

PHILOSOPHICAL ADVENTURES

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While Nietzsche is notorious for seeing philosophy as a mode of autobiographical confession, other philosophers, such as Habermas, see philosophy as a discipline of rigorous argumentation and theory construction that constitutes a form of discourse to be sharply separated from literature and narrative. As with philosophical antinomies, these one-sided positions need to be overcome and we should see philosophy both as a commentary on the times framed by one's social positionality and life-experiences, and a discursive practice that attempts to produce more general theoretical arguments and knowledge. Yet it is extremely difficult, I have found, to reflect on how one's life and times have influenced one's own theoretical work and I fear that the following reflections are more of a narrative construct than "scientific" commentary. Yet since such binary oppositions are ripe for deconstruction, I will gamely attempt to describe my philosophical adventures and speculate on what might have influenced my theoretical and political itinerary.

Life and Times: From the 1940s into the 1960s

I was born in the Chelsea Medical Hospital on May 31, 1943. My parents had been married for about three years and had been working for the U.S. government in Washington. My father then joined the Navy, took some courses in economics and administration at Harvard, and prepared to go to war. My mother gave birth to a child who turned out to be a writer and philosopher, and organized a trek across the United States with a six-week old baby. In a well-documented train ride, my mother and two of her sisters took me from Harvard to Berkeley and then to Carpinteria, California, south of Santa Barbara where the familial unit lived in a paradise overlooking the Pacific Ocean, if one can trust the documentary evidence of home movies.

The family idyl was short-lived as my father was sent to Hawaii where he served as paymaster in the Navy, roamed the beach with my Uncle Carl, and seemingly avoided trauma or mutilation. With the defeat of German and Japanese fascism, my father returned home from war, and got a job with Addressograph-Multigraph business machines. My parents rented an apartment in the modest building where my grandparents lived in downtown Los Angeles on South Hope Street.

And so my young and impressionable body was transported from an ecological paradise to urban Los Angeles. For the next few years we lived in downtown LA and family stories and photographs have my grandfather walking me everyday through Bunker Hill, later bull-dozed to build the Bonaventure and other high-rise corporate buildings, including a daily walk through the Biltmore Hotel lobby where my grandfather would buy a cigar. Later, I would get sick everytime my grandfather would visit and it was discerned that I was allergic to cigars, creating a life-long aversion to tobacco products.

My brother John was born in 1947 and the nucleus of the typical American middle-class family was emerging, although we were outgrowing the small LA apartment. My urban flaneur existence came to an end around 1949 when my parents bought a house in Temple City in a new housing development for about \$4000. My artistic proclivities at that time were crushed when I decorated the freshly painted downtown LA apartment by drawing pretty pictures on the white walls with crayon. My parents and grandparents were horrified with my aesthetic creations, and for the first-time I can remember I was physically disciplined with my grandfather taking out his belt, putting me across his knees, and spanking out any artistic aptitude I may have had.

And so it was off to Temple City, a small town west of LA, where Alfred Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt was set the year of my birth, and which was quickly becoming suburbanized. At that time, the suburbs were relatively new, but I was there and would continue to pursue the delights of suburban living. In the following years I would successively live in Fall Church, Virginia, Valley Stream, New York, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, and Larchmont, New York. After selling business machines for several years in California, my father returned to work for the U.S. government in Washington (1952-1956), and then went back to work for Addressograph-Multigraph on Long Island (1956-1958). He switched to Arbitron in New York City, a firm that did TV and radio-ratings around 1958 and was transferred to their Chicago office (1961), and then returned to New York, where my parents bought an up-scale house in Larchmont in 1965. Some years later, in the late 1960s, my father was fired in a merger acquisition, and my family learned of the challenges of corporate downsizing. Renouncing the corporate rat-race, my father decided to become a professor, finishing his Ph.D. in communications and teaching at Marshall University in West Virginia, where, coincidentally, my brother had settled after some years in hippie communes to renovate homes, businesses, and public buildings.

