of human nature. Alternative dispute resolution is thus gradually expanding the contemporary social imagination even as it gradually permeates social practice. Although these practices are still culturally marginalized in many respects, they provide yet another glimpse of, and theoretical basis for, alternatives to the dominant codes of adversarialism.

Lack of Integration

As this survey demonstrates, alternatives to the culture of adversarialism have been articulated by a wide range of contemporary theorists, professionals, activists, and others. Some of these alternatives are still little more than intuitive ideals. Others have been developed into sophisticated theoretical frameworks. Still others have been applied as relatively successful models of social practice. All of these alternatives, however, shift our understanding of human relations from the left to the right on the *adversarialism↔cooperation* continuum sketched in Figure 2. At the same time, all of these alternatives have been relatively isolated from each other within the larger culture of

adversarialism. Though they all provide separate glimpses of non-adversarial practices, it is difficult to view and experience them together as a comprehensive alternative. They have not yet been successfully integrated into a larger, internally consistent and mutually reinforcing cultural formation.

Because of this, the practical efficacy of many of these alternatives remains difficult to evaluate. Although they may intuitively appeal to many people, they tend to appear naïve or utopian to many others. After all, from the vantage point of the culture of adversarialism, human nature often appears to be naturally and inevitably adversarial. Given these widespread assumptions about human nature, non-adversarial models of social practice tend to appear impractical at best and susceptible to manipulation and abuse at worst. Accordingly, the culture of adversarialism cultivates widespread cynicism regarding non-adversarial models of social practice which in turn constrains the successful application of these alternatives.

Consider, for instance, recent experience with alternative dispute resolution in the sphere of public policy and planning. Public consultations designed as alternative dispute resolution processes have become popular exercises in recent decades. These exercises, however, have left many participants frustrated and disillusioned because they often turn out to be little more than elaborate public relations strategies designed to sell policy and planning decisions that are already foregone conclusions – constrained or determined in advance by the political economy of partisan governance. Moreover, even when such processes are relatively authentic, their outcomes are often circumscribed by pre-existing legal and regulatory frameworks that were themselves shaped by the same partisan systems. Embedding non-adversarial dispute resolution processes within adversarial structures of governance can

thereby render them dysfunctional.

In addition to the structural problems these processes face within the larger culture of adversarialism, they can also be undermined by the psycho-cultural dispositions of those who participate in them. Having been raised within a culture of adversarialism, where the aggressive pursuit of self-interests are normalized and even idealized, it should come as little surprise that many people find it difficult to engage others with different interests in a non-adversarial manner. Embedding non-adversarial dispute resolution processes within a psycho-cultural climate of adversarialism can render these processes even more dysfunctional.

In order to evaluate the practical efficacy of non-adversarial models across a wide range of human affairs, it is therefore necessary to evaluate their application within an integrated or comprehensive cultural formation, characterized by structures of consciousness and structures of social organization that reinforce rather than undermine non-adversarial ways of thinking, talking, and acting throughout the public sphere.

CHAPTER V: AN INTEGRATED ALTERNATIVE

One example of an integrated alternative to the culture of adversarialism is the Bahá'í International Community. As a contemporary phenomenon with a coherent, traceable, and well-documented history, the Bahá'í International Community has an integrated body of thought, text, and practice that lends itself to analysis as a comprehensive discursive or cultural formation, as defined in Chapter I. Within this unique cultural universe, its members grow, develop, and internalize a coherent set of cultural norms. Moreover, in both its psycho-cultural and socio-structural dimensions, it is consistently non-adversarial. In the following pages, the culture of the Bahá'í International Community will therefore be analyzed as an integrated alternative to the dominant culture of adversarialism.

Case Study: The Bahá'í International Community

Rationale for Studying the Bahá'í Community

The Bahá'í International Community is a unique contemporary phenomenon. It is a steadily growing voluntary association of people from more than 2,100 different ethnic backgrounds, representing all nations and socio-economic classes on earth. With a current membership of more than five million, it constitutes a microcosm of the planet's diverse human population. As an organized community, it has locally elected governing councils in more than 15,000 localities worldwide, nationally elected governing councils in more than 170 independent nations and territories, and a single internationally elected governing

council that coordinates its activities on a global scale. By all of these measures, it is likely the most diverse yet highly organized community of people on the planet today.[1]

Held together by a commitment to the fundamental equality and interdependence of all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religious background, the Bahá'í International Community has been quietly labouring for more than 150 years in its efforts to construct a system of unified, just, and sustainable social practice. Its members believe that this system will one day demonstrate its efficacy to the rest of the world as a model of social organization for the age of global interdependence that we are entering.[2]

In this regard, the Bahá'í International Community is just beginning to emerge from relative obscurity on the world scene – becoming increasingly well known for its work in such areas as human rights, the advancement of women, education and literacy, environmental preservation, and sustainable development.[3] This work includes more than 1,700 grassroots projects to date that focus not on the delivery of services but rather on the development of capacities within people themselves.[4] In addition to these projects, the Bahá'í International Community also works collaboratively with many other non-governmental organizations, including Advocates for African Food Security, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Centre for Our Common Future, and the Education for All Network, to name but a few.

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[1] For these and other related figures on the size and growth of the Bahá'í International Community, refer to statistics published by the Bahá'í World Centre, *Bahá'í World 1996-97*. For corroborating sources outside of the Bahá'í Community, refer to statistics published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

[2] Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by Shoghi Effendi in *World Order*.

[3] For an excellent overview of the community's historical emergence from obscurity, refer to Collins, "In the Eyes of the World". See also Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*.

[4] Descriptions and statistics on these projects can be found at http://www.bahai.org/bworld, under a link entitled *Bahá'í Development Projects, A Global Process of Learning*.

Another factor that has contributed to the Bahá'í International Community's emergence from obscurity is its extensive involvement with the United Nations system, which it has been working with since the inception of the United Nations in 1948. Since that time, the Bahá'í International Community has emerged as one of the most prominent non-governmental organizations within the United Nations system. It has been accredited with consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as well as in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It has working relationships with a range of other United Nations agencies such as the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the Centre for Human Settlements, the Centre for Human Rights, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Disarmament Affairs, the Peace Studies Unit, and the UN Regional Commissions. In addition, it is continually increasing its contact with specialized United Nations agencies such as the World Food Council (WFC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Finally, it has assumed active roles as both planner and participant in major international events such as the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.[5]

As a result of its rising presence on the international stage, the Bahá'í International Community has also become the object of increasing scholarly attention in recent decades. In 1975, an international Association for Bahá'í Studies was formally established to study the

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[5] For a concise history and overview of the Bahá'í International Community's active involvement with the United Nations, refer to the BIC United Nations Office, "Cooperation with the United Nations".

theory and practice of the Bahá'í community. Since that time, the Association has spawned a network of twenty-six national affiliates, with specialized interest groups in the areas of agriculture, the arts, conflict resolution, business and economics, education, environment, health, intercultural issues, science and technology, philosophy of science, religious studies, and women's studies. The Association holds annual scholarly conferences on various continents and publishes a quarterly refereed journal entitled *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, as well as occasional scholarly monographs.

Outside of the activities of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, more than eighty theses and doctoral dissertations had been written (in English alone), on various aspects of the Bahá'í International Community by 1985.[6] Although updated figures are not readily available, this number appears to have grown steadily since that date, as citation analysis reveals a continuous increase in the overall number of scholarly books and academic journal articles examining various aspects of the Bahá'í International Community in recent decades.[7] Finally, as a further indication of the Bahá'í International Community's relevance to contemporary scholarship, the University of Maryland established a Bahá'í Peace Chair in 1992 to bring a Bahá'í perspective to the formal study of peace and world order issues. Similarly, the University of Jerusalem established a Bahá'í Studies Chair in 1999 for the formal study of the Bahá'í International Community itself.

As all of these examples indicate, the Bahá'í International Community has emerged as a

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6 Refer to Collins, *Bibliography*, pp. 303-10, for an annotated bibliography of these theses and dissertations. It is especially interesting to note that included in this bibliography is the dissertation of sociologist Peter L. Berger (of Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* – cited in Chapter I as one of this century's foremost exponents of social constructionist theory). Berger's *Sociological Interpretation of the Bahá'í Movement* was written as his Ph.D. dissertation at the New School of Social Research in New York in 1954.

7 Fazel and Danesh, "Citation Analysis".

global movement worthy of both public and scholarly attention. Moreover, given its commitment to non-adversarial models of social practice, it is particularly relevant to the study at hand. Through an analysis of the theory and practice of the Bahá'í International Community, valuable perspective can be gained on the culture of adversarialism.

A Note on Methodology

The following analysis draws from a range of primary texts, written or commissioned by the central authors and institutions of the Bahá'í International Community. These include the writings of Mírzá Husayn-`Alí (known more commonly by the name Bahá'u'lláh), the writings of `Abbás Effendi (`Abdu'l-Bahá) and Shoghi Effendi, as well as documents written or commissioned by the international governing council of the Bahá'í International Community, the Universal House of Justice.[8]

Of the documents commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, many have been gathered from archives of statements made by the Bahá'í International Community to various United Nations conferences and agencies. Perhaps more than any other Bahá'í texts, these

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[8] Bahá'u'lláh was the original author and "architect" of the Bahá'í International Community. From 1853, at the age of 36, until his death in 1892, he was imprisoned by the Persian and Ottoman empires for his leadership of a "heretical" movement dedicated to the construction of a new social order based on principles of justice, unity, and interdependence, as well as the elimination of prejudice and discrimination based on gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and so forth. Through the course of his forty-year imprisonment and exile, he wrote extensively, including a prolific correspondence with a steadily growing community of supporters throughout the Middle East. In these writings, he articulated the basic principles and organizational structure of the Bahá'í community. Before his death, he appointed his eldest son, `Abdu'l-Bahá, to succeed him in his efforts to build and strengthen the nascent Bahá'í community. `Abdu'l-Bahá continued these efforts while remaining a prisoner until 1908. After his release from prison, he carried on this work until his own death in 1921, at which time he appointed Shoghi Effendi to succeed him. Under the efforts of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the nascent Bahá'í community grew into a diverse, global, and well-organized movement. Ten years after Shoghi Effendi's death in 1953, the Bahá'í community had grown to the point that it could elect its first international governing council, the Universal House of Justice, which now directs and coordinates the work of the community worldwide. For an excellent scholarly history of the lives and accomplishments of Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, as well as the historical development of the Bahá'í International Community itself, refer to Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*.

statements provide clear and concise summaries of the key Bahá'í concepts that will be discussed below. Given the availability of these clear and concise summary statements, I frequently quote them directly in order to avoid imposing a layer of my own vocabulary on the Bahá'í discourse that I am examining. Of course, this has not been necessary when I discuss the more concrete, technical aspects of Bahá'í practice. But in my discussions of relatively abstract concepts, such as those that constitute the "organic worldview" that Bahá'ís hold, I have resorted to fairly extensive quotations in order to preserve the actual language of Bahá'í discourse as much as possible.

In addition, for simplicity and clarity, throughout my discussion I have taken the liberty of referring to Bahá'ís collectively, as though they speak with a single voice. In part, this is a stylistic choice intended to make the discussion more readable. However, it also reflects the consensus that exists among Bahá'ís regarding their core principles and practices. Because the Bahá'í International Community is a voluntary association of individuals who have been drawn together by a common commitment to a well articulated set of concepts, principles, and practices, these concepts, principles, and practices are not in dispute within the community. Moreover, there are institutional structures in place within the community for resolving questions of interpretation and application while maintaining unity of purpose and understanding. Consequently, there are no factions, parties, or competing interpretative frameworks within the community.

In this context, though it is inevitably hazardous to generalize about internally disputed discourses such as liberalism, humanism, Marxism, post-modernism, and so forth (because their proponents clearly do not all speak with a single voice), such generalizations are relatively safe in the case of Bahá'í discourse. With that said, however, any analysis of the

sort that follows inevitably involves some interpretation due to the processes of selection, emphasis, phrasing, and so forth that goes into all writing. In this regard, an effort has been made to maximize the intersubjective validity of my analysis by soliciting feedback from a diverse panel of Bahá'ís who have agreed to comment on it. The panel was composed of Bahá'ís who have both extensive familiarity with Bahá'í texts and years of service within local and national Bahá'í communities, including experience as elected members of various Bahá'í institutions. By "triangulating" my interpretation of Bahá'í thought and practice with theirs, I am confident that the intersubjective validity of the analysis has been maximized, and with regard to the core concepts I discuss, it is thus safe to refer to Bahá'ís collectively as though they speak with a unified voice.

Analysis

In the following analysis, I begin by discussing the overall organic worldview that informs the non-adversarial prescriptions and practices of the Bahá'í International Community. Next, I examine a number of these prescriptions and practices, including Bahá'í models of collective decision making, Bahá'í institutional structures, and Bahá'í strategies for pursuing social change. I also explicate the assumptions about human nature that underlie each of these elements of Bahá'í normative theory. Finally, I conclude the chapter by evaluating the efficacy of these prescriptions and practices by discussing the actual experience of the Bahá'í International Community.

Organic Worldview

Members of the Bahá'í International Community share a common worldview that could

appropriately be described as "organic". Bahá'ís speak of the organic interdependence of the human species, the organic nature of the relationship between human beings and their environment, and the organic processes of growth and adaptation that characterize humanity's collective evolution. Within this organic worldview, Bahá'ís conceive of *power* not simply in terms of contests and the struggle for domination but also in terms of unity and the need for coordination. Based on these views, Bahá'ís are committed to learning and erecting non-adversarial social practices and institutional structures. Before examining these structures and practices, however, the organic metaphors that inform them need to be clarified and distinguished from other organic conceptions of society.

Historically, organic conceptions of society have occasionally been invoked by privileged and self-interested groups or classes as a means of imposing "harmony" on the populations they have governed. Organic metaphors have thus been used to stifle diversity, suppress human rights, and maintain a false (and often fragile) consensus regarding the necessity of the status quo.[9]

In contrast to this largely hollow and imposed organicism, however, Bahá'ís invoke organic metaphors as a means of promoting diversity, preserving human rights, and pursuing social change. In this context, Bahá'ís believe that one of the root causes of social injustice and inequity is actually humanity's inability to recognize its organic interdependence and pattern its collective life accordingly. In the absence of this recognition, Bahá'ís point out, oppressive and exploitative social relations are perceived as normal, natural, and inevitable because conflict, rather than cooperation, is assumed to be the defining characteristic of

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[9] For examples of the oppressive use of organic metaphors, refer to Nader, "Harmony Models"; Jouvenel, *On Power*; Schweitzer, "Harmony Ideology"; and Rose, *The Politics of Harmony*.

human existence.[10]

In advocating the organic unity and interdependence of the human race, Bahá'ís thus call into question some of the twentieth century's most deeply entrenched assumptions. The most obvious of these, they suggest,

> is the conviction that unity is a distant, almost unattainable ideal to be addressed only after a host of political conflicts have been somehow resolved, material needs somehow satisfied, and injustices somehow corrected. The opposite, [Bahá'ís believe], is the case. The primary disease that afflicts society and generates the ills that cripple it... is the disunity of a human race that is distinguished by its capacity for collaboration and whose progress to date has depended on the extent to which unified action has, at various times and in various societies, been achieved. To cling to the notion that conflict is an intrinsic feature of human nature, rather than a complex of learned habits and attitudes, is to impose on a new century an error which, more than any other single factor, has tragically handicapped humanity's past.[11]

Accordingly, Bahá'ís believe that fundamental changes in the way human beings relate to one another are both necessary and inevitable.[12] In particular, they assert that old ways of exercising power and authority, rooted in these entrenched assumptions about human nature, must give way to understandings of these concepts.[13] Throughout history, they point out,

> power has been largely interpreted as advantage enjoyed by persons or groups. Often, indeed, it has been expressed simply in terms of means to be used against others. This interpretation of power has become an inherent feature of the culture of division and conflict... In general, power has been an attribute of individuals, factions, peoples, classes, and nations. It has been an attribute especially associated with men rather than women. Its chief effect has been to confer on its beneficiaries the ability to acquire, to surpass, to dominate, to resist, to win.[14]

In contrast to these traditional, competitive expressions of power – which Bahá'ís believe

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10 For a more detailed discussion of this theme, refer to the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*.

