BOOK REVIEWS

The Writer and the World: Essays. By V.S. Naipaul. Introduced and edited by Pankaj Mishra. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. xv, 524 pages. $39.95.

If we are to travel with V.S. Naipaul, we must accept, at the onset of the journey, that our preconceived notions about life in the postcolonial world–no matter how fashionable—will inevitably be dashed. Moreover, this will be done with the elegance, restraint, and crispness that makes the 2001 Nobel laureate the most polished prose stylist writing in English today. Consider what Naipaul reveals, and thus what we must see and accept, about the identity of a beautiful singer at an Easter Mass in Argentina. "You had to go quite far up, through the people standing, before you saw that the woman with the pure voice was a young Indian nun, short, her head covered, with the skirt of her modern habit falling not far below the knees of her bow legs. And with everything one felt here about the wonder of Spain, and the Spanish civilities of Salta, there came, at the sight of the young Indian nun, who had made peace with the world in her own way, a contrary judgement about the enduring cruelty of the Spanish conquest." Rather than bemoan the sorry fate of a native woman suffering the double yoke of imperial and religious domination, Naipaul admits the simple splendour and delicate dignity of the moment. A young woman taking personal responsibility for righting the wrongs done to her by the larger world has achieved this single "wonder of Spain" in an otherwise chaotic Argentina. And it has been discovered by a commentator willing to make "a contrary judgement" about how the nun has made her peace, a willingness indicative of both the complicated legacies of colonialism and the fierce honesty that has made Naipaul more feared than loved in many literary and cultural circles. But in this brief, bracing moment from "Argentina and the Ghost of Eva Perón," one of the longer selections in Naipaul's majestic new collection of essays, we realize why he is the foremost contributor to the English-speaking world's travelogue of its past wrongs and present problems. His authorial presence, as complex as the many places to which he has travelled, balances acidic critique with humane evocation, making him our finest, our most universal witness to the difficult wonders of this world.

Measuring Naipaul's non-fiction career from the 1960s through the early 1990s, this collection testifies both to his impressive *oeuvre* outside the substantial body of his fiction, and often enough, to the intertwining of these two modes of writing. We can trace unmistakable thematic and stylistic parallels between many essays and novels, such as the pieces from the second section of the collection, "Africa and Diaspora" and the roughly contempo-

rary novels *The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), and *A Bend in the River* (1979). This interleaving occurs on a small scale too; in the collection's most affecting moments, Naipaul combines the novelist's eye for the perfect detail with the journalist's nose for the uncommon story, Jamesian touches elevating his writing from mere reportage. A corrupt Argentinean union man peruses a book with "the tips of ringed fingers wetted on the tongue" before he turns the pages; a craven Frenchman mounts an oblique but grotesque advance on a tired, dulled African woman in an Abidjan café.

These rough-cut gems are set within a larger project: exploring the political and cultural landscape of countries that are newly-independent from their imperial masters. In such settings, Naipaul repeatedly bleeds the hypocritical, the pathetic, the debilitating, and, often enough, the blatantly absurd that is so undeniably, and unfortunately, characteristic of such places. Offering the literary equivalent of forensic analyses of the careers of African "Big Men" such as Mobutu Sese Seko, Naipaul shows us how "the borrowed ideas—about colonialism and alienation, the consumer society and the decline in the West—are made to serve the African cult of authenticity; and the dream of an ancestral past restored is allied to a dream of a future magical power. The confusion is not new, and is not peculiar to Zaire." Indeed, this confusion has a global reach: Naipaul debunks the terror behind magical crocodiles in the Ivory Coast; exposes the murderous greed of Black Power charlatans in Trinidad; uncovers the bald self-interest of political masquerade in India. Early in "Power?", a 1970 investigation of politics and Carnival in Caribbean islands, he provides a shorthand analysis for the method behind such madness: "Make-believe, but taken seriously, and transformed."

Throughout the years and across the waters, Naipaul's critique has rested upon certain premises that he shows us are universal in their existence and central in their usage for politicians and intelligentsia who seek to fill the power vacuums created by the imperial retreat. Hollow mimicry of Western practices, unceasing sense of victimization, institutionalized penchant for protest, collective conceptions of individuals that avoid the spectre of personal responsibility—these are the means by which the unscrupulous continue and intensify the plight of the formerly-colonized in India, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Against these constrictions, Naipaul constantly champions a dignified, at-times defiant, and ever-resilient individualism, which Pankaj Mishra nicely describes in a helpful introduction as producing "a melancholy undertow to the vigorous humanism of his essays."

Naipaul himself, spanning the space between problem and solution, is a testament to the possibilities available to individuals willing to take responsibility for their lives instead of blaming History and the White Man for their ills. He conveys these potentialities persuasively in the collection's closing piece, a lecture entitled "Our Universal Civilization." Here, as throughout—excepting the comparatively flat pieces on American culture—Naipaul challenges easy pretexts and proposes unsettling premises (particularly regarding Islamic culture). Faintly underlying his at-times overwhelming cyni-

cism, however, is an unmistakably genuine belief in the inherent dignity of the human person. Naipaul seems a perfect fulfilment of Ralph Ellison's view "that man at his best, when he's set in all the muck and confusion of life and continues to struggle for his ideals, is near sublime." Today, we can find no finer representative of such sublimity than V.S. Naipaul: again and again, he returns from his travels with word of the deep glow of the human spirit, still burning in a scuffed and scarred world.

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John Macmurray: A Biography. By John E Costello. Edinburgh: Floris, 2002. 436 pages. £20.00.