My mother had been a high-school Latin and English teacher and there were always books around the house. I was a systematic and scholarly reader, starting with all the Golden Books, and moving up to Classic Comic Books, of which I had an entire collection. I discovered the library in Temple City and read all of the Winnie the Pooh books and then Doctor Doolittle series; I also remember reading and owning a full series of the Hardy Boys mystery books. Later summers, I would systematically read Poe, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and whoever else caught my literary fancy.

My first kiss was from Linda Vickers, daughter of a famous film noir actress, who often sipped drinks on her patio, as Linda and I played and ate peanut-butter sandwiches and drank lemonade. My parents were socializing me to be a good capitalist and protestant, to work hard, and to save money. Family friends and relatives would deposit loose change and an occasional bill in a giant glass piggy bank that I proudly displayed, and one day when friends were over we took my grandfather's hammer and smashed the pig. With the money in hand, we romped through the neighborhood, invited all the neighborhood kids to a party in the candy store, and had a great time until my mother and some neighbors appeared to crush our communist insurrection. I was "discipline" by my father, locked in my room, and told not to share the wealth with my little friends.

This California adventure also came to an end as we moved to Falls Church, Virginia and I learned about race and the South. Many of our neighbors were Southerners who were horrified

that my brother and I did not hunt or fish and tried to properly socialize us into approved masculinity. I tolerated fishing, but abhorred hunting and cannot to this day understand why grown men would want to shoot animals. I could also not understand the prejudices of my neighbors against blacks.

At this time, around 9 or 10 years of age, my literary career began when my parents bought me a hectograph for Christmas and I started printing out a literary journal, Ye Olde Courthouse Digest, an amalgam of my serialized adventure stories, school gossip, and, so I would like to think, social and political commentary. I was active in the community, making Eagle Boy Scout as our local military folks trained us in survivalism and counterinsurgency. I also played Little League baseball, Church basketball, and was an ace in ping pong, badminton, miniature golf, and other sports. I went to Bible Studies in the summer, was head of the Methodist Young Fellowship, and went to church three times a day on Sunday. I also became a young capitalist, waking up every morning to deliver the Washington Post, invested my earnings in the stock market, and eventually saved enough to later finance a year in Paris.

Once again suburban bliss was disrupted when I was about 12 and my parents moved to Valley Stream, New York. Here, I was quickly initiated into multiculturalism and racism when I discovered that the Jews, Italians, Swedes, Irish, and other ethnicities all hated each other and invented a variety of names to call each other that I had never heard of before. I myself was interested in cultural difference and cultivated friends from all of these groups. I was, however, a bit of a freak with a southern accent which I quickly lost and assimilated myself by joining the football and track teams (which saved me from having to get into fights everyday after school).

I discovered New York City at this time and regularly took the bus and subway to Times Square for movies, to the Village to walk around and take in the scene, and to Chinatown to buy fire crackers (I later bought my first ounce of grass in Little Italy). In high school, I read existentialism, liked the beats, and was trying to be cool. I don't remember any teachers or classes that influenced me, except the typing class in the ninth grade, where, the only boy in the class, I learned speed-typing, clearly my most valuable high-school asset. I remember when I was one of ten to win a New York State regents scholarship all of my friends howled with glee and the smart kids were surprised.

My senior year in high school my parents moved to Chicago, I stayed with family friends to finish up and graduate, and in the confusion all of my college acceptances got in too late and I was senior year without a college. My parents had gone to Doane College in Crete, Nebraska, my father was on the Board of Regents there, and I got a full athletic and scholastic scholarship, beginning an academic career that was fully subsidized (although my father made me work in Chicago factories during the summers where I discovered the dubious joys of proletarian existence). I had a philosophy teacher, Robert Browne, who included Erich Fromm and Martin Buber in his curricula, and the beginnings of a Frankfurt school mode of existentialism were sewn. I read Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and the like, and began to self-consciously study philosophy and imagine myself becoming a philosophy professor.