11 BIC Haifa Office, "Who is Writing the Future?".

12 BIC United Nations Office, "Women and the Peace Process".

13 BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Communities Statement". In a related statement, the Bahá'í International Community maintains that traditional notions of power and authority "stand in urgent need of redefinition" (BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", pp., 16-18).

14 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", pp., 16-18.

"have lost their credibility as means of solving difficult problems"[15] – Bahá'ís assert that ever-increasing levels of interdependence within and between societies are compelling us to learn and exercise the powers of collective decision making and collective action, born out of a recognition of our organic unity as a species.[16]

From the perspective articulated above, Bahá'ís interpret contemporary world conditions (from humanity's unprecedented reproductive and technological success as a species to the increasing levels of social interdependence this has generated to the increasingly complex and interrelated social and environmental problems that have in turn arisen) as mounting evolutionary pressures that are compelling us toward "an organic change in the structure of present-day society".[17]

Bahá'ís thus believe that inherited social structures and practices, which evolved under very different historical conditions, are maladaptive in the face of contemporary conditions. The question, according to Bahá'ís, is whether humanity will adapt new social structures and practices out of a forward-looking response to these mounting evolutionary pressures or whether humanity will adapt only in response to ever-more catastrophic events "precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour".[18]

In this regard, Bahá'ís suggest that if we are to adopt a forward-looking approach to the challenges that increasingly face us,

> we must begin by appreciating the magnitude of change required to bring about thought and actions more appropriate to life-enhancing virtues and practices. The "world problematique" demands a radical transformation in the hearts and minds of mankind. We appear to be frozen in

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[15] BIC United Nations Office, "Women and the Peace Process".

[16] BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Communities Statement".

[17] Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 43.

[18] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 1.

> our present patterns of perception, employing old models and concepts. Such patterns have existed for centuries and are rooted in the concepts of nation states, national sovereignty, conflict and combat, winning and losing.[19]

Accordingly, Bahá'ís suggest that "the bedrock of a strategy that can engage the world's population in assuming responsibility for its collective destiny must be the consciousness of the oneness of humankind".[20] This deceptively simple concept, they explain,

> presents fundamental challenges to the way that most of the institutions of contemporary society carry out their functions. Whether in the form of the adversarial structure of civil government, the advocacy principle informing most of civil law, a glorification of the struggle between classes and other social groups, or the competitive spirit dominating so much of modern life, conflict is accepted as the mainspring of human interaction.[21]

"Only through the dawning consciousness that they constitute a single people", Bahá'ís continue, "will the inhabitants of the planet be enabled to turn away from the patterns of conflict that have dominated social organization in the past and begin to learn the ways of collaboration and conciliation".[22] Moreover, the social and environmental costs of clinging to these inherited patterns of conflict, they assert, will only continue to mount. "Interdependence among the peoples and nations of the world", they point out,

> will only increase in the years ahead. The peoples and nations of the planet are being drawn together as they become more and more dependent upon one another... This growing interdependence and the intensifying interaction among diverse peoples pose fundamental challenges to old ways of thinking and acting. How we, as individuals and communities, respond to these challenges will, to a large degree, determine whether our communities become nurturing, cohesive and progressive, or inhospitable, divided and unsustainable.[23]

In advocating recognition of the organic unity and interdependence of the human species, however, Bahá'ís emphatically caution against any notion of unity that results in a stifling of

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19 BIC United Nations Office, "Disarmament and Development".

20 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 2.

21 Ibid., p. 2.

22 Ibid., p. 3.

23 BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Communities Concept Paper".

diversity. The Bahá'í concept of unity should therefore not be confused with a prescription for uniformity. Rather, it is a prescription for "unity in diversity".[24] Moreover, Bahá'ís view diversity not simply as something to be tolerated but as an essential collective resource to be cultivated and valued. "Much like the role played by the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment", they explain,

> the immense wealth of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and economic development of the human race... It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global civilization... protected from suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway [and] free of manipulation for partisan political ends.[25]

In addition, Bahá'ís also caution against any notion of organic unity that results in the suppression of basic human rights, as alluded to above. In contrast to the oppressive organicism that has traditionally been invoked in order to maintain power over others, the Bahá'í concept of unity implies that society must become the collective trustee of basic human rights. "Each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole", they state, and implied in such a trusteeship are a range of collective responsibilities.[26] These include responsibilities to ensure, for instance,

> the security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to privacy... the provision of employment, mental and physical health care, social security, fair wages, rest and recreation, and a host of other reasonable expectations on the part of the individual members of society... [including] also the right of every person to expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the protection of national and international law.[27]

In the Bahá'í view, therefore, this concept of trusteeship constitutes the moral foundation of the human rights that an increasingly interdependent humanity has struggled to articulate

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[24] Ibid.

[25] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 10.

[26] Ibid., p. 10.

[27] Ibid., p. 10.

in recent generations.[28] To Bahá'ís, the concept implies a reciprocal relationship between human societies and the individuals that constitute them. Within this relationship, individuals have a duty to sustain and enrich society with diverse and creative contributions, while society, in turn, has a responsibility to preserve and promote those conditions within which individuals can do this. Thus, rather than viewing diversity and individuality as threats to the social body, Bahá'ís view them as sources of collective health and well-being.

Elaborating on this point, Bahá'ís draw an analogy between human society and the individual human body. Acknowledging, of course, that "human society is composed not of a mass of merely differentiated cells but of associations of individuals, each one of whom is endowed with intelligence and will" they maintain that

> nevertheless, the modes of operation that characterize [our] biological nature illustrate fundamental principles of existence. Chief among these is that of unity in diversity. Paradoxically, it is precisely the wholeness and complexity of the order constituting the human body – and the perfect integration into it of the body's cells – that permit the full realization of the distinctive capacities inherent in each of these component elements. No cell lives apart from the body, whether in contributing to its functioning or in deriving its share from the well-being of the whole... What is true of the life of the individual has its parallels in human society... That human consciousness necessarily operates through an infinite diversity of individual minds and motivations detracts in no way from its essential unity. Indeed, it is precisely an inhering diversity that distinguishes unity from homogeneity or uniformity.[29]

According to Bahá'ís, however, such a reciprocal relationship, within which diversity is nurtured and human rights are preserved, can only be established through recognition of the unity and interdependence of all people. In this regard, moreover, Bahá'ís believe that this organic conception of society is a prerequisite for transcending the traditional, competitive expressions of power that have characterized many social relations throughout history and

[28] For a more detailed discussion of this theme, refer to the BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 4.

[29] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 2.

which underlie many human rights abuses. Pointing to traditions of violence against women, for example, Bahá'ís explain that

> violence against women is a yardstick by which one can measure the violation of all human rights. It can be used to gauge the degree to which a society is governed by aggressivity, dominated by competition and ruled by force... [because] a society patterned on dominance inevitably gives rise to such distortions of power as violence against women.[30]

In this regard, Bahá'ís also maintain that those who inflict violence on women are themselves among the casualties of traditional, competitive conceptions of power.[31]

> When unbridled competition, aggression, and tyranny destroy the fabric of society, everyone suffers... Violence against women is a grave symptom of this larger disorder... Our challenge is to search out new strategies and adopt fresh models that will encourage a healthier, more cooperative society at all levels.[32]

In this regard, however, Bahá'ís acknowledge that the transformation of consciousness they are advocating will inevitably be a difficult and gradual process.[33] Although they admit that incremental advances may be made in the immediate years ahead, Bahá'ís believe that fundamental change will ultimately require the cultivation of new attitudes and values across successive generations. Thus they suggest that

> efforts should be concentrated on reaching children and youth, who are still in the process of forming the values that will shape their lives. Instilling in our children respect for themselves and others, recognition of the oneness of humanity, appreciation of unity in diversity, and a sense of citizenship in a world community will be the best guarantee of improved protection of human rights in the years to come... As we educate our children to accept diversity as part of the human condition and to extend respect and full human rights to the entire human family, civilization will benefit from an unimaginable wealth of contributions... In that respect, human rights education could be considered basic education for life in the modern world.[34]

Of course, Bahá'ís also recognize that there are currently many constraints on the

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30 BIC United Nations Office, "Ending Violence Against Women".

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 BIC United Nations Office, "UN Decade on Human Rights Education".

34 Ibid.

transformation of consciousness that they are calling for. "Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest", they acknowledge, continue to "beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another".[35] Indeed, they point out,

> so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behaviour is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable. With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.[36]

This paralysis of will, Bahá'ís insist, must be carefully examined and resolutely dealt with.[37] In order to overcome it, Bahá'ís suggest that we "need a vision, an image of the future, which can harness our energies and engage our dedication and sacrifice".[38] To supply this vision, Bahá'ís invoke another organic analogy so simple that it can readily be grasped by literate and illiterate minds alike, including children and youth in their all-important formative years. Comparing humankind's collective evolution to the development of the individual, they suggest that humanity is passing through natural stages of development as it grows toward maturity: "The human race", they suggest, "as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age".[39] From this perspective, they interpret "the turmoil, discontinuity and agitation of recent times" as

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[35] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 2-3.

[36] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[37] Ibid., p. 6.

[38] BIC United Nations Office, "Disarmament and Development".

> characteristic of an immature stage of growth. In terms of global development we must see ourselves moving, as a species, into a new age, preparing for bigger tasks, assuming wider loyalties, adopting a more universal purpose and direction, and cultivating collaboration and cooperation.[40]

Bahá'ís thus regard "the current world confusion and the calamitous condition of human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet".[41] In this context, they assert that

> present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions – reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization – then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.[42]

Foremost among these, Bahá'ís suggest, are the competitive and aggressive models of power and authority alluded to above. "Habits and attitudes related to the use of power", they point out,

> which emerged during the long ages of humanity's infancy and adolescence, have reached the outer limits of their effectiveness. Today, in an era most of whose pressing problems are global in nature, persistence in the idea that power means advantage for various segments of the human family is profoundly mistaken in theory and of no practical service to the social and economic development of the planet... The human race is being urged by the requirements of its own maturation to free itself from its inherited understanding and use of power.[43]

"To choose such a course", Bahá'ís in turn maintain, "is not to deny humanity's past but to understand it".[44] Thus, in an open statement addressed to the peoples of the world, they

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39 BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 4.

40 BIC United Nations Office, "Disarmament and Development".

41 BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 4.

42 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 10.

43 Ibid., pp. 16-18.

44 Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 2-3.

suggest that

> a candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.[45]

In summary, then, Bahá'ís share a clearly articulated organic worldview that is, for them, a source of hope and inspiration regarding the long-term prospects of building a more unified, just, and sustainable social order. Within this worldview, Bahá'ís speak of the organic interdependence of the human species, the organic nature of the relationship between human beings and their environment, and the organic processes of growth and adaptation that characterize humanity's collective evolution. However, in contrast to organic conceptions of society that have historically been invoked as a means of stifling diversity, suppressing human rights, and maintaining the status quo, Bahá'ís invoke organic metaphors as a means of promoting diversity, preserving human rights, and pursuing social change. Moreover, in contrast to traditional, competitive conceptions of power, Bahá'ís conceive of power in terms of unity, collective action, and the need for coordination. Accordingly, Bahá'ís advocate non-adversarial social structures and practices that they believe are the means through which unity and coordination can be achieved.[46]

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45 Ibid., p. 2-3.

46 At the same time, Bahá'ís recognize that force can be necessary in upholding just laws, protecting populations from military aggression, and confronting tyranny and oppression. In this sense, Bahá'ís are not pacifists. This point is explicitly made by the Universal House of Justice, as quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 437. Nor are they blind to the widespread injustices within both past and present societies, as the discussion above demonstrates. What they advocate, however, is the transformation of social structures and practices in a manner that they believe will collectively enable people to more effectively address the root causes of injustice, conflict, and war.

Collective Decision Making

Given the organic worldview discussed above, with its prescriptions for unity and coordination in the face of increasingly complex social challenges, Bahá'ís assert that more mature methods of collective decision making are now imperative. The interdependent problems now facing humanity, they maintain, are impossible to address without "a magnitude of cooperation and coordination at all levels that far surpasses anything in humanity's collective experience".[47]

Toward this end, Bahá'ís advocate a more inclusive model of collective decision making that involves all segments of society in the conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of the policies and programs that affect them.[48] In addition, Bahá'ís believe that such a model must also transcend the adversarial posturing and partisanship, and the patterns of negotiation and compromise, that have become virtually synonymous with democratic decision making in this age.[49] Thus they explain that

> debate, propaganda, the adversarial method, the entire apparatus of partisanship that have long been such familiar features of collective action are all fundamentally harmful to its purpose: that is, arriving at a consensus [regarding] the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.[50]

In making these assertions, however, Bahá'ís insist that they do not mean to belittle existing democratic systems. "Indeed", they clarify, contemporary democracies "are to be recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an advanced stage in

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47 BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Development".

48 BIC United Nations Office, "Valuing Spirituality in Development", p. 12.

49 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

50 Ibid., p. 11.

the development of social organization".[51] They make these observations, they explain, "not to indulge in criticism of any system, but rather to open up new lines of thought, to encourage a reexamination of the bases of modern society".[52] Elaborating on this theme, Bahá'ís again compare humanity's collective social evolution to the maturation of an individual.

> In a period of history dominated by the surging energy, the rebellious spirit and frenetic activity of adolescence, it is difficult to grasp the distinguishing elements of [a] mature society… The models of the old world order blur vision of that which must be perceived; for these models were, in many instances, conceived in rebellion and retain the characteristics of the revolutions peculiar to an adolescent, albeit necessary, period in the evolution of human society.[53]

In contrast to the systems they believe were born out of these earlier stages in our collective social development, Bahá'ís advocate a non-adversarial model of collective decision making that they refer to simply as *consultation* – a model which they believe is "central to the task of reconceptualizing the system of human relationships" alluded to above.[54]

Currently practiced in Bahá'í communities worldwide, Bahá'ís have found this fundamentally non-adversarial model to be adaptable to any culture.[55] They have also found it to be useful in virtually any arena where group decision-making and cooperation is required.[56] Accordingly, while the method is formally used for guiding the affairs of Bahá'í communities on the local, national, and international levels, it is also used both formally and

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51 Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, p. 6.

52 Ibid., p. 11.

53 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

54 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

55 BIC United Nations Office, "Equality in Political Participation".

56 BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

informally in Bahá'í-initiated social and economic development projects, in Bahá'í-operated schools, in Bahá'í-owned businesses, and in the day-to-day decision making of Bahá'í families.[57] Moreover, inasmuch as the press serves as a forum for collective dialogue and deliberation, Bahá'ís are even striving to apply many of the principles and objectives of consultation to the operation of the press within the Bahá'í community.[58]

Consultation seeks to build consensus in a manner that unites various constituencies instead of dividing them.[59] This is accomplished through a commitment to various consultative principles that encourage participants to transcend the struggle for power that is so common in traditional decision-making systems.[60] Among these principles is the principle of valuing diversity alluded to above. Rather than view diversity as a source of conflict and an obstacle to collective decision making, Bahá'ís regard human diversity as an asset in decision making processes.[61] Accordingly, participants in consultation seek to inform themselves by soliciting and considering the perspectives, concerns, interests, and expertise of all segments of the community. Moreover, by valuing diversity and actively soliciting traditionally excluded views, Bahá'ís maintain that the consultative process also engenders trust between diverse segments of the community, which is a prerequisite of any efforts to translate collective decisions into collective actions.[62]

Closely related to the principle of valuing diversity is the principle of detachment from

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57 Ibid.