This first full-scale biography of John Macmurray is very welcome. Macmurray, "the last of the great Scottish humanists," is perhaps best known as the guru of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In truth the relationship between Blair and Macmurray is ambiguous. And anyhow Macmurray is too significant a figure to be forever noticed only as a political footnote.

John Costello's book provides a rich and rewarding introduction to Macmurray's life and thought. In part, through extensive and deft use of unpublished correspondence and papers, Costello traces the changing contours of Macmurray's life. On almost every page new insights and facts are brought into the public realm for the first time. Macmurray comes before us as a somewhat over-serious, introverted and even pompous youth. The flowering of his early romance with Betty, later his wife, was frustrated by his somewhat idealized view of love, which stood at variance with Betty's altogether more down-to-earth expectations. The development of Macmurray's thought during his studies at Glasgow and Oxford are traced. During this time Macmurray moved away from the evangelical religion that he had imbibed as a youth. But he never rejected Christianity as such. Indeed, Macmurray's entire work was, as Costello shows, an attempt to express the enduring significance of religion. The flip side of this was Macmurray's keen awareness of the possible social implications of the decline of religion. Whilst no lover of the churches, which he saw as inveterate purveyors of insincere religion, Macmurray argued that a secular society might be one that would lose sight of the profound questions traditionally tackled by religion. A secular society might, through the quest for technological achievement and material prosperity, fail to ask the fundamental question about what makes life worth living.

Macmurray's life and thought, as Costello traces them, were decisively influenced by his experience as a combatant in the Great War. His encounter with death and chaos on the Western Front left him with a profound sense that Western society was morally and religiously bankrupt. He dedicated his life thereafter to seeking out the source and remedies of the sickness. The

problem he identified as the inability to marry freedom and responsibility. The solution was to be found in a rigorous examination of the intellectual foundations of society, through the construction of a more inclusive vision of the relation of all of human knowledge and culture and in the cultivation of communities of friendship. In such communities persons would be motivated by self-giving love for others and, in principle, none would be excluded. They would be marked by mutuality and freedom. Justice would be the backbone of such communities, but the heart would be friendship.

These were not simply theories that Macmurray expounded in his classrooms in Oxford, London and Edinburgh. He first learned that love could transform and liberate through his intense relationship with Betty, his wife. Betty and he shared an 'open marriage' and from this he learned of the personal struggles involved in living out a relationship marked by trust and equality. Moreover, beyond his professional work as a philosopher, he immersed himself in progressive educational projects, religious discussions and political movements, all with the purpose of overcoming conflict and the fear that drives it.

Costello's book places before the reader a man who was a fascinating combination of the quixotic and the profound. Many of his ideas resonate with the needs of the contemporary world and the views of its most prescient commentators. Some of his actions and words were touchingly adolescent. At the age of 41, for instance, he dreamed of setting up a community that might take over the governance of Europe after the coming crisis that he foresaw. But these two sides of Macmurray are the traits of the religious prophet, and that was the role in which Macmurray was most at home. During his war service, Macmurray experienced a vision of sorts in which he was told he would not be harmed for he would "help remake the world." John Costello's well-written book describes a man whose ideas still have a role to play in building a truly human society.

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Collected Works of George Grant. Volume 1 (1933–50). Edited by Arthur Davis and Peter C. Emberley. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000. xxxvii, 501 pages. $75.00

The University of Toronto Press and editors Arthur Davis and Peter Emberley have undertaken a great service to Canadian letters in commencing what is to be an eight-volume *Collected Works* of the Canadian philosopher and public thinker (and former Professor of Dalhousie University), George Grant. The series proposed would incorporate not only the whole of Grant's published works, but also selections from his unpublished writings. If this volume has set the standard for the rest, then we can be confident that we will have the definitive standard edition of Grant's writings. The editorial work is painstak-

ing without being intrusive; for example, all the references to figures and events that Grant alludes to are fully and helpfully documented, yet one can read Grant's words directly and easily. For those wishing a thorough and complete sense of the whole compass and development of Grant's writings, this is a splendid achievement.

However, it surely has not escaped the editors of this volume that there is a certain irony in producing such a comprehensive edition of Grant's writings. At the very least, Grant had an ambiguous relation to academic scholarship; in a 1980 letter to *The Globe and Mail* he explained his resignation from McMaster University as partly due to a growing trend in academic life to "museum culture." Clearly the editors of this volume see Grant's thought as anything but dead: in fact it is their love of Grant's thinking that has drawn the editors to compile this collection of Grant's earliest writings—writings that preceded the works that made him famous. But surely Grant himself would bring to our attention that the forces of technology generally and the academic industry more specifically can be furthered even where one's intentions are otherwise.

George Grant (1918–88) was born into a prominent Toronto family with ties to a number of the most prestigious educational institutions in the country. His father was the principal of Upper Canada College; one grandfather was president of Queen's University, the other oversaw the Rhodes Scholarship Trust. His uncle was Vincent Massey, the first Canadian-born Governor General; another uncle was a major force in the federal Conservative Party. Grant was born not only into prominence and privilege, but also into expectation and mission. He was heir to a now almost forgotten English Canadian nationalism. For Grant's grandparents, the role of Canada was evidently to support and uphold the British Empire as a force of civilization, humanity and progressive Christian liberalism. In this identification with the Empire, Canada's difference from the great republic to the south was also established. However, for Grant's father, the easy identification of the good and the British Empire was touched by an ambivalence born in the trenches of the first World War. The most evident sign of this ambivalence was Grant's father's pacifism, which was important in shaping Grant's own responses when he was faced with the World War of his own generation.

In the 1950s and then most spectacularly in the 1960s with *Lament for a Nation*, Grant would emerge as one of the most radical and compelling critics of his own society, above all of the technological dynamism that came to grip it. In *Lament for a Nation