The most eventful college experience was pulling my ankle tendon and ending my track career. The existential void was overwhelming and could only be filled with heavy doses of

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and existential philosophy. A year in Copenhagen in 1963-64 aided my Kierkegaard studies and I also discovered socialism at the foreign student club where my attempts to defend U.S. capitalism and democracy were soundly thrashed. A bad flu and free medicine taught me the rationality of socialized medicine and I also learned the emancipatory possibilities of free love (this was the early 1960s).

My parents returned to New York, and in the summer of 1965 I took courses at the New School, reading Sartre's Being and Nothingness. I was now set on becoming a philosopher and wanted to study in New York, which was increasingly capturing my imagination as the place I wanted most to live. Entreaties from my Uncle Bob to go to Michigan law school and join his corporate law firm fell on deaf ears, as did a proposal from a former neighbor to join AT&S's Junior Executive Program. A Woodrow Wilson fellowship in 1965 got me into Columbia University and I moved to the upper West Side, went to the West End bar every night, and experienced the joys of New York life in the '60s.

Adventures in Continental Philosophy

In 1968, I was studying continental philosophy at Columbia University when the student uprising erupted. My philosophical allegiances at the time were primarily to phenomenology and Existentialism and while I was unprepared for the explosiveness and impact of the student rebellion, I became active in New Left politics, participating in major anti-war demonstrations. Indeed, students all over the United States and Europe were demonstrating against the Vietnam war, taking over University buildings and even campuses, and in Paris in May '68, it appeared that a new French revolution was in the making. To help understand these events, I went back and read the works of Herbert Marcuse and by the time of the publication of **An Essay on Liberation** (1969), I both better understood Marcuse's writings and the philosophical underpinnings of the student movement to which I was increasingly attracted and involved.

In 1969, I left Columbia to write my dissertation on "Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity" with the support of a German government fellowship (DAAD). I choose to pursue this project at the University of Tübingen, in the small southwestern German town where Hegel, Holderlin, Schelling, and other luminaries had studied and which had a reputation as an excellent place to study a broad range of German philosophical traditions. Tübingen was permeated with the spirit of 60s radicalism and I bought pirate editions (Raubdruck) at the University Mensa of Karl Korsch's writings on Marxism, Georg Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness, Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, and other texts of the Frankfurt school. I also became involved in a Critical Theory study group and sat in on Ernst Bloch's seminars, which alternated between seminars on the great philosophers and ones on topics such as imperialism, fascism, and other political topics. From Bloch, among other things, I learned that philosophy was highly political and that politics required philosophical analysis and critique.

Near the end of my research on Heidegger, I picked up Adorno's Jargon der Eigentlichkeit and discovered some early essays by Marcuse on his teacher Heidegger, which carried out a sharp critique of Heidegger's thought and which proposed a synthesis of phenomenological Existentialism and Marxism, of Heidegger and Marx, to overcome the limitations in these traditions. I found Marcuse's critiques of Heidegger convincing and his

proposed amalgamation of Heidegger and Marx fascinating. I also thoroughly investigated Heidegger's relation to National Socialism and thus was not surprised by the later revelations in the Farias, Ott and other volumes on Heidegger's Nazism.

I was thus rapidly moving toward the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, a move intensified by a year in Paris. After two years in Germany, I had more or less completed my dissertation on Heidegger and received a good grounding in German philosophy. I was eager to improve my knowledge of French and to immerse myself in French philosophy and culture. During a thirteen month sojourn in Paris during 1971-1972, subsidized by my paper route savings, I accordingly devoted myself to French language and philosophy, and also drafted the first version of a book on Herbert Marcuse whose work continued to interest me.