58 Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, pp. 16-18.

59 BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

60 Ibid.

61 BIC United Nations Office, "Equality in Political Participation".

62 Ibid.

one's personal views. In Bahá'í consultation, individual participants strive to transcend their respective points of view.[63] And though this principle may sound paradoxical at first, it reflects an underlying epistemology with very practical implications. In this regard, Bahá'ís accept that human comprehension is finite and limited relative to the infinite complexity of the world around us and that human beings therefore cannot perceive or know reality directly, comprehensively, in its raw form or essence. Moreover, they implicitly acknowledge that a person's views are shaped and circumscribed by their experience, education, social position, historical context, and so forth. Given the limited and circumscribed nature of our views, Bahá'ís in turn accept that our access to truth is not absolute but relative.[64] Thus, while consultative groups strive to solicit the widest possible diversity of views on a given subject, the individuals who offer those views strive to do so in a spirit of detachment – confident that their views will be considered by the group, yet aware of the limitations of those same views.[65]

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63 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

64 Effendi, *World Order*, p. 58.

65 The belief that we can know reality directly is rooted in the *empiricist* philosophies of the European Enlightenment. The most extreme expression of these philosophies, often referred to as *positivism*, asserts that the methods of empirical science allow human beings to objectively or "positively" reveal and know the underlying essence of reality. Underlying this assertion is an assumption that the (scientifically trained) mind can serve as a transparent lens on reality. This assumption, however, has been widely challenged in the twentieth century by philosophers who point out that human knowledge is always mediated by a framework of language, thought, and experience that shapes our perceptions of the world – and thus the human mind can never have direct access to reality. Taken to an extreme, these insights have in turn led some *postmodern* and *poststructuralist* philosophers to suggest that we have no access at all to whatever reality, if any, might exist outside of human discourse – an epistemological position known as *relativism*. From this opposite extreme, human knowledge is viewed entirely as a social construction. Bahá'ís subscribe to neither of these extreme theories of knowledge or epistemologies. Rather, they assume that there is a real world out there, independent of human thought, and at least partially comprehensible. They also recognize that human efforts to comprehend reality are limited and shaped by language, thought, experience, and so forth. From these basic premises, Bahá'ís derive what could be called a "consultative epistemology" – which can be applied both to collective decision making and scholarly inquiry – in which diverse perspectives are seen as potentially complementary and inquiry proceeds in a cooperative manner, through informed dialogue rather than argumentative debate. For an insightful discussion of this consultative epistemology, refer to Smith, "The Relativity of Social Construction". In brief, Smith

(footnote continued on next page)

In this context, Bahá'ís view diverse perspectives as complementary rather than oppositional – each potentially illuminating a different facet of a complex, multi-faceted reality. Moreover, diverse perspectives and ideas are understood by Bahá'ís as insights that, once offered, become collective resources to be used by the entire decision making group. In Bahá'í consultation, they explain, "when an idea is put forth it becomes at once the property of the group".[66] Acknowledging that this notion sounds simple, they suggest that

> it is perhaps the most profound principle of consultation. For in this rule, all ideas cease to be the property of any individual, sub-group, or constituency. When followed, this principle encourages those ideas that spring forth from a sincere desire to serve, as opposed to ideas that emanate from a desire for personal aggrandizement or constituency-building.[67]

Of course, Bahá'ís recognize that the detachment prescribed above does not always come easily – even to those who are committed to it in theory. "Consultation", they explain, "is no easy skill to learn".[68] But commitment to the process, they suggest, results not only in more effective collective decision making but also in the maturation of individual participants as well as whole communities.[69] Bahá'ís thus view consultation as a learning process, and they believe that the skills and attitudes developed through consultation are as important as the specific decisions arrived at.

In this regard, another closely related principle of Bahá'í consultation is that of exercising

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demonstrates that the tension between extreme positivism and extreme relativism is reconciled in Bahá'í consultation by an implicit understanding that the social construction of knowledge is itself a *relative* phenomenon. On one hand, some aspects of reality are more tangible than others. On the other hand, when we examine any given aspect of reality, some conceptual frameworks are more revealing than others. Human comprehension is thus constrained simultaneously by the relative tangibility or intangibility of the phenomena we are examining, as well as the relative adequacy of the conceptual framework we are using to examine it. Based on this implicit understanding, Bahá'ís adopt a consultative approach to reality, in which diverse interpretative frameworks are sought out due to the complementary insight they can offer.

66 BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

67 Ibid.

68 Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 96-97.

69 BIC United Nations Office, "Equality in Political Participation".

care and moderation in one's manner of expression. "Freedom of speech", Bahá'ís assert, "must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of speech, on the other".[70] Speech is a powerful phenomenon, they explain, which calls for an acute exercise of judgment.[71] Pointing to the phenomenal characteristics of speech, Bahá'ís suggest that

> content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, and timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech... Consequently, [we] need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life [and] exercise it judiciously.[72]

"Efforts at such discipline", Bahá'ís believe, "will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race".[73] Accordingly, Bahá'ís maintain that freedom of expression need not be interpreted as a license for extreme and divisive speech. Ridicule, insult, ultimatums, and other offensive, demeaning, and conflict-inducing modes of expression – which have become the norm for much of what passes as public communication today – have no place in Bahá'í consultation.[74] Rather, Bahá'ís recognize that mutual insight and understanding, which are prerequisites of meaningful collective decision making, emerge most readily in an atmosphere of courtesy, respect, care, and moderation. Moreover, Bahá'ís assert that only in such an atmosphere can participants confidently apply the principle referred to above, that ideas belong not to the individual to whom they occur during the discussion but to the group as a whole, to take up, discard, or

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70 Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, pp. 12-13.

71 Ibid., pp.12-13.

72 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

73 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

74 For more detailed discussions of this theme, refer to the Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*; and the BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

revise as seems to best serve the goal pursued.[75] For Bahá'ís believe that only within an atmosphere of mutual respect, support, and encouragement, rather than aggression and intimidation, can clarity of thought prevail and the perspectives of all people be heard – especially those who lack self-confidence and self-assertiveness due to their historical exclusion from decision-making processes.

These prescriptions regarding etiquette of expression, on the other hand, do not imply the need to gloss over conflicts by demanding that participants bury their differences and speak to each other in artificially polite civil tones. On the contrary, they imply finding and facilitating modes of expression that allow conflicting perceptions and interests to be critically examined, but in an atmosphere of tolerance and a spirit of mutual commitment within which problems become soluble challenges.[76]

Moreover, these prescriptions also do not imply cold, rationalistic modes of expression in which emotion has no place.[77] On the contrary, Bahá'ís acknowledge that emotion is fundamental to human experience and perception, and efforts to foster collective action and mutual understanding cannot ignore it. Thus Bahá'ís recognize, on the one hand, that emotions can uplift, inspire, and motivate people to pursue meaningful social change.[78] On the other hand, while Bahá'ís point out that the process of consultation in not intended to be a form of group therapy, they recognize that even painful emotions convey dimensions of human experience that must sometimes be acknowledged if mutual understanding and

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75 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

76 Universal House of Justice, " May 1994 Letter".

77 Refer, for example, to statements made by Shoghi Effendi, quoted in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Community Functioning*, p. 12.

78 Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by `Abdu'l-Baha in *Selections*, pp. 38, 81, as well as the Universal House of Justice in *Community Functioning* and *Consultation.*

empathy are to prevail.[79] In this regard, however, Bahá'ís believe that the emotional dimension of people's experience can be conveyed without the offensive and defensive posturing and extreme expressions we have grown so accustomed to associating with public expression.[80] Indeed, resisting the tendency toward such posturing appears to be the only way to raise self-awareness in others of the consequences of their actions and hence foster within them the actual will to reform. Thus, while Bahá'ís do not advocate a consultative process that is cold and emotionless, they do strive to avoid the adversarial clash of emotions that typically generates conflict and alienation.[81]

Furthermore, Bahá'ís do not interpret the above prescriptions regarding expression as a license to dismiss any person or group as coarse, uneducated, or irrational. In this regard, the right to self-expression is a fundamental principle of Bahá'í community life.[82] Thus the mature etiquette of expression alluded to above is not viewed by Bahá'ís as a prerequisite for participating in consultation. Rather, Bahá'ís view consultation as a process within which people can collectively learn and refine more constructive modes of expression.[83] Moreover, within this atmosphere of collective learning, Bahá'ís caution that any given individual is responsible only for monitoring and refining his or her own mode of expression and that

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79 Universal House of Justice, ed., *Community Functioning*, pp. 10-13.

80 Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by the Universal House of Justice, Ibid. See also the Universal House of Justice, quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 180; as well as Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Consultation*, pp. 9-10.

81 Universal House of Justice, ed., *Community Functioning*, p. 13.

82 Refer, for example, to Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 177, as well as the Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms*, p. 12.

83 Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Community Functioning*.

individuals should not take it upon themselves to monitor, correct, or censure others.[84] In this respect, Bahá'ís strive neither to offend others nor to be offended by others.[85]

Yet another fundamental principle of consultation is the requirement that the context of decision making itself be raised to the level of principle as distinct from political pragmatism.[86] To Bahá'ís, this means that reference to agreed-upon principles must take precedence over sectarian interests in decision-making processes.[87] Thus Bahá'ís maintain that "leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to respond to the dangers facing the world community if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them".[88] "Only discourse at the level of principle", they assert, "has the power to invoke a moral commitment, which will, in turn, make possible the discovery of enduring solutions to the many challenges confronting a rapidly integrating human society".[89]

Within the Bahá'í community, one example of such a principle is the principle of collective trusteeship alluded to above, which forms the basis of a Bahá'í approach to human rights. Other principles that Bahá'ís strive to apply in their decision-making processes include the equality of men and women, the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty, and the sustainable stewardship of the natural environment.[90] All collective decision making

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84 Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 92.

85 Refer, for example, to the Universal House of Justice, quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 180.

86 Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 8-9.

87 BIC United Nations Office, "Building a Just World Order".

88 BIC United Nations Office, "Earth Charter / Rio De Jeneiro Declaration".

89 Ibid.

90 For discussions of these and many other fundamental Bahá'í principles, refer to `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*. Refer also to the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*; the BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Nature"; and the BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind".

within the Bahá'í community is thus guided by these and similar principles. Moreover, underlying all of these principles, according to Bahá'ís, is the more general principle of justice. At the group level, they explain,

> a concern for justice is the indispensable compass in collective decision-making, because it is the only means by which unity of thought and action can be achieved. Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of awareness that, in the achievement of human progress, the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked. To the extent that justice becomes a guiding concern of human interaction, a consultative climate is encouraged that permits options to be examined dispassionately and appropriate courses of action selected. In such a climate the perennial tendencies toward manipulation and partisanship are far less likely to deflect the decision-making process... In this context, justice is a thread that must be woven into the consideration of every interaction, whether in the family, the neighborhood, or at the global level.[91]

Within this overarching commitment to justice, Bahá'ís thus employ ethical principles as mutually agreed-upon criteria that guide their efforts to formulate, compare, and evaluate potential decisions. Such an approach, according to Bahá'ís, creates a dynamic that is very different from traditional partisan negotiation and compromise. In short, they believe it shifts the process of collective decision making toward a new centre, maneuvering it out of the quagmire of competing interest claims and into the court of ethical principle – where the broader goals of social justice are more likely to prevail.

Guided in this way by deliberate, conscious, and systematic attention to ethical principle, Bahá'ís strive toward consensus in consultation but settle for a majority vote when consensus cannot be reached.[92] After a decision has been made, however, Bahá'ís strive to implement it in a unified manner, regardless of the individual opinions they may each have held before

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[91] BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", pp. 12-13.

[92] BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

they entered into consultation and regardless of whether they voted with the majority.[93] Elaborating on this important principle of consultation, Bahá'ís explain that

> once a decision is made, it is incumbent on the entire group to act on it with unity – regardless of how many supported the measure... In this sense, there can be no "minority" report or "position of the opposition" in consultation. Rather, Bahá'ís believe that if a decision is a wrong one, it will become evident in its implementation – but only if the decision-making group and, indeed, the community at large, support it wholeheartedly. This commitment to unity ensures that if a decision or a project fails, the problem lies in the idea itself, and not in lack of support from the community or the obstinate actions of opponents.[94]

Under such circumstances, Bahá'ís suggest, an earlier decision can readily be reconsidered if experience exposes any shortcomings.[95] Indeed, in this sense, the ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and refinement or abandonment of previous decisions is understood as an extension of the consultative process. Bahá'ís believe that this longitudinal process, however, will only be as effective as the degree of unity achieved in the implementation of the original decision. For partisan opposition not only makes it more difficult to evaluate whether the problem was with the decision or with the fact that its implementation was sabotaged, it also undermines the atmosphere of mutual respect and common purpose within which it is easier to change or refine previous decisions. In this regard, Bahá'ís believe that consultation is undermined by "the culture of protest" that is another widely prevailing feature of contemporary society.[96]

In summary, then, consultation is a non-adversarial model of collective decision making within which participants strive to transcend the struggle for power that characterizes traditional partisan decision making. It derives from an underlying epistemology rooted in

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93 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

94 BIC United Nations Office, "Statement on Consultation".

95 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 11.

96 Ibid., p. 11.

cooperative inquiry rather than argumentative persuasion. Toward this end, participants regard diversity as an asset and seek to inform themselves by soliciting and considering the perspectives, concerns, interests, and expertise of all segments of the community. Within the process of consultation, participants strive to transcend the limitations of their own perspectives, strive to express themselves with care and moderation, strive to raise the context of decision making to the level of principle, and strive for consensus but settle for a majority when necessary. In turn, participants also strive to implement decisions in a unified manner in order to create conditions within which decisions can be effectively monitored, evaluated, and revised if necessary.

Institutional Structures

Although Bahá'ís believe that more mature methods of collective decision making are needed to deal with the increasingly complex and interdependent problems facing humanity, they acknowledge that such methods will not be sufficient by themselves. New methods of decision making, they believe, need to be employed within new institutional models that will allow them to bear fruit. The challenge, Bahá'ís assert, is "to reshape fundamentally all the institutions of society [based on] a radical rethinking of most of the concepts and assumptions currently governing social and economic life".[97]

In the economic arena, for instance, Bahá'ís point to the problems inherent in "a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our

97 Ibid., p. 18.

forebears".[98] This system, they explain, is responsible for "the social and economic ills that blight every region of our world in the closing years of the twentieth century", including the "inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering [that] keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war".[99]

In this regard, Bahá'ís call for a fundamental restructuring of contemporary economies. "Central to the task of reconceptualizing the organization of human affairs", they assert,

> is arriving at a proper understanding of the role of economics. The failure to place economics into the broader context of humanity's social and spiritual existence has led to a corrosive materialism in the world's more economically advantaged regions, and persistent conditions of deprivation among the masses of the world's peoples. Economics should serve people's needs; societies should not be expected to reformulate themselves to fit economic models. The ultimate function of economic systems should be to equip the peoples and institutions of the world with the means to achieve the real purpose of development: that is, the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.[100]

Humanity, they therefore assert, "must develop new economic models shaped by insights that arise from a sympathetic understanding of shared experience, from viewing human beings in relation one to another".[101] Among other things, Bahá'ís believe that such insights must include a long-overdue recognition of the interdependence of capital and labour.[102] In light of these and similar insights, they insist that

> priorities must be reassessed. Resources must be directed away from those agencies and programs that are damaging to the individual, societies and the environment, and directed toward those most germane to furthering a dynamic, just and thriving social order.[103]

Such a basic reassessment of economic priorities, of course, is unlikely within

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[98] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 4-5.

[99] Ibid., pp. 4-5, 7.

[100] BIC United Nations Office, "Valuing Spirituality in Development", p. 8.

[101] Ibid., p. 8.

[102] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 10.

[103] BIC United Nations Office, "Valuing Spirituality in Development", p. 8.

contemporary political systems that tend to subordinate decision making to the logic and pressures of capital accumulation. Accordingly, Bahá'ís believe that fundamental political reform is a prerequisite of meaningful economic reform. Thus it is toward the transformation of inherited political structures that Bahá'ís direct much of their attention.

In this regard, Bahá'ís point to electoral reform as one of several urgent priorities.[104] However, in contrast to proposals that seek simply to refine partisan elections through campaign finance reforms, the imposition of term limits, the introduction of proportional systems of representation, and so forth, Bahá'ís reject the entire theory of partisanship that informs all of these proposals as well as the systems they seek to reform. "The ideology of partisanship", they state, "despite impressive contributions to human progress in the past, today finds itself mired in the cynicism, apathy, and corruption to which it has given rise". [105] In this regard, they assert that democracy "does not need and is not well served by the political theatre of nominations, candidature, electioneering, and solicitation".[106]

In contrast to these traditional competitive practices, Bahá'ís elect their own governing councils through a process that is entirely free of nominations, campaigning, or partisanship.[107] Locally, Bahá'í councils are made up of nine members who are elected from the entire membership of a given Bahá'í community. All adults are eligible to vote as well as to be voted for so that everyone is both a voter and a candidate. In this sense, the right to vote is coupled with the responsibility to serve if voted for. This responsibility, moreover,

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[104] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", pp., 16-18.

[105] Ibid., pp. 16-18.

[106] Ibid., pp. 16-18.

[107] For detailed discussions of all elements of the electoral model outlined below, refer to the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Bahá'í Elections.*

generally entails significant sacrifices of one's time, energy, and personal aspirations.

As a matter of principle, no one calls attention to themselves or solicits votes in any way in Bahá'í elections. In fact, Bahá'ís interpret the solicitation of votes as a lack of fitness to serve. Accordingly, Bahá'ís also avoid discussing with one another who they will (or did) vote for in order to avoid any semblance of nomination or canvassing. Voting occurs by secret ballot, with individuals guided only by the promptings of their own consciences. With true freedom of choice, Bahá'ís thus vote for those nine community members they feel best combine the qualities of selflessness, recognized ability, and mature experience.[108] In selecting these nine names, each Bahá'í also makes a conscious effort to maximize the diversity of the elected council.[109]

Once the votes are tallied, those community members with the nine highest vote counts serve on the governing councils (i.e., election is by plurality vote). And, in keeping with the community's commitment to diversity, in the case of a tie between a person representing the majority and another representing the minority in any given community, Bahá'í electoral procedure automatically confers the position to the minority.[110]

Councils elected in this manner then function as trustees of the community, collectively making decisions on its behalf through the process of consultation outlined above. Furthermore, decision-making authority resides only in the collective will of the council, and the individual members who have been elected to it accrue no individual authority, power, or

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[108] For discussions regarding these and other qualities Bahá'ís consider in deciding who to vote for, refer to Shoghi Effendi, quoted in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Bahá'í Elections*, pp. 3-4.

[109] Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by Shoghi Effendi, as quoted in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Bahá'í Elections*, p. 4.

[110] Universal House of Justice, ed., *Bahá'í Elections*, p. 4.

privilege within the community.

In their capacities as collective trustees, these councils are guided by a number of explicit principles, including obligations "to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those whose actions they seek to govern; to consult openly and to the fullest extent possible with all whose interests are affected by decisions being arrived at; [and] to assess in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve".[111] These principled obligations are carried out through a number of mechanisms, including the frequent solicitation from other community members of insight, advice, or expertise pertaining to specific decisions that come before the council, as well as regularly scheduled public consultations in which a council listens to and familiarizes itself with the perspectives, recommendations, needs, concerns, and grievances of community members.[112]

However, unlike most contemporary democratic systems, in which decision makers (who are essentially political entrepreneurs) must continually negotiate the competing demands of constituents, campaign contributors, lobbyists and activists (in order to build or retain political capital), Bahá'í councils are shielded from competitive pressures to influence decisions from outside the sphere of formally elected authority. This is accomplished in a number of ways. First, as discussed above, those who are elected to these councils do not seek election, and they have no vested interests in reelection (i.e., they are not political entrepreneurs seeking to build or retain political capital). Second, elected members are expected to decide matters according only to the promptings of their own consciences (one of

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[111] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", pp., 16-18.

[112] Refer to discussions of these themes in the Universal House of Justice, ed., *Consultation* and *Bahá'í Meetings*.

the primary qualities for which they were elected), and not according to the dictates or pressures of competing interest groups.[113] And finally, elected members are also expected to weigh all of their decisions not simply in terms of the immediate interests of their respective communities but in terms of the long-term welfare of all of humanity – even if this means forgoing immediate local benefits out of concern for the welfare of distant peoples or future generations.[114] Thus, while elected Bahá'í councils actively strive to familiarize themselves with the conditions and concerns of their communities, and invite all community members into the process of proposing, refining, implementing, evaluating, and revising the programs and policies that affect them, there is no place for competing constituents, campaign contributors, lobbyists, and activists (in the sense of people taking actions designed to pressure the council's decisions) – all of which are antithetical to the purposes and principles of the Bahá'í community and its electoral system.

In all of these ways, the Bahá'í electoral system embodies neither a contest nor the pursuit of power. Because no one seeks election, there is no concept of "winning". At the same time, however, it remains eminently democratic.[115] Moreover, in contrast to partisan electoral systems, the process is unifying rather than divisive.

The electoral model outlined above thus provides a striking contrast to the partisan systems that have become the norm in contemporary democracies. Moreover, this non-

[113] Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by Shoghi Effendi in *World Order*, p. 153. Refer also to Shoghi Effendi as quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 18.

[114] Refer, for instance, to discussions of these themes in the BIC United Nations Office, "Prosperity (Oral Statement)" and "Statement on Nature".

[115] In this regard, a United Nations study that was commissioned for the newly independent country of Namibia suggested that Namibians "examine the electoral provisions within Bahá'ís communities worldwide" which, the study concluded, were "certainly more democratic than what goes on in most state elections" (United Nations Institute for Namibia, *Comparative Electoral Systems*, pp., 6-7).

partisan model is grounded in the practical experience of the Bahá'í International Community, which has used it for more than three-quarters of a century to annually elect its local governing councils – of which there are currently more than 15,000 worldwide. In addition, a two-stage version of the same process is used to annually elect the Bahá'í community's national governing councils – of which there are currently more than 170 worldwide (several of which embody communities larger than some small nation states). In this two-stage process, local communities elect delegates who in turn elect their respective national councils.[116] Finally, a three-stage version of the same model is used every five years to elect the international governing council of the entire worldwide Bahá'í community. Within this three-stage process, the community members that have been elected to the national councils through the two-stage process described above in turn serve as delegates who elect the international body.[117]

Based on their extensive experience with this electoral model, Bahá'ís are confident that it could be adapted, over time, to all democratic societies. Indeed, Bahá'ís maintain that until contemporary societies adopt essentially non-competitive and non-partisan methods for electing those upon whom they confer decision-making authority, they will be unable to effectively address the increasingly complex problems facing them.[118]

On a closely related note, Bahá'ís also believe that until the nations of the world design and elect international institutions that can integrate, coordinate, and regulate their collective actions – as is the case within the Bahá'í community – humanity will be unable to effectively

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116 For detailed discussions of the process through which these national councils are elected, refer to the Universal House of Justice, ed., *National Convention*.

117 Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 84. Refer also to the Universal House of Justice, *Constitution*.

118 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 8.

address the many global problems that it now faces. This predicament, Bahá'ís believe, lends a new urgency to the need for global coordination.[119] Toward this end, Bahá'ís believe that an integration process – comparable to the integrative processes that led to the emergence of organized nation states – is now also taking place at the global level.[120] Twice in this century, they point out, humanity has attempted to bring about a new international order.[121] Bahá'ís explain, however, that both of these attempts have been largely unsuccessful because they both "sought to address the emergent recognition of global interdependence while nevertheless preserving intact a system which put the sovereignty of the state above all else".[122] What is needed, Bahá'ís assert is, a genuine universal framework that transcends these anachronistic notions of national sovereignty.[123] World unity, they explain,

> is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.[124]

In this context, Bahá'ís advocate a system of international federalism, or a world commonwealth, that "would place the interest of the whole ahead of the interest of any individual nation".[125] Such a system, they assert, must include some form of a world

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119 BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", pp. 1-2.

120 BIC United Nations Office, "Prevention of Discrimination".

121 BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 2.

122 Ibid., p. 2.

123 Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 6.

124 Effendi, *World Order*, p. 202.

125 BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 6.

legislature, a world tribunal, and a world executive, elected by the people of all countries.[126] Within this system, certain forms of national sovereignty would be ceded, including the right to maintain armaments for the purposes of war. In this regard, Bahá'ís have advocated, for well over a century, a system of collective security in which all nations would contribute to an international force designed to deter aggression while at the same time relieving nations of the oppressive burden of escalating military expenditures.[127]

At the same time, however, Bahá'ís acknowledge that "extraordinary care must be taken in designing the architecture of the international order so that it does not over time degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagogy".[128] Toward this end, Bahá'ís suggest that the collective decision-making and electoral models outlined above would go a long way toward reducing such a threat. By structuring governance not as a contest for power but as a call to service and sacrifice; by electing individuals solely on their demonstrated integrity, capacity to work with others, and commitment to the collective welfare; by scheduling frequent elections so that the membership of a governing council can easily be replaced should the need arise; and by ensuring that decision making is carried out through a principled approach that regards diversity as a resource and human rights as a collective trust, Bahá'ís believe that many historical tendencies toward political corruption could be structurally reduced if not eliminated.

In addition, moreover, Bahá'ís also advocate constitutional requirements that would devolve decision making to the lowest level possible – as is the case within the Bahá'í

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[126] For more detailed discussions of this theme, refer to the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, pp. 9-12. Refer also to Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*.

[127] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 10.

[128] BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 6.

administrative order itself. Such a system, Bahá'ís maintain, can promote and stimulate local decision making and grassroots initiatives, while simultaneously providing a mechanism of authority that makes coordination and regulation possible, where needed, on a global scale.[129] Elaborating on this theme, Bahá'ís assert that

> it needs to be explicitly and forcefully stated that any new structures for global governance must, as a matter of both principle and practicality, ensure that the responsibility for decision-making remains at appropriate levels... Striking the right balance may not always be easy. On the one hand, genuine development and real progress can be achieved only by people themselves, acting individually and collectively, in response to the specific concerns and needs of their time and place... On the other hand, the international order clearly requires a degree of global direction and coordination... Therefore, in accordance with the principles of decentralization outlined above, international institutions should be given the authority to act only on issues of international concern where states cannot act on their own or to intervene for the preservation of the rights of peoples and member states. All other matters should be relegated to national and local institutions.[130]

Furthermore, Bahá'ís also acknowledge the need to protect cultural identities in the face of global political integration. In this regard, they point out that

> loyalty to a large entity does not necessarily conflict with loyalty to a small entity. We live and work in many social units and institutional environments, often nested one within the other, that are complementary and often mutually supportive. Love of one's country does not preclude love of family or community, rather, it enlarges the circle of relationships.[131]

Thus Bahá'ís suggest that the existing foundations of society need to be broadened in a way which does not conflict with any legitimate allegiances. "Diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world", they insist, "are not to be ignored or suppressed, but a wider loyalty, a larger aspiration is called upon".[132] Such a loyalty, they maintain, must be to

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[129] Ibid., p. 5.

[130] Ibid., p. 5.

[131] BIC United Nations Office, "UN Decade on Human Rights Education".

[132] BIC United Nations Office, "Prevention of Discrimination".

the human race as a whole, deriving from a recognition of the interdependence of our entire species, as discussed above.

In this regard, Bahá'ís believe that recognition of the interdependence of all people, and the expanded loyalty that this recognition fosters, is already beginning to provide the foundation for an emerging culture of human rights that, in itself, is becoming an increasingly powerful check on abuses and misuses of power at all levels. At the same time, however, they acknowledge that humanity still has a long way to go in this regard. But from the evolutionary perspective that Bahá'ís maintain, humanity's progress to date is only half the picture. Equally important is the trajectory we appear to be following.

In this context, Bahá'ís again view all of the above prescriptions – recognition of the interdependence of the entire human race, the adoption of non-adversarial consultative methods, the adoption of non-partisan electoral systems, and the construction of an integrated system of global governance – as long-term projects that will only be achieved across the span of generations. Nevertheless, Bahá'ís insist that humanity can no longer postpone its commitment to such projects. Thus they point out that

> with the physical unification of the planet in this century and acknowledgement of the interdependence of all who live on it, the history of humanity as one people is now beginning... endowed with the wealth of all the genetic and cultural diversity that has evolved through past ages, the earth's inhabitants are now challenged to draw on their collective inheritance to take up, consciously and systematically, the responsibility for the design of their future.[133]

In summary, then, Bahá'ís advocate nothing less than the structural transformation of the political sphere. Toward this end, they prescribe the adoption of a non-partisan electoral model in which all citizens are eligible both to vote and to be voted for and are responsible to serve if elected. Within this model, there is no nomination or campaigning and voting occurs

by secret ballot, with voters guided only by the promptings of their own consciences. Through plurality vote, societies would thus confer authority on elected councils that would make decisions through the process of consultation described earlier. Shielded from the pressures of lobbyists, these councils would nevertheless be obliged to familiarize themselves with the conditions and concerns of their communities and seek community members' advice in formulating the programs and policies that would affect them. Such councils, Bahá'ís believe, need to be established locally, nationally, and internationally within an integrated system that devolves decision making to the lowest level possible, while simultaneously providing a mechanism of authority that facilitates global coordination and regulation where needed. On all levels, these councils would be re-elected on frequent cycles so that societies could easily replace their membership if they failed to fulfil their obligations in a responsible manner.

Strategies for Pursuing Social Change

Assuming the structural prescriptions outlined above are desirable (a contestable assumption, of course), viable strategies would still be needed for realizing them. Toward this end, the Bahá'í International Community is also pursuing systematic strategies of social change. Moreover, like all of the prescriptions and practices that Bahá'ís advocate, these strategies are again non-adversarial.

To connect this discussion to the discussion in Chapter I, strategies of social reform tend to focus on either psycho-cultural or socio-structural change.[134] On one end of the

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[133] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 1.

[134] The following discussion is particularly indebted to Arbab, "The Process of Social Transformation".

continuum, many people view the development or transformation of individual consciousness as the path to meaningful social change. Sometimes this is understood in terms of critical awareness raising, sometimes is it understood in terms of the inculcation of moral virtues, sometimes it is understood in terms of religious conversion, and sometimes it is understood in terms of basic mental skills training (i.e., literacy, job skills, etc.). In all such cases, the common assumption is that broad social change can be brought about through the aggregation of changes within individual minds.

On the other end of the continuum, many people view the reform or transformation of basic social structures as the path to meaningful social change. This may be understood in terms of economic structures (e.g., reforming relations of production), political structures (e.g., electoral reform), or other collective social structures (media policy reform), but the common assumption is that individuals are shaped by their social environments, and therefore meaningful social change can only occur through changes in the way their social environments are structured.

In this context, Bahá'ís believe that individual psycho-cultural development and collective socio-structural reforms are both necessary, but that neither one is sufficient by itself. Rather, they advocate a twofold process of change involving both.[135] "Because the relationship between the individual and society is a reciprocal one", they explain, "the transformation now required must occur simultaneously within human consciousness and the structure of social institutions".[136] In order to pursue change on both of these levels, Bahá'ís therefore pursue two distinct but closely related strategies.