While in Paris, I was fortunate to hear the lectures of Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard, and to read their recent works, as well as the texts of Baudrillard, Derrida, and others. Listening to Foucault's lectures was like being in Church, as he intently read from lecture notes in a hushed auditorium. Levi-Strauss was more lively and very friendly when a friend took me to meet him. Deleuze was highly animated and used the blackboard to scribble out his main concepts; I later saw him perform his fabled contrast between modern analytical thought and rhizomic thought at a conference at Columbia in 1975. Lyotard was an extremely engaging lecturer, coming out in blue jeans, lighting up a cigarette, bantering with students about current political events, and then launching into a lecture on Kant or another philosophical theme, usually without notes.

I initially read Derrida as a curious version of Heideggerian philosophy and read Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lyotard as supplementing the Frankfurt School. I saw similar attempts to develop syntheses of Marx, Freud, and critical philosophy in both contemporary German and French thought and did not see the differences as sharp as they appear to many today. Thus, for me it was not a choice of the Germans or French, but of drawing on both traditions to develop new philosophical syntheses.

Upon returning to the States in 1972, I offered myself for sale for a position in continental philosophy at the APA slave market and sold myself to the University of Texas at Austin, where I labored in the area of continental philosophy for some 24 years. I was offered a job teaching Marxist philosophy and my study in Europe gave me a good grounding in the Marxian tradition and made the Texas offer attractive. This choice was fortunate as Texas has a strong tradition in continental philosophy and a pluralistic department that allowed a broad range of different types of philosophical inquiry (although an anti-continental philosophy police squad would emerge and become hegemonic, ending this phase of my philosophical adventures).

In retrospect, I had piled up an enormous amount of cultural capital during my three years in Germany and France that enabled me to write a series of books on both the Frankfurt School and contemporary French thought over the next two decades. My books on critical theory include Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism (1984), Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity (1989), and (with Stephen Bronner) A Critical Theory Reader (1989). My books Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory (1977), Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage (1983), co-edited with Stephen Bronner, Postmodernism/Jameson/ Critique (1989) and the many

articles that I have written on Marx and Marxism were nourished during my two years in Germany and subsequent research trips. My books *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (1989), (with Steven Best), *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (1991), *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*, and (number two with Best) *The Postmodern Turn* (1997) were made possible by the work that I did on French theory during a year in France and subsequent return trips to France.

Consequently, I found a broad range of continental philosophy attractive. And yet I was not happy with the division of Anglo-American philosophy into continental vs. analytical perspectives. While much that passes for analytical philosophy today is abstract, academic, and often useless, much that parades as continental philosophy is dogmatic posturing and pretentious gibberish. But both the tools of conceptual analysis and perspectives of continental philosophy can be applied together in specific tasks and projects. Philosophy, in my optic, is both analysis and synthesis, deconstruction and reconstruction. Consequently, I would defend pluralistic perspectives that draw on the best work on all traditions.

Indeed, it is somewhat ridiculous for philosophers in the United States to worship and fetishize European philosophers whose works developed in a very specific socio-historical environment and whose ideas may or may not be relevant to American conditions. Instead, we should see continental philosophy as an important tradition whose ideas can be rethought, reconstructed, and developed in new ways in our own unique historical situation. Our own tradition of American philosophy also has some important resources, and in recent work, as I note below, I find Dewey and pragmatism to be of growing importance and would argue that we need to take seriously American traditions of philosophy, and see what insights and contributions are found in our native traditions.

Media Culture, the Public Sphere, and U.S. Politics

In the mid-1970s I was involved in Marxist studies groups at the University of Texas at Austin. After going through key Marxian texts, including the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, we decided to study American political economy and in particular television. We saw corporate control of television, à la the Frankfurt school, as a major source of corporate hegemony, but we were also impressed with the Trilateral Commission report that the media, universities, and other institutions were promoting too much democracy and threatening corporate hegemony, and we wondered what we could do to contribute to this crisis for capital. Our group became involved in alternative media and were given a chance to do a weekly public access TV show, Alternative Views. Accordingly, from 1978 to the mid-1990s, Frank Morrow, myself and others religiously taped hour-long interview and documentary programs, that were eventually syndicated around the United States, and briefly made me a celebrity in New York City, where the program was shown several times per week on the NY access channels. This project helped me to become a Deweyan public intellectual, and to apply philosophical notions and abilities to issues of public concern in a public forum.