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[135] BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 3.

[136] Ibid.

On the individual level, Bahá'ís pursue social change primarily through educational processes. "Education", they maintain, "is indisputably the most effective way to shape the values, attitudes, behaviours and skills which will make it possible to function effectively in an integrated world society".[137] In this regard, out of 1700 social and economic development projects Bahá'ís are currently engaged in, more than 750 are educational projects.[138] These projects include, for example, the delivery of informal literacy programs within largely illiterate populations, the organization of primary and secondary schools in areas lacking basic educational infrastructure, and the founding of decentralized rural universities designed to assist rural people develop locally needed skills and capacities.

In addition, however, Bahá'ís also conceive of education in terms of individual moral development. A focus on moral development is thus an essential feature within the pattern of Bahá'í family and community life. In this regard, Bahá'ís seek to cultivate basic values and virtues such as trustworthiness, generosity, and compassion, which are common to all of the world's moral philosophies and religious traditions.[139] They also focus on basic concepts such as human oneness, freedom from prejudice, appreciation of diversity, and world citizenship, which they believe have also become moral imperatives in this age.

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[137] BIC United Nations Office, "Education, Media, and Arts".

[138] Updated statistics in this regard can be found at http://www.bahai.org/bworld, under a link entitled *Bahá'í Development Projects, A Global Process of Learning.*

[139] On this note, Bahá'ís acknowledge that "the concept of promoting specific morals or values may be controversial, especially in this age of humanistic relativism. Nevertheless, we firmly believe there exists a common set of values that have been obscured from recognition by those who exaggerate minor differences in religious or cultural practice for political purposes. These foundation virtues, taught by all spiritual communities, constitute a basic framework for moral development" (BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", pp. 20-21). Thus Bahá'ís suggest that "universal spiritual principles which lie at the heart of religion – tolerance, compassion, love, justice, humility, sacrifice, trustworthiness, dedication to the well-being of others, and unity – are the foundations of progressive civilization". "At the same time", however, they acknowledge that "the perversion of religion has been a primary cause of social disintegration, intolerance, hatred, sexism, poverty, oppression and warfare down through the ages. Indeed,

(footnote continued on next page)

Complementing these strategies of individual education and moral development, Bahá'ís are simultaneously pursuing collective strategies of socio-structural transformation. The entire administrative order described above, with its non-adversarial decision making methods, its non-partisan electoral model, and its globally coordinated institutional structure, is not merely a theoretical construct for Bahá'ís. Rather, Bahá'ís have been actively building this administrative order for more than three-quarters of a century as part of a systematic strategy of structural transformation.

In this context, Bahá'ís believe that their administrative order provides them with an institutional framework within which they can further develop the skills, capacities, and attitudes that they believe are needed to manage processes of social change in an increasingly interdependent and complex world.[140] Bahá'ís thus acknowledge that they do not start out with the consultative and organizational skills that their own administrative order requires of them. Rather, they view participation in Bahá'í administration as the means by which they learn and refine those skills. In this regard, Bahá'ís view their administrative order as an institutional structure that facilitates training in non-adversarial decision making and non-partisan organizing.

While serving as a training ground for the skills described above, the Bahá'í

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many of today's seemingly intractable problems...can be traced to the corruption and misuse of religious authority" (BIC United Nations Office, "Religion in Social Development").

[140] Refer, for example, to the discussion of this theme in the BIC United Nations Office, "Building a Just World Order".

administrative order simultaneously channels the efforts of the community into concrete social and economic development projects. In this sense, Bahá'ís are not merely learning consultative and organizational skills as an abstract intellectual exercise, to be applied in a distant future. On the contrary, these skills are being applied in the present to practical grassroots initiatives.[141] Moreover, as the size and scope of the Bahá'í International Community continues to grow, so, too, do the size and scope of these initiatives.

Finally, by erecting their administrative order, Bahá'ís are also striving to create a visible model that they believe will eventually demonstrate its efficacy to the rest of the world and thus provide a pattern for the future administration of human affairs – a pattern that is fundamentally democratic yet entirely non-partisan.[142] Bahá'ís acknowledge, of course, that their administrative order is still only at an embryonic stage in its long-term, organic development.[143] As it gradually matures, however, they are confident that it will attract the attention of societies that are becoming increasingly frustrated by their inability to address the apparently intractable problems they are facing. Indeed, as the Bahá'í International Community has recently begun to emerge from its former obscurity on the world scene, an increasing number of outside observers have already begun to recognize it as a model worthy of attention.[144]

In all of these ways, Bahá'ís are pursuing both psycho-cultural and socio-structural transformation as twin strategies of social change. Moreover, these twin strategies are

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[141] For an excellent discussion of the Bahá'í approach to social and economic development, refer to Vick, *Social and Economic Development.*

[142] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 13.

[143] Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme by Shoghi Effendi in *World Order*, pp. 23,185,95.

[144] For an excellent overview of the Bahá'í International Community's historical emergence from obscurity in this regard, refer to Collins, "In the Eyes of the World".

closely interwoven within the fabric of Bahá'í community life. For instance, at the same time that Bahá'í electoral processes are being implemented, which select for individuals who demonstrate integrity and commitment to the collective welfare, efforts are being made to cultivate these same moral dispositions within the community, through processes of individual education and development – especially among successive generations of children and youth. Conversely, while Bahá'ís believe that selflessness and detachment are measures of moral development, training in these qualities is achieved, in part, through service within Bahá'í administrative structures. Thus individual development is a foundation of Bahá'í administration, even as Bahá'í administration is a training ground for individual development.

Bahá'ís are therefore pursuing an iterative strategy that unfolds gradually through the complex interplay of personal and collective growth. Moreover, given the evolutionary perspective that Bahá'ís hold, Bahá'ís have a long-term commitment to this process. Describing the strategic development of their administrative order, Bahá'ís thus explain that

> an evolutionary mindset implies the ability to envision an institution over a long time frame, perceiving its inherent potential for development, identifying the fundamental principles governing its growth [and] formulating high-impact strategies for short-term implementation.[145]

Through strategic planning and long-term commitment, each new generation of Bahá'ís thus builds upon the collective insight, experience, and moral development of its predecessors. At the same time, the overall Bahá'í strategy for pursuing social change is non-adversarial. Bahá'ís are not working *against* any class or group of people in their efforts to construct a global administrative order. Nor are they organizing *in opposition to* any existing

[145] BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 7.

governments, policies, or programs. In fact, they are explicitly committed to non-involvement in partisan politics of any kind.[146] Rather, Bahá'ís believe that the adversarial structures and practices born out of humanity's collective adolescence are gradually decaying through the force of their own obsolescence. Thus they explain that

> if long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution?[147]

In this context, Bahá'ís perceive simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration playing out within the social and political structures of our age.[148] On the one hand, they see inherited structures becoming mired in corruption and ineptitude and proving themselves incapable of addressing the pressing challenges of this age, while the populations they purport to serve are in turn withdrawing their participation and support as they retreat in frustration and cynicism. On the other hand, they see an upsurge of constructive activity occurring in the shadows of these decaying structures, characterized by fresh approaches and creative experiments and driven by ever-widening networks of diverse, dedicated, and forward-looking people.

In prioritizing their own strategic efforts, Bahá'ís believe that the process of disintegration described above needs no additional assistance, as inherited structures appear to be disintegrating through the force of their own obsolescence. To participate in these

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[146] For an excellent compilation of primary Bahá'í texts on this subject, refer to Khan, ed., *Political Non-Involvement.*

[147] Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 42.

[148] BIC United Nations Office, "Turning Point for All Nations", p. 1.

deconstructive processes merely draws energy and resources away from more constructive strategies. Bahá'ís therefore turn their full attention to the construction of viable alternatives, which they associate with the process of integration.[149] And from a Bahá'í perspective, the structures and practices of the administrative order they are building represent a vital strategic contribution to this integrative process.

In summary, then, the Bahá'í International Community is pursuing a two-fold strategy of individual development and structural transformation. Both dimensions of this strategy are non-adversarial. The first involves ongoing programs of education and moral development. The second involves the systematic construction of a visible and attractive alternative to partisan systems of collective decision making and political organization. Furthermore, Bahá'ís are pursuing both of these strategies in an iterative manner, with each one reinforcing the other as they simultaneously unfold across successive generations within a steadily expanding community.

Assumptions about Human Nature

The prescriptions and strategies outlined above thus constitute key constructs within the normative social theory articulated by the Bahá'í International Community. All social theories, however, rest on underlying assumptions about human nature, and they cannot be properly evaluated without examining those underlying assumptions. Many of the theories underlying the culture of adversarialism, for instance, are predicated on assumptions that human nature is fundamentally selfish and aggressive. Based on these assumptions,

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[149] For an excellent compilation of primary Bahá'í texts on this subject, refer again to Khan, ed., *Political Non-Involvement.*

contemporary Western governments, economies, legal systems, and so forth have largely been organized as contests between self-interested individuals or groups.

Though Bahá'ís acknowledge the human potential for selfishness and aggression, they also believe that human beings also have innate capacities for cooperation and mutualism. In this context, Bahá'ís conceive of human nature through the metaphors of a "lower" nature and a "higher" nature, or a "material" nature and a "spiritual" nature.[150] For Bahá'ís, the former refers to the aggregate expression of selfish and aggressive instincts and behaviours. It is the equivalent, in other words, of the self-maximizing political and economic being at the core of most contemporary Western social theory. This lower nature, moreover, is a central category of Bahá'í thought. Bahá'ís interpret the oppression and exploitation of other human beings as both individual and collective expressions of these attitudes and behaviours. And Bahá'ís are by no means blind to the pervasiveness of these expressions in our collective past and present. In fact, recognition of these expressions is largely what motivates Bahá'ís to make the ongoing commitments of time and energy required by the strategies of social change they are pursuing.

On the other hand, the concept of a higher or spiritual nature is an equally central category of Bahá'í thought.[151] As Bahá'ís explain:

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[150] Refer, for example, to the discussion of this theme in `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.

[151] "For the vast majority of the world's population", Bahá'ís point out, "the idea that human nature has a spiritual dimension… is a truth requiring no demonstration. It is a perception of reality that can be discovered in the earliest records of civilization and that has been cultivated for several millennia by every one of the great religious traditions of humanity's past. Its enduring achievements in law, the fine arts, and the civilizing of human intercourse are what give substance and meaning to history. In one form or another its promptings are a daily influence in the lives of most people on earth and, as events around the world today dramatically show, the longings it awakens are both inextinguishable and incalculably potent… It would seem obvious, therefore, that efforts of any kind to promote human progress must seek to tap capacities so universal and so immensely creative". BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", pp. 12-15.

> The spiritual dimension of human nature can be understood, in practical terms, as the source of qualities that transcend narrow self-interest. Such qualities include love, compassion, forbearance, trustworthiness, courage, humility, cooperation and willingness to sacrifice for the common good – qualities of an enlightened citizenry, able to construct a unified world civilization.[152]

Moreover, Bahá'ís do not simply conceive of this capacity in individual terms. Rather, they also believe it has collective expressions.[153] Bahá'ís thus interpret accomplishments such as the abolition of slavery or the achievement of universal suffrage not simply as shifts in the balance of power between historically competing interest groups, but also as collective expressions of the capacity of historically dominant groups to subordinate their narrow and immediate self-interests to the broader long-term interests of the entire population.

In this regard, Bahá'ís point to the important role that the cultural environment plays in the realization of these mutualistic capacities. Granted, Bahá'ís believe that individual will and effort also play a role in this regard. But they simultaneously believe that mutualism, like adversarialism, can either be nourished or suppressed through the structures of thought, value, social practice, and so forth that constitute our cultural environment.[154] Though our genetic inheritance endows us with the capacity for both selfish and cooperative behaviours, Bahá'ís believe that our cultural environment plays a large part in determining the degree to which either of these traits gains ascendancy in human affairs. Furthermore, because Bahá'ís believe that human cultures evolve organically, either adapting or perishing in the face of changing conditions and pressures, they believe that the regulation of selfish and aggressive

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[152] BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Development".

[153] Refer, for instance, to Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, pp., 43, 114, 63, 66-67. See also Shoghi Effendi as quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, p. 115.

[154] For discussions of these themes, refer to `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214, and *Promulgation*, pp. 330, 440. See also Shoghi Effendi, quoted in the BIC United Nations Office, "Valuing Spirituality in Development".

impulses, along with the cultivation of mutualism and cooperation, has some evolutionary force behind it.[155] As human societies grow in size and complexity, and as the welfare of every individual becomes bound up in the welfare of ever-expanding social groups, Bahá'ís believe that human beings face increasing pressure to expand their sphere of cooperative and mutualistic relations.

In this context, Bahá'ís do not necessarily view early human societies as more selfish and aggressive than complex modern societies. Bahá'ís simply point out that, due to the relatively simple social structures that characterized early human societies and due to their relative isolation from other social groups, their spheres of mutualism and cooperation were relatively limited. Accordingly, as societies have grown in size and complexity, their members have had to develop an expanded sense of identity and inclusion, along with expanded structures of social integration, however imperfect these have been.[156]

Most importantly, however, even though all forms of social organization to date have drawn boundaries between internal members and external others, such distinctions are no longer possible, Bahá'ís believe, in an age of increasing global interdependence. Clans, tribes, city-states, and nations could develop relatively mutualistic and cooperative internal relations while still relating to other clans, tribes, city-states, or nations in relatively competitive or adversarial ways. In a globally interdependent community, however, there is no "other". This marks a qualitative transformation of the evolutionary pressures facing humanity. From a Bahá'í standpoint, this is what necessitates "a magnitude of cooperation

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[155] Refer, for example, to discussions of this theme in the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*.

[156] Refer again to the discussion of this general theme in Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*.

and coordination at all levels that far surpasses anything in humanity's collective experience"[157] – "an organic change in the structure of present-day society... such as the world has not yet experienced".[158]

All of this, of course, rests on the underlying assumption that human beings actually have the capacity for such mutualism and cooperation. And even though many critics remain skeptical of this assumption, Bahá'ís (and many others) see evidence of this capacity in the social tendencies of our species itself, as demonstrated by the broad trajectory of human history toward increasingly large, complex, and interdependent social groups; and in our ability to reflect on and learn from both the successes and failures of these experiences with expanding social integration. They also see evidence of this capacity in the example of countless individuals, past and present, who have defied the view that human nature is inevitably selfish and aggressive by leading lives characterized by self-sacrifice, compassion, and generosity. Finally, Bahá'ís also see evidence of this capacity in the experience of their own community. "Its very existence", they point out, "challenges prevailing theories about human nature and the prospects for creating peaceful patterns of life".[159]

Finally, although Bahá'ís employ the metaphors of a lower (or material) nature and higher (or spiritual) nature in support of the prospects for a more peaceful and cooperative social existence, they condemn the manner in which similar distinctions have historically been employed for oppressive purposes. For instance, in some patriarchal societies, such distinctions have been used to subordinate women based on misogynistic claims that women

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[157] BIC United Nations Office, "Sustainable Development".

[158] Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 43.

[159] BIC United Nations Office, "Humanity's Future".

have an inherently lower or more material nature while men have an inherently higher or more spiritual nature.[160] Such claims are incompatible with Bahá'í belief, which is based on clearly articulated principles of gender equality and the complete refutation of such spurious claims.[161]

On a closely related note, some puritanical and ascetic traditions have employed such distinctions to suggest the fundamental "impurity" or corruptness of the human body along with the essential "sinfulness" of all earthly or bodily pleasures. Indeed, traditions of clerical celibacy and monasticism spring largely from the coupling of misogynistic attitudes with such beliefs (i.e., the female body has been viewed as the primary source of earthly temptation and bodily pleasure, from which men must separate themselves in order to develop spiritually). In some cultures, such beliefs have also spawned traditions of self-flagellation and other practices involving the mortification of flesh. Again, such beliefs and practices are antithetical to the Bahá'í understanding of human nature and the human body. The Bahá'í distinction between a lower and higher nature is not made to denigrate the human body as corrupt or impure. Rather, Bahá'ís view the human body as the positive vehicle for the development of the human mind.[162] As such, it is to be treated with care, dignity, and respect.[163] In addition, Bahá'ís believe that sensory pleasures of the body are to be enjoyed within the limits of moderation and the constraints imposed by consideration for the welfare

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160 Refer, for example, to discussions of this legacy in Noble, *A World Without Women.*

161 For an overview of primary Bahá'í texts addressing the equality of men and women, as well as an overview of Bahá'í efforts to promote this equality in practice, refer to Khan and Khan, *Advancement of Women.*

162 BIC Haifa Office, "Prosperity of Humankind", p. 7.

163 Refer, for instance, to Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 94, 98, 201.

of others.[164]

In summary, then, Bahá'ís conceive of human nature in terms of both a lower nature and a higher nature, not as a means of denigrating the human body, nor as a means of denigrating women, but rather as a means of envisioning the possibility of a more mutualistic and cooperative social order. Moreover, though Bahá'ís recognize the role that individual effort plays in the realization of these cooperative and mutualistic capacities, they maintain that our cultural environment plays an equally important role. They further believe that the cultivation of mutualistic and cooperative behaviours is compelled by evolutionary forces, as adversarial structures and practices prove increasingly maladaptive in the face of ever-expanding levels of social interdependence.

The Experience of the Bahá'í Community

Of course, assumptions about human nature, as well as the social prescriptions that derive from them, ultimately cannot be evaluated in the abstract. Their real-world application must also be assessed. Fortunately, the experience of the Bahá'í International Community provides an opportunity for such assessment. In this regard, the Bahá'í International Community can be understood as a social experiment that is testing the assumptions about human nature and social organization outlined above. Granted, this experiment is scheduled to span many generations and its ultimate outcome cannot yet be determined. However, many initial observations can be made based on the experience of the Bahá'í community to date. Toward this end, I offer the following initial assessment, based on more than a decade of personal participation within the Bahá'í International Community. This includes

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[164] Ibid., p. 345.

ethnographic observations within numerous individual communities throughout four countries on three continents. It also includes participation on several elected Bahá'í councils as well as participation in a range of Bahá'í-initiated social and economic development projects. Finally, it includes eighteen months of volunteer work at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

Based on personal observations within the Bahá'í International Community, Bahá'ís appear to vary significantly in their grasp of different Bahá'í principles and practices as well as in their personal commitments of time and energy to the work of the community. They also appear to struggle with varying degrees of success in their efforts to transcend inherited cultural values, beliefs, and habits. On the whole, however, Bahá'í discourse appears to be a powerful source of individual motivation – spurring people to remarkable levels of dedication and self-sacrifice. Countless Bahá'ís I have met and worked with have left deep impressions on me in this regard. Also noteworthy are the tens of thousands of Bahá'ís around the world who, at the bidding of their communities, sacrifice substantial amounts of time and energy by serving on elected Bahá'í councils. And as the work of the Bahá'í community continues to grow – particularly on the national and international levels – this increasingly means leaving behind one's career, one's home, and possibly even one's country, to labour, often for years, in a relatively anonymous and entirely unsolicited position of elected service.

In addition to serving in elected positions, thousands of Bahá'ís have also voluntarily left lives of relative material comfort in order to participate in Bahá'í projects and initiatives around the world. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Bahá'ís around the world, even when they cannot participate directly in such initiatives, voluntarily contribute some portion of

their income to support the work of the Bahá'í International Community, without personal recognition or material gain. In this context, the experience of the community reads as a history of individual self-sacrifice, belying the notion that human nature is incorrigibly selfish. In fact, since the inception of the Bahá'í community, more than 20,000 of its members have made the ultimate self-sacrifice by giving up their lives rather than giving up their dedication to Bahá'í ideals in the face of violent persecution.[165] In all of these ways, even though the Bahá'í International Community is still in the formative stages of its development, its experience to date suggests that individuals are indeed capable of transcending narrow self-interests and turning their attention instead to the common good.

The experience of the Bahá'í community also points to the efficacy of non-adversarial social structures and practices. Of course, at this formative stage in the development of the Bahá'í International Community, individual Bahá'í communities struggle with varying degrees of success in their efforts to learn and apply non-adversarial practices of collective decision making along with the non-adversarial structures of power and authority that accompany them. In this regard, individual communities differ significantly in their capacity to coordinate and sustain collective actions. On the one hand, many nascent communities have difficulty organizing simple monthly meetings, let alone annual elections. On the other hand, more mature communities are beginning to gain public attention and respect for their well-organized and socially progressive accomplishments, examples of which are discussed

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[165] For an account of the history of Bahá'í persecution and self-sacrifice in Iran, refer to Sears, *A Cry From the Heart*. Since the writing of that history, Bahá'ís have continued to be executed, imprisoned, and denied basic human rights in Iran for their beliefs. For a first-hand account of these contemporary persecutions, including the imprisonment and execution of Bahá'í women and girls, refer to Roohizadegan, *Olya's Story*.

below.[166]

Even at this formative stage in the development of the Bahá'í International Community, the structures and practices of Bahá'í administration are also beginning to stand in contrast to the divisive, partisan models of democracy that are taken for granted in many parts of the world. For example, while working in Haifa, Israel, during the 1988 International Bahá'í Convention, I observed more than 1000 delegates from around the world gather to elect the Bahá'í community's international governing body. The election left a deep impression on me. The delegates represented a microcosm of the human race, including indigenous peoples from every continent, many of whom had never before left their homeland and some of whom were not even literate. In addition to the electoral process described above, the atmosphere of the convention was particularly striking. In contrast to the speech making, the sloganeering, and the jockeying for power and attention that characterize many partisan electoral conventions, the Bahá'í convention proceeded in an atmosphere of dignity, reverence, and composure. With no solicitations, nominations, or campaigning, all of the delegates carried out their task in a spirit of service and humility. In order to avoid even the semblance of any desire for re-election, the previously elected membership of the Universal House of Justice made no public appearance throughout the entire period of the convention leading up to the casting of ballots. After the results of the election were announced, there were no victory speeches or celebrations. Following this electoral process, all of the assembled delegates consulted together for several days, in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement and respect, about the affairs of the entire global community. Throughout

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[166] Refer also to Collins, "In the Eyes of the World", for an overview of the public attention that the Bahá'í International Community has been gaining in recent years.

these consultations, they voiced their recommendations and concerns in a manner that was frank and candid, yet without partisan posturing or self-promotion. Outside of these formal consultations, the delegates mingled informally in a display of mutual interest and affection that transcended all differences of race, class, gender, and so forth.

Of course, the International Bahá'í Convention represents a relatively mature expression of the Bahá'í administrative principles. Even on the local level, however, these principles have proven effective for coordinating the affairs of diverse communities and channeling their energies into numerous projects of social development and reform. Moreover, because Bahá'í administration is non-partisan and non-competitive, it tends to draw in a wide range of people who would otherwise never choose or be able to participate in (partisan) governance and decision making. In this regard, hundreds of thousands of people from every part of the planet have been learning skills that enable them to organize, make collective decisions, and pursue collective actions.

These skills are most visibly expressed, for instance, in the grassroots emergence of Bahá'í social and economic development initiatives. Unlike many international "development" agencies, in which projects tend to be conceived and designed from above and imposed on populations who are understood merely as the recipients of outside aid or assistance, Bahá'í development projects are generally initiated and sustained by local or regional communities who, through collective consultation, identify their own development priorities and conceive their own strategies to address them.[167] At the same time, because the

[167] Refer to Vick, *Social and Economic Development*; for an overview of Bahá'í development theory and practice. For detailed descriptions of contemporary Bahá'í development projects, refer to *One Country*, an online publication of the Bahá'í International Community, which can be viewed at http://www.onecountry.org.

Bahá'í International Community is an integrated global community with a structure that facilitates networking, communication, and a process of collective learning, initiatives that prove their efficacy in one community are often adapted by other communities according to their own particular needs and circumstances.

For instance, Bahá'ís have recognized for over a century that promoting the equality of women is one of the keys to lasting social and economic development. (Indeed, Bahá'ís believe as a matter of principle that should the resources not be available to educate all children in a given family or community, then the education of girls should be given precedence, as this will have the most significant and lasting impact on the progress and well-being of families and entire communities.[168]) In keeping with this principle, Bahá'í communities around the world have long been engaged in projects to uplift the status of women.[169] Moreover, they have recently begun collaborating with other like-minded groups and agencies toward this end. For example, with support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Bahá'ís have used traditional media, such as village theatre, song, and dance, to explore themes such as the importance of educating girls, the importance of consultation between husband and wife, and the value of full partnership in child-rearing, money management, and domestic labour.[170] To date, Bahá'ís have initiated similar projects in dozens of villages in at least five countries on three continents.

What is particularly noteworthy about all of these projects is that they build on locally

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168 Refer, for example, to discussions of this principle in Khan and Khan, *Advancement of Women*, and Boyles, "Full Partnership".

169 For an overview of these commitments, refer again to Khan and Khan, *Advancement of Women*, and Boyles, "Full Partnership".

170 For an overview of these traditional media initiatives, refer to documents posted at http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/94-0605.htm and http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0826g.htm.

developed institutional capacities (i.e., elected Bahá'í councils), and they involve the participation of both women and men. After participants analyze the challenges facing them through the process of Bahá'í consultation, supplemented by various diagnostic and data collection tools, the results are shared with the entire community through traditional media that are familiar and non-threatening. The focus, moreover, is on developing skills and changing attitudes rather than providing material goods and services. Toward these ends, there has been impressive evidence of success in both anecdotal and statistical terms: In villages where these projects have been undertaken, men have begun to share in the burden of domestic labour, husbands and wives are beginning to consult together about family finances and other decisions, women are gaining greater participation in community decision making, and girls and women are gaining increased access to education and literacy training – all of this through a process that involves rather than alienates men.[171]

At the same time, a focus on specific projects such as this can obscure the broader accomplishments of the Bahá'í International Community. To the extent that meaningful development involves the development of skills, attitudes, and capacities rather than the mere delivery of goods or services, the entire experience of the Bahá'í International Community can be viewed as an integrated global development project, within which more than five million people are currently developing such skills, attitudes, and capacities. Within this larger project, individual Bahá'í communities typically move, at varying rates, through a predictable sequence of developmental stages. In my experience, nascent Bahá'í communities tend to struggle simply to organize regular meetings and informally consult

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171 For anecdotal as well as statistical evidence of the success of these initiatives, refer again to http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0826g.htm. Refer also to Boyles, "Full Partnership", pp. 259-63.

together about the simplest community affairs. Once they have a large enough membership to form an elected council, they typically struggle to master Bahá'í electoral procedures, along with the more formal requirements of consultation required of such elected councils. After gaining experience with these basic skills, Bahá'í councils usually turn their attention toward building bonds of unity and fellowship within the community, as well as developing the skills they need to regularly consult with the entire membership of their communities. Once this stage of development is achieved, Bahá'í communities generally turn their attention to the development of basic educational programs within the community, within which children as well as adults can deepen their grasp of Bahá'í concepts and practices. Then, after mastering these basic functions, Bahá'í communities typically turn their attention to the social and economic needs of the larger societies they live within.

To date, Bahá'í communities that have reached this last stage of development have initiated a wide range of these more visible social and economic development projects throughout the world. These projects include, for instance, the establishment of tutorial schools and literacy programs in communities that lack these basic services; the creation of micro-credit cooperatives in communities with few financial resources; the development of indigenous community radio within populations that have traditionally had no access to means of mass communication; and the founding of decentralized rural universities in regions that are poorly served by urbanized approaches to higher education. These initiatives spring from locally or regionally identified needs and priorities and draw on locally or regionally available resources – most notably the human resources that have been gradually cultivated over generations within steadily growing Bahá'í communities. Thus, while outside observers might only recognize these more visible initiatives as "development

projects", the entire process of community building that leads up to them and makes them possible must also be understood as development. Indeed, many outside development "experts" are gradually beginning to recognize that this long-term process of community building is a prerequisite of sustainable social and economic development.

Moreover, given that the ultimate objective of the Bahá'í International Community is the establishment of a new social order based on the principles of unity and interdependence, the ultimate measure of Bahá'í development strategies might well be the extent to which the community as a whole has come to embody these specific principles. On this measure, I would suggest that the Bahá'í International Community has become a visible model of success. Despite the many growing pains that it continues to experience at this formative stage in its development, the unity it has already achieved is arguably its most distinguishing accomplishment. On the local level, for instance, this unity is formally expressed by collective practices that draw out diversity and regard it as a resource for collective problem solving. Less formally, this unity is also demonstrated by the cultivation of countless friendships, inter-marriages, and collaborative relationships among people of diverse backgrounds within local Bahá'í communities.

On the global level, the principle of unity is expressed through the inclusive, integrated, and coordinated structure of the Bahá'í International Community, as well as the spirit that animates it. This spirit was visibly expressed, for instance, at the Second Bahá'í World Congress in New York City in 1992. At this event, more than 30,000 Bahá'ís from around the world gathered to reflect on a century of accomplishment as well as prepare for the challenges facing them in the years ahead. Embodying the full diversity of the Bahá'í International Community, the congress was a testimony to the potential unity of the entire

human race. It reflected a century of community organizing and development within an entirely non-adversarial framework. Moreover, this non-adversarial framework has been one of the primary reasons that the unity of the Bahá'í International Community has survived intact without the factions or divisions that have overtaken virtually every other social movement in history.

Finally, the experience of the Bahá'í International Community also offers a glimpse of the effectiveness of non-adversarial strategies and commitments even under conditions of direct oppression and gross human rights violations. In this regard, the experience of the Bahá'í community in Iran is particularly noteworthy. Since its inception in the mid-eighteenth century, the Iranian Bahá'í community has faced successive waves of persecution. Efforts to eradicate the nascent community shortly after its conception resulted in the deaths of thousands of Iranian Bahá'ís, as well as the lifelong imprisonment and exile of its founder. Since then, violent persecutions have continued to flare on and off, with their most recent eruption following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, whose leaders once again declared their intention to eradicate the community.[172]

Despite a century and a half of such persecution, Iranian Bahá'ís have made remarkable progress. For instance, in a deeply patriarchal culture that treated women as chattel or mere reproductive vessels, held them virtually as domestic prisoners, and deemed them unworthy of education, Bahá'ís were the first to cast aside the veil, declare the full equality of men and women, and begin translating this principle into practice. Among other things, Bahá'ís established the first schools for girls in Iran. These schools were open not only to Bahá'ís

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[172] Martin, *Bahá'í Minority.*

but to people of all backgrounds. Indeed, they trained the first generation of professional women ever in Iran, and their influence has been felt throughout the entire society.[173]

Within the Bahá'í community itself, the advancement of women was especially pronounced. In contrast to prevailing cultural norms, women were not segregated from men in Bahá'í community functions. By working side by side with men on elected Bahá'í institutions and committees, they gained valuable skills as well as an invaluable sense of dignity and self-worth within the Bahá'í community. By 1974, Bahá'í women under the age of 40 had also achieved 100 percent literacy, in comparison to the national average of only 15 percent.[174] In turn, these commitments to the advancement of women propelled the social and economic development of the entire Iranian Bahá'í community – another dynamic that many "development" experts are only now beginning to recognize.