I also became involved in cultural studies in the 1970s and have remained active in this field through the present. Around 1976, I wrote Stuart Hall who was head of the then little-known Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham England, asking about his

work and his program. Stuart sent a three-page single-spaced typed letter and a stack of his Centre's fabled stencilled papers and my media study group devoured them. The combination of philosophy, social theory, and cultural studies that I was engaged in eventually produced a series of works.

As noted, I have long tried to synthesize German and French traditions, rather than to oppose them, and this project animated a book co-authored with Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (1988). The idea was to combine critical theory and post-structuralist methods to interrogate the politics and ideology of Hollywood film. My two books on television also drew on both German and French traditions, but attempted to rethink the problematics of the Frankfurt school critique of the culture industries through a concrete study of American television. This project informed my *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990) and *The Persian Gulf TV War* (1992). In all of these texts, I use philosophy as providing weapons of critique and tools of analysis that can be applied to concrete issues and problems.

I thus do not use philosophy as abstract dogmas to be religiously worshipped, but as a body of living thought to apply to contemporary problems and issues. The best of continental philosophy is critical and dialogical (i.e. Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, et al), and its major thinkers have often drawn on the most productive elements of their predecessors, while overcoming those aspects that are no longer useful or relevant.

I have continued to apply the insights and methods of philosophy to a vast array of cultural phenomena and my book *Media Culture: On Cultural Studies: Politics, Identity, and Society Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995) attempted to reconceptualize the project of cultural studies by using the tools of philosophy and critical social theory. Within cultural studies, I have argued for a multiperspectival model that combines political economy, textual analysis, and study of audience reception and media effects. The various philosophical positions I have studied — ranging from Marxism to feminism to poststructuralism — can be applied to the interpretation and critique of cultural and political phenomena and contribute to developing a critical, multicultural, and political cultural studies.

New Technologies, New Literacies, and the Reconstruction of Education

The Austin adventures came to an end in the mid-1990s when George W. Bush became Governor of Texas and a rightwing cabal took over the UT-Philosophy Department. Austin had been a great place to live with a vibrant counterculture and political culture and for decades the University of Texas had been an excellent location to teach. But as the University became more rightwing during the Bush years, many of us saw the (w)righting-on-the-wall, saw Austin and UT drowning in the sewer of corruption and mediocrity that distinguished Bush family politics, and decided to move on, leaving Texas to the Bushites.

Fortunately, a job at UCLA materialized and I joined the UCLA Graduate School of Education in 1997, along with Sandra Harding who also appears in this volume. Ironically, many of those who I consider the top philosophers of my generation have left philosophy departments, raising some serious questions about the contemporary institutional status of philosophy. On the

whole, it seems like contemporary American philosophy seems frozen, in a state of paralysis. While the dominant analytical philosophy suffers from theoretical sclerosis, a hardening of the categories, and undergoing a slow public and academic death, the situation of continental philosophy is also dispiriting. In the 1980s, it looked as though contemporary philosophy was entering a fruitful state of pluralism with a blossoming of continental philosophy, mutating into "Theory," crossing over into every discipline. On the philosophical frontlines, there was also a reappropriation of Dewey and pragmatism, of other strands of American philosophy, as well as the move into new fields such as feminism, African American and Latino philosophy, philosophy of technology, environmental philosophy, philosophical media studies, and the philosophy of electronic culture and communication.

These trends continue within the broader philosophical-intellectual world, but often not in philosophy departments, and they have been pushed to the margins of the academic discipline of philosophy. Most distressing, not only has reaction and retrenchment set in with analytic philosophy, but continental philosophy is segregating itself into circles in which specific philosophers are revered as the Voice of Truth, of the revered Word. Thus the ontotheological dimension of philosophy that Derrida decried has its Renaissance in schools of contemporary philosophy. Living philosophy, however, is always synthesis, always in motions, always taking in the novel, absorbing challenging ideas, trends, and theories, constantly developing and reshaping philosophy, in dialogue with other disciplines and contemporary culture and experiences.