Another example of the accomplishments of the Iranian Bahá'ís can be seen in their specific response to the renewed persecutions following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Following the revolution, Iranian authorities launched a full-scale assault on the Bahá'í community. Bahá'ís were publicly beaten, their businesses confiscated or destroyed, their homes plundered or burned, and many of their elected leaders tortured and executed. Bahá'í marriages were declared a form of prostitution punishable by death. Bahá'í children were expelled from school. A "Law of Retaliation" was also passed exempting all crimes against Bahá'ís from any punishment under the law.[175]

With no legal recourse available inside Iran and no legal avenue available to leave Iran

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173 Boyles, "Full Partnership".

174 Ibid.

175 Martin, *Bahá'í Minority*.

(Bahá'ís were denied passports), the Iranian Bahá'í community could do little more than document the atrocities committed against it and communicate the details to Bahá'í communities in other countries, who in turn began a globally coordinated campaign to educate governments, media, and other leaders of thought around the world about their plight. Within Iran, Bahá'ís also created informal networks of shelter and support as well as informal home schools for their children. Eventually, they created a nation-wide "open university", held quietly in living rooms and basements, and operated through a combined system of volunteer teachers and correspondence coursework, in order that an entire generation of Bahá'í youth not be deprived of higher education. Meanwhile, as the Bahá'ís inside Iran found creative ways to survive and advance themselves, the international campaign to educate governments and other leaders gradually began to yield results. Resolutions were passed in parliaments and congresses around the world, as well as in the United Nations, condemning these gross human rights violations and exerting pressure on Iran to cease its persecution of Bahá'ís. In response to these pressures, the most blatant human rights violations began to gradually diminish, and though Iranian Bahá'ís still live a precarious existence, the threat to the community's existence appears to now be effectively behind them and the execution of Bahá'ís appears to have nearly stopped.[176]

Beyond their mere survival, however, this latest wave of persecution has had a galvanizing effect on Bahá'ís in Iran as well as throughout the world. Inside Iran, the experience has deepened the commitment of many Bahá'ís. In addition, their non-violent responses have cultivated sympathy and admiration within more moderate and progressive

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[176] Ibid.

segments of Iranian society, which, Bahá'ís confidently believe, represent the future of that society. Outside Iran, the global external affairs campaign that was prompted by these persecutions has led to two equally significant developments. First, it forged new capacities for coordinated global action that represents a significant new stage of maturation for the Bahá'í International Community. These capacities are now being applied to new global campaigns for human rights, the advancement of women, literacy, development, and so forth. Second, it led to emergence of the Bahá'í International Community from relative obscurity on the international stage, where its history, commitments, and accomplishment are now garnering widespread attention. In its emergence from obscurity, it has attracted the sympathy and support of people throughout the world who are becoming increasingly familiar with and attracted to its underlying principles and practices.

In all of these ways, the Bahá'í community's non-adversarial response to persecution and oppression illustrates an effective alternative to violence and opposition. Granted, over 200 lives were lost following the most recent wave of persecution in Iran. But these numbers might have been significantly higher if the Bahá'ís had responded with violence or illegal protests against a regime that was ready to seize on any excuse to legitimate its persecutions. Instead, the Bahá'í response catalyzed the development of new internal capacities as well as widespread external recognition – at a rate that most Bahá'ís could scarcely have imagined before the persecutions began. Furthermore, by staying the course, Bahá'ís have gained valuable insights into the efficacy of their own non-adversarial strategies of social change.

In summary, the Bahá'í International Community can be understood as a social experiment that is testing the assumptions about human nature, social organization, and social change outlined earlier in this chapter. Although the ultimate outcome of this

experiment cannot yet be determined, some tentative conclusions can be offered based on the experience of the community to date. First, although individual Bahá'ís struggle with varying degrees of success in their efforts to subordinate their immediate self-interests to the long-term welfare of the entire social body, the history of the Bahá'í community is, by and large, a history of individual self-sacrifice and dedication to collective interests. In and of itself, this history presents a significant challenge to the assumption that human nature is incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. In addition, although individual Bahá'í communities struggle with varying degrees of success in their efforts to collectively learn and apply non-adversarial practices of collective decision making, along with the non-adversarial structures of power and authority that accompany them, the Bahá'í community as a whole has made substantial progress toward these ends. Even at this formative stage in its development, the structures and practices of Bahá'í administration already stand in contrast to the divisive, partisan models that have become synonymous with democracy throughout most of the world. Moreover, these non-adversarial structures and practices have proven highly effective in coordinating the affairs of a diverse global community and channeling its energies into numerous projects of social development and reform. Finally, by pursing non-adversarial strategies of social change, Bahá'ís are demonstrating the efficacy of alternatives to violence and opposition – even under conditions of direct persecution and oppression. In the face of gross human rights violations, the pursuit of non-adversarial strategies has lent a significant impulse to both the internal development as well as the external recognition of the Bahá'í International Community.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE CODES OF ADVERSARIALISM

This dissertation began with a theory of culture – an explanation of what culture is and how it both shapes and is shaped by those who live within it. Chapter I drew on a range of intellectual traditions, from anthropology and sociology to semiotics and contemporary cultural studies, to articulate this theory. The chapter began with a conceptual definition of the term *culture* itself, and a discussion regarding the complex relationship between human nature and culture. A distinction was then drawn between *psycho-cultural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of the human mind), as well as *socio-structural* dimensions of culture (i.e., culturally contingent structures of social organization) in order to draw attention to these two distinct but interrelated aspects of culture. In turn, a theory of cultural change and adaptation was articulated, with the concept of *cultural codes* as its central metaphor. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of the concept of *hegemony,* which serves as a useful device for understanding the way that dominant cultural codes can come to serve the narrow interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them.

In Chapter II, I began critiquing the culture of adversarialism by analyzing the way that relations of power are understood and enacted within it. Toward this end, I illustrated that power is generally theorized as something that is exercised *over* or *against* others in the pursuit of mutually exclusive gains. I then pointed out that this limited understanding of power illuminates some relations of power while it obscures others. Most notably, it obscures the mutualistic or cooperative exercise of power – exercising power *with* others in

the pursuit of collective gains. In this context, I suggested that a narrow descriptive or explanatory theory of power tends to translate into a narrow prescriptive or normative theory of power. The result is what I referred to as *normative adversarialism* – the prescription of adversarial methods as normal and necessary social practices.

In Chapter III, I illustrated that normative adversarialism is relatively ubiquitous throughout Western culture – albeit in "rational" and non-violent forms. I supported this assertion by surveying the way human relations are understood and enacted throughout the public sphere. In this regard, I demonstrated that normative adversarialism underlies the conflict and competition most people take for granted in our economic system; the partisan structures and practices taken for granted in our political system; the adversarial contests taken for granted in our legal system; the polarized conflicts and violence taken for granted in our mass media content; the oppositional strategies taken for granted by many social activists; and even the disputational models taken for granted by many academics. Moreover, I showed that all of these models appear to serve the interests of more powerful social groups at the expense of less powerful ones. In addition, I showed that all these models are mutually reinforcing. They simultaneously shape and reflect the ways we think, talk, and act throughout the public sphere as they naturalize a general culture of adversarialism that does not serve all interests equally. In this regard, I suggested that normative adversarialism has all the characteristics of an effective hegemonic construct, as defined in Chapter I. In other words, normative adversarialism can be understood as a cultivated set of "common sense" assumptions and beliefs that serve the narrow interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them.

In order to further illustrate the hegemony of adversarialism, I examined a number of

marginalized alternatives in Chapter IV. First, I acknowledged that many cultures, past and present, have embodied mutualistic expressions and aspirations. In this regard, I pointed out that human history embodies ongoing historical tensions between adversarialism and mutualism. Recognizing this, I turned my attention to various contemporary expressions of the latter. Various streams of feminism, systems theory, ecology, communication theory, and alternative dispute resolution were surveyed as examples. Each was chosen for the unique critical perspective it offers on normative adversarialism, and the glimpse it provides of non-adversarial alternatives. At the same time, because these alternatives are relatively isolated from one another within the dominant culture of adversarialism, I suggested that their practical efficacy remains difficult to evaluate. Within a culture that contradicts and undermines them from virtually every direction, these marginalized alternatives tend to appear naïve and idealistic – an outcome that is entirely consistent with the theory of hegemony introduced in Chapter I.

In order to further evaluate non-adversarial models of social practice, I suggested that it is helpful to view their application within a culture or community that consistently reinforces rather than undermines them. I attempted to do this in Chapter V through a case study of the Bahá'í International Community – an emerging global movement that integrates a wide range of non-adversarial structures and practices into a unified cultural system. I began by discussing the overall organic worldview that informs these structures and practices. Next, I examined a number of these prescriptions and practices in some detail, including Bahá'í models of collective decision making, Bahá'í institutional structures, and Bahá'í strategies for pursuing social change. In turn, I examined the assumptions about human nature that underlie each of these elements of Bahá'í normative theory. And finally, I concluded the

chapter by offering a brief assessment of the actual experience of the Bahá'í community to date.

Five Theoretical Propositions

While the preceding analysis is complex and wide-ranging, it can be distilled into a set of five succinct theoretical propositions, which can be summarized as follows:

(1) Human beings have the potential for adversarial as well as mutualistic behaviour.

(2) The degree to which we realize either of these potentials is largely a function of the cultures we are raised within, and the tension between adversarialism and mutualism has been resolved differently in different cultural contexts.

(3) Contemporary Western-liberal cultures are dominated by the codes of "normative adversarialism" – the prescription of adversarial methods as normal and necessary social practice throughout the public sphere.

(4) Though adversarialism is a relative phenomenon, and though adversarial practices are not essentially problematic in all circumstances, their relatively ubiquitous and indiscriminate expression throughout the contemporary public sphere does not serve the broadest public interest; as a dominant cultural expression, "the codes of adversarialism" can therefore be understood as socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive.

(5) The historical persistence of these socially oppressive and culturally maladaptive codes can be explained by the theory of hegemony; that is, the codes of adversarialism primarily serve the interests of privileged segments of society who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to them and who now occupy social positions from which they continue to

cultivate these codes (whether consciously and intentionally or not), as a form of cultural common sense.

These theoretical propositions have significant practical implications, especially in the area of social reform. First, they point to an entire range of social structures and practices that might be important targets of reform but that have hitherto been overlooked due to their naturalization within the culture of adversarialism. In fact, these propositions suggest that the structures and practices of racism, sexism, nationalism, competitive materialism, and so forth, which have all been targets of social reform throughout this century, may all be related expressions of a common underlying construct – *adversarialism* – that finds expression in virtually every arena of contemporary public life.

In addition, these propositions also raise significant questions about strategies of social reform. For if adversarialism primarily serves the interests of those privileged groups who owe their ascendancy in human affairs to it, then adversarial strategies of social reform may ultimately constrain the long-term pursuit of social justice. This is not to say that gains have never been made through adversarial strategies. Rather, it is to suggest that adversarial strategies may have reached the limits of the effectiveness. In this context, partisan-political organizing, litigation, strikes, protests, and other adversarial strategies may win limited battles while simultaneously prolonging the perpetuation of existing social relations by legitimating the underlying codes of adversarialism that privilege more powerful social groups throughout the public sphere. Furthermore, by channeling social reform energy into arenas that favour more powerful social groups by design (e.g., partisan political institutions, the courts, the commercial media), these strategies may be diverting energy from more

constructive alternatives. Thus the political economy of adversarialism may leave social reformers at a perpetual disadvantage.

Consider, in this regard, the metaphor of a game. When a game is structured according to adversarial rules, as a contest of power, then more powerful players tend to prevail. Accordingly, when less powerful players agree to engage in power struggles against more powerful ones, they are agreeing to play by rules that promote their own defeat. After all, contests of power are won by those with the most power.

In this context, adversarial strategies of social reform are analogous to playing by the rules of the game above. These adversarial rules primarily serve the interests of dominant social groups. This insight raises a number of questions for social reformers: How can one pursue social reform without partisan organizing, litigation, strikes, protests, and other adversarial strategies? What alternative strategies of social reform are available? And aren't adversarial struggles the only means by which real social reform has ever been achieved?

In response to the first two of these questions, a wide range of non-adversarial strategies have been discussed throughout this dissertation. These include strategies of education and awareness raising, the cultivation of new values and attitudes, and the building of new models of social and political practice, such as those discussed in Chapters IV and V. In the broadest sense, however, the alternative is to opt out of the existing rules of the game and start playing by a new set of non-adversarial rules. Ultimately, the only thing perpetuating the old adversarial game is the fact that the majority of people subscribe to its rules. If an alternative game begins to yield recognizable results (e.g., justice, equity, social emancipation), then it will begin to attract increasing numbers of people to it (e.g., the majority of people whose interests are not well served by the old game). In turn, if enough

people stop playing by the old rules and start playing by new ones, the old game will come to an end through attrition as fewer and fewer people subscribe to its rules. This would not require competing within the old game in order to "win". Nor would it require attacking those who profit most from the old rules. Rather, it would require an ability to see that the old game has no intrinsic or necessary existence; an ability to recognize it as a cultural construct that will only be perpetuated as long as people agree to abide by its rules; and an ability to begin experimenting with or looking for a new set of rules.

On this last point, increasing numbers of people *are* beginning to experiment with or look for new rules. Each of the examples discussed in Chapters IV and V illustrate this. Of the examples in Chapter IV, alternative dispute resolution has perhaps had the most visible success to date – and it provides an excellent illustration of the strategy referred to immediately above. Alternative dispute resolution represents the emergence of a new game, governed by non-adversarial rules, that has literally risen in the shadows of an adversarial legal system that is alienating increasing numbers of people (including many lawyers and judges). But its success is not being won by "taking on" the legal adversary system. Rather, more and more people are simply opting out of the old game and opting into the new one because they recognize that their interests are better served in the new one.

Similarly, feminist scholars Foss and Griffin propose that their model of invitational rhetoric (discussed in Chapter IV) offers a strategy of opting out of the existing argument game in order to model a more attractive alternative. In their own words:

> Although invitational rhetoric is not designed to create a specific change, such as the transformation of systems of oppression into ones that value and nurture individuals, it may produce such an outcome… simply because it models an alternative… and thus shows how an alternative looks and works. Invitational rhetoric may thus transform an oppressive system

precisely because it does not engage the system on its own terms.[1]

Likewise, many other examples of this non-adversarial strategy can also be found, from the localized experiments in cooperative economics alluded to in the beginning of Chapter IV to the global experiment with alternative models of governance and collective decision making discussed in Chapter V.

Moreover, examples such as these suggest an answer to the third question posed above: Aren't adversarial struggles the only means by which real social reform has ever been achieved? These examples demonstrate that non-adversarial strategies of social reform do indeed exist. In fact, they suggest that non-adversarial strategies of opting out and building more attractive alternatives may have played a role in many movements toward social justice and equity throughout history. The problem is that these strategies are often not recognized as strategies of social reform at all. We seldom read about them in history books because they often lack elements of conventional narrative drama. We seldom hear about them in the commercial media because they lack the extremism and confrontation needed to make them "newsworthy". Likewise, we do not even tend to read about them in the writings of reform-minded scholars because they do not conform to the adversarial models of power and social change that many of them employ.

Thus constructive social reform efforts that are carried out quietly by countless people around the world tend to not even register in our accounting of social reform – rendered virtually invisible within the discourses of adversarialism. But adversarial struggles are clearly not the only means by which social reform has ever been achieved. In fact, a proper

[1] Foss and Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion", pp. 16-17.

accounting might reveal that, throughout much of history, meaningful social reform has been achieved primarily through non-adversarial means, while adversarial strategies have absorbed enormous amounts of human energy and generated significant attention, yet yielded few lasting results. Such an accounting is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this dissertation. But it warrants future attention.

A Response to Skeptics

Of course, all of the propositions outlined above warrant considerable skepticism when viewed from within the culture of adversarialism. From that vantage point, they may not appear "realistic" because they are inconsistent with the "reality" that it generates. Thus the non-adversarial prescriptions outlined above may appear naïve, impractical, or even oppressive within the culture of adversarialism because they are incongruous with the common sense that it cultivates.

For instance, the culture of adversarialism generates the appearance of evidence that human nature *is* incorrigibly selfish and aggressive, and therefore it appears that we *do* need to harness and constrain these impulses by structuring most of our social interactions as rational contests. Based on this apparent evidence, non-adversarial prescriptions appear not only unworkable, but also vulnerable to the self-interested motives and manipulations that Western-liberal institutions have allegedly been designed to harness and constrain. On the other hand, even within the culture of adversarialism, there are enough "anomalies" to suggest that human beings also have the capacity for mutualism and cooperation. And though the former view has a long genealogy in Western-liberal discourses, the latter view

appears to be gaining many contemporary advocates, including respected scholars in the fields of anthropology, economics, and other disciplines.[2]

The problem, of course, is that it is difficult to empirically verify which of these views is more valid. Rather, we are confronted with two competing sets of difficult-to-test assumptions about human nature and culture. The analysis in this dissertation suggests, however, that it is at least in our broadest collective interests to critically re-examine prevailing assumptions and begin experimenting more systematically with non-adversarial social structures and practices.

Skeptics of this suggestion might warn, in turn, of the oppressive uses that "harmony models", "organicism", "the rhetoric of consensus", and other allegedly non-adversarial constructs have been put to in the past.[3] As acknowledged in Chapter V, consensual and organic conceptions of society have historically been invoked by privileged social groups as a means of *imposing* harmony under terms that are favourable to their own self-interests. Organic metaphors and the rhetoric of consensus have thus been used to stifle diversity, suppress human rights, and perpetuate status quo social relations.

Recognizing this, many people assert that conflict is more desirable than a false or imposed consensus and that adversarial practices are therefore essential if an oppressive social order is to be reformed. However, as with the argument that rational debate is more desirable than violence or war, this argument embodies a false choice because it obscures other alternatives. As demonstrated in Chapters IV and V, organic metaphors can also be

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2 Refer back to discussion in Chapter III.

3 Refer, for example, to critiques articulated or summarized by Nader, "Harmony Models"; Schweitzer, "Harmony Ideology"; Bush and Folger, *Promise of Mediation*; and de Jouvenel, *On Power*.

conceptualized as the basis for social justice and reform. Indeed, humanity's reluctance to recognize its organic interdependence and pattern its collective life accordingly can be interpreted as a root cause of social injustice.

Of course, it is again difficult to empirically verify which of these views is more valid. But the analysis in this dissertation at least raises the possibility that our common sense commitments to normative adversarialism may be misinformed. Indeed, if adversarialism is a hegemonic construct that serves the interests of some social groups more than others, then these common sense commitments may be analogous to the anti-suffrage commitments held by some Western women only a few generations ago.

Skeptics might still argue, however, that this entire analysis is self-contradictory because it invokes the theory of hegemony to critique adversarialism, yet the theory of hegemony is rooted in a generally adversarial view of history. The theory of hegemony interprets history as an ongoing sequence of power struggles, played out in the arenas of discourse and culture, between social groups with competing interests. Thus the contradiction: How can adversarialism be a hegemonic construct when hegemony is an adversarial construct?

A closer reading of this dissertation, however, suggests a resolution to this apparent contradiction. In the preceding analysis, I acknowledge that human history has indeed been characterized by various historical struggles between competing social groups. At the same time, however, I assert that human history has not been limited to these expressions and that hegemonic struggle has never been the sole determinant of human culture. Mutualism and cooperation have also played a significant, if not frequently overlooked, role in human history. Adversarialism and hegemonic struggle are only half the picture. Mutualism and cooperation are the other half of the picture.

In addition, the relative prominence of either adversarialism or mutualism appears to be historically specific and susceptible to change. In this regard, it is possible that the relative prominence of adversarial struggle will diminish over time in response to the pressures of global interdependence. As the discussion in Chapter V points out, our own reproductive and technological success as a species is steadily drawing us together into a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet and whose concerns are increasingly complex and intractable. Under these radically changing historical conditions, mutualism may prove an increasingly successful strategy for all social groups, even as adversarialism proves increasingly anachronistic and unworkable.

If this is the case, age-old patterns of hegemonic struggle between competing social groups might gradually recede as patterns of mutualism and cooperation expand . Thus one can envision movement toward a "post-hegemonic" world order characterized by social structures and practices that promote the broadest possible collective interests. Though isolated expressions of adversarialism may never be entirely eliminated, adversarialism may no longer be prescribed as a normative ideal throughout the public sphere.

It is this perspective that allows one to reconcile the apparent contradiction identified above. Even though a post-hegemonic world order may not be inevitable, it is at least logically possible. The theory of hegemony can therefore be used to interpret aspects of human history without constraining our vision of the future. Indeed, if human societies are anything like most other complex dynamic systems, then past patterns or states are not the only predictors of future states. Many complex systems are characterized by punctuated processes of evolutionary adaptation that result in qualitative transformations over time. Why should human societies be any different? Again, mutualism and cooperation are not the

only possible outcomes of such a qualitative transformation. But they are potential outcomes and they are worth working toward. Thus my perspective derives not from historical determinism but from historical agency. In contrast, the prevailing assumption that individuals or social groups are incapable of transcending selfish pursuits or hegemonic struggles is the more deterministic or fatalistic view.

Again, however, it is difficult to empirically verify which of these views is more valid. But the analysis in this dissertation at least raises the possibility that the latter view may be misinformed. What is called for, therefore, is an open mind and a willingness to experiment with and evaluate alternatives.

Toward Empirical Validation

Of course, an open mind is not an empty mind – and the comments above do not imply suspending all critical judgement. In this regard, the propositions outlined above need to be tested empirically. Although an effort has been made to anchor the preceding analysis to empirical reference points when possible, all cannot be accomplished within a single dissertation. Hence this larger empirical project remains. Toward this end, this dissertation will close with a brief discussion of how the above propositions might be empirically tested.

As discussed in the preceding section, these propositions are as difficult to empirically verify as they are to empirically refute. What can be asserted with confidence, however, is that they cannot be tested simply by studying human behaviour within the dominant cultural environment. Western-liberal discourses define human nature as essentially adversarial, and they structure our collective thought, talk, and action largely in those terms. Thus they are

likely to cultivate or reinforce the public behaviours they assume to be universal and inevitable. In this regard, the culture of adversarialism may construct much of the "empirical" evidence with which it legitimates itself. Because of this possibility, one cannot test the above propositions by looking only at societies of people who have been born and raised within a culture that cultivates or reinforces adversarial behaviours. But given the increasingly global influence of Western-liberal culture, what other options are available for testing these propositions?

One option is to undertake comparative anthropological studies of populations that are still relatively untouched by Western culture, in order at least to assess the degree to which adversarial behaviours are biologically determined and inevitable. The political anthropologist Marc Howard Ross recently undertook an extensive cross-cultural analysis that provides a solid first step in this direction.[4] Ross's findings suggest that there is indeed significant variation from culture to culture in the relative amount of conflict or cooperation expressed. Moreover, he attributes these variations not merely to socio-structural factors, as many economists and sociologists would, but also to psycho-cultural factors. As Ross explains, "objective situations alone do not cause conflict; interpretations of such situations also play a role".[5] "The empirical results", he continues,

> clearly show that a society's early socialization is intimately associated with patterns of conflict and violence. Psychocultural effects cannot be reduced to structural conditions explained in terms of simple interests. ...interest-based rational-choice models are not so much wrong as more limited than many of their proponents suggest. Interests matter, I agree, but psychocultural forces are crucial in determining how these interests are defined and what actors do to defend them.[6]

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4 Ross, *Culture of Conflict.*

5 Ibid., p. 11.

6 Ibid., pp. 9-10.

At the same time, Ross also acknowledges the role that social institutions play in reinforcing these psycho-cultural dispositions throughout life.

> Early social relationships provide the foundations for the model of social behaviour (what I call psychocultural dispositions) one carries throughout life.... But early childhood is not the only formative time for interpretations of the world that shape conflict behaviour. A wide range of a society's institutions and practices reinforce important psychocultural dispositions through the values and behaviours that are encouraged or discouraged, through cultural definitions of group identity (we versus they), and through culturally approved responses to perceived aggression.[7]

Ross's investigation, of course, represents only a first step toward an empirical understanding of whether or not human beings have the capacity to replace adversarialism with mutualism and cooperation. His comparative analysis is encouraging, however, because it demonstrates that normative adversarialism is not ubiquitous across pre-industrial cultures and that culturally specific factors (both socio-structural and psycho-cultural) play a significant role in determining the degree and expression of conflict or cooperation.

Granted, studies of pre-industrial societies cannot be generalized to complex modern societies. It could be, for instance, that the complex divisions of labour inherent in modern capitalist economies create structural conflicts of interest that make contest models of resource allocation both necessary and inevitable. Even if this is true, however, it simply means that efforts to transcend adversarialism are limited more by social structure than by human nature. Our social structures, unlike our biological natures, are at least cultural constructs that can potentially be reformed. In any case, based on studies of pre-industrial cultures, we can still only make limited inferences about complex modern societies.

Empirical methodologies that evaluate the efficacy of non-adversarial models in complex modern societies are also clearly needed. Fortunately, a few evaluations of this type have

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7 Ibid., pp. 10, parentheses in the original text.

also been undertaken already – again with similarly encouraging results. For instance, both micro- and macro-level evaluations of alternative dispute resolution suggest that, compared to traditional litigation, alternative dispute resolution can lead to higher outcome satisfaction and lower costs (both financial and emotional) for all parties in many types of disputes.[8] In addition, initial evaluations of non-adversarial decision-making models suggest that these models tend to yield more thoughtful, creative, and effective decision making than partisan-adversarial approaches.[9] Similarly, initial evaluations of models such as public journalism and symmetrical two-way public relations (discussed in Chapter IV) are also beginning to yield some promising results.[10]

As evaluations such as these are expanded, they will begin to shed light on the efficacy of alternative practices that are congruent with the broad propositions outlined above. Again, however, these evaluations also have limitations that must be taken into account. Members of virtually all modern societies have internalized various adversarial norms and behaviours due to the global influence of the Western culture of adversarialism. These psycho-cultural dispositions are likely to confound efforts to measure the true efficacy of non-adversarial models because the models are likely to be undermined by these previously internalized norms and behaviours. Even so, such evaluations can still provide tentative insights, provided one takes into account the potentially confounding effect of these predispositions.

On a closely related note, these kinds of evaluative studies are also limited because they

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[8] Refer back to discussions and evidence presented in Chapters II and III.

[9] Refer, for example, to Kolstoe, "Improved Thinking".

[10] For evaluations of public journalism, refer to Austin, "Progress Report"; Charity, *Doing Public Journalism*; and Schaffer, Miller, and Kramer, eds., *Six Case Studies*. For evaluations of two-way symmetrical public relations, refer to Grunig and Grunig, "Review of a Program of Research" and "Models of Public Relations".

tend to examine the efficacy of specific non-adversarial models in isolation from one another. The ultimate test of such models, of course, would be within an integrated framework of mutually consistent and reinforcing non-adversarial structures and practices. This is important not only because such an integrated framework might cultivate more supportive psycho-cultural dispositions in the individual's implementing them, as discussed above, but also because different social structures and practices influence one another through complex linkages, and the efficacy of any given social structure or practice can be affected by these linkages.

For instance, the model of public journalism referred to above, which tries to cultivate a more inclusive and participatory civic culture by focusing on democratic deliberation rather than adversarial spectacle, embodies many non-adversarial ideals that are congruent with the propositions outlined above. Currently, however, public journalism experiments typically occur within commercially owned, advertising-supported media. The efficacy of public journalism is likely to be constrained within this context because these commercial advertising-supported media are governed by a profit-seeking logic that often contradicts or constrains public journalism ideals.

Similar linkages, of course, affect many other social structures and practices, such as the linkages between our economic, political, and legal systems discussed in Chapter III. Isolated experiments in any one of these arenas are therefore likely to be confounded by their linkages to other arenas that are still characterized by adversarial norms. For instance, how can one evaluate the full efficacy of alternative dispute resolution models when such models currently operate within a larger framework of laws and regulations that have been formulated through contest models of governance, which are in turn linked to the political

economy of a capitalist free market and which therefore tend to privilege economically powerful groups? Within such a framework, privileged social groups often have little incentive to work toward mediated resolutions because they can often fare better in a legal adversary system designed to enforce laws and regulations that may already favour their interests. And even when these groups do work within alternative dispute resolutions processes, they often come to the table with significant political advantages over other social groups. Therefore, non-adversarial alternatives ultimately need to be evaluated within a larger framework in which they are linked to models that structurally reinforce rather than undermine them.

This confounding problem of linkages, as well as the problem of cultural predispositions discussed earlier, therefore present substantial challenges to the empirical evaluation of non-adversarial social structures and practices within the contemporary culture of adversarialism. In order to address all of these confounding problems and still be able to generalize about complex modern societies, one would ideally need to set up a controlled experiment on a society-wide scale. This would require manipulating a wide range of social structures and practices within subsets of otherwise complex modern populations and comparing them, over several generations, to control groups from the same populations. This, of course, is impossible.

The next best thing, however, would be to look within complex modern societies for existing subcultures or populations that already integrate a wide range of non-adversarial social structures and practices within a relatively comprehensive framework. If such groups could be found, then one could evaluate their social structures and practices relative to the structures and practices of the larger societies they live within. One would have, in effect, a

naturally occurring experiment that at least partially approximates the ideal experiment described above.

Although the ideal experiment described above is clearly impossible, at least one instance of this naturally occurring experiment already exists. As the discussion in Chapter V demonstrates, the Bahá'í International Community provides a close approximation of the alternative cultural formation described above. Other subsets of the population may also embody a wide range of non-adversarial structures and practices in other forms. But for the purpose of this discussion, the Bahá'í International Community provides a clear illustration of a naturally occurring experiment that approximates the ideal experiment described above. Indeed, many Bahá'ís consciously view themselves in exactly this manner: as participants in a social experiment that is testing the efficacy of non-adversarial structures and practice across a wide range of human activity. Furthermore, the Bahá'í International Community has already offered itself as a model for study in this regard.[11]

Of course, the Bahá'í community is still in an early formative stage of its development as its participants strive to learn and implement a wide range of non-adversarial structures and practices and develop the skills and capacities these call for. In addition, because Bahá'ís are not isolationist, they continue to live with a foot in two cultural universes. Therefore many Bahá'ís continue to struggle with cultural dispositions they have internalized from the surrounding culture of adversarialism. With each successive generation, however, the experience of the Bahá'í International Community yields increasingly valuable insights as children raised within Bahá'í families and Bahá'í communities internalize non-adversarial

[11] Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 13.

principles and practices in their formative years and carry these dispositions into adulthood in ever-greater measure. In this regard, a longitudinal study of the Bahá'í International Community offers a unique opportunity to test the propositions outlined above within a relatively holistic empirical framework – even if the ultimate outcome of the experiment will not be known for generations.

All of the methodologies discussed above therefore have their strengths and limitations. However, if all of these methodologies are considered complementary, each could gradually provide pieces of a larger picture, through which we could arrive at a more informed assessment of the propositions outlined above. In addition, other methodologies not explored above can undoubtedly be adapted or devised to further clarify this picture and refine our overall assessment.

The first step, however, is formulating a theoretical framework that permits us to begin asking these questions. Thus it is the heuristic value of this dissertation that constitutes its most significant and original contribution. The questions it raises are more than mere arm-chair speculations. They pertain to the lives and living conditions of real people everywhere. They pertain to the ways that we construct our social reality, as well as the ways that we pursue social change. In this context, they form the basis for an applied but critically informed research agenda with eminently practical implications.

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