During my several years of service at UCLA as George F. Kneller Chair in the Philosophy of Education, I have focused on researching the relevance of new technologies to education, politics, and everyday life, as well as continuing work in philosophy, social theory, and cultural studies. I have published an article on new technologies and new literacies in Educational Theory, several articles on multimedia and new forms of textuality in various books and journals, and a series of articles on the Internet and politics. A Blackwell reader Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks, co-edited with Gigi Durham (2001), contributes to my work in cultural studies while my work on alternative media continues with a biographical introduction and collection of writings, Art and Politics: An Emile de Antonio Reader, co-edited with Dan Streible (2000).

In addition, I have produced three web sites for courses in technology and society, cultural studies, and philosophy of education, as well as helping to develop websites on postmodern theory and critical theory. I would like to eventually bring together this research to produce a book on New Technologies and New Literacies: Challenges for the Millennium, that would follow the Deweyan project of democratizing education as an instrument of progressive social transformation.

Whereas much of the dominant literature on the new technologies tends to be either celebratory or derogatory, I provide what I intend to be a balanced appraisal of the costs and benefits of deploying new technologies. In particular, in debates concerning whether books or computer data bases and resources provide the basis for contemporary education, I mediate between these extremes, arguing that education today should be based on a balance between book material and new computer and multimedia-based material. Likewise, I argue that

traditional literacy in print culture and traditional skills of reading and writing are more important than ever today, but that we need to teach new literacies to supplement the skills of the past.

Moreover, I am articulating the discourses of democracy, globalization, and new technologies in several projects including a book The Postmodern Adventure, co-authored with Steven Best (2001). We are currently working on the dialectics of biotechnology with studies on cloning and stem cell research. Bioethics appears as a vital field within contemporary culture, as new biotechnologies emerge and transform the very nature of human beings.

Finally, I have continued my work in critical theory with two published collections of the writings of Herbert Marcuse Toward a Critical Theory of Society (2001) Technology, War, and Fascism (1998). I was chosen to edit Marcuse's unpublished and/or uncollected texts by Peter Marcuse and am currently preparing a volume on Marcuse and the New Left, returning to an era and texts that deeply influenced me.

These projects were rudely interrupted by the theft of the presidency by George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election. I was appalled and stunned that this totally unqualified candidate would emerge as president of the United States and close scrutiny of the Battle for the White House led me to conclude that the theft of election 2000 was one of the great crimes of U.S. history. I accordingly put aside all other work and wrote a study of Grand Theft 2000 that will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in the Fall of 2001.

Concluding Comments

Ultimately, my philosophical adventures provided me with the conditions of the possibility of seeing philosophy as an adventure that contains the dimensions of all the traditional domains of philosophy, as well as social theory, cultural criticism, and social and political critique. While some analytic philosophers develop their arguments in journal articles or books, often focusing on very narrow topics, the great continental thinkers provide vast philosophical vistas that include philosophy of history, metaphysics, social theory, aesthetics, ethics, politics, and other normative concerns. The major continental philosophers were concerned with the key issues of their day, focusing on the problems of the present age, and drawing on the relevant sciences, ideas, and discourses of their period.

I share this focus on today and its problems -- a perspective also found in Dewey and American pragmatism. In this sense, I suppose, my work is very much in the tradition of the Frankfurt School which transcended narrow disciplinary boundaries and undertook studies of a vast array of contemporary phenomena from supradisciplinary perspectives. This project continues to appeal to me, as does its attempt to relate theory to practice, to politicize theory, and to make it an instrument of social action -- as illustrated by my recent book **Grand Theft 2000**. Thus, rather than seeing the end of philosophy in a postmodern turn, I see philosophy as confronting novel challenges in an era of new media, technologies, cultural forms, and political configurations and believe that the adventure of philosophy can best carry on by engaging these phenomena.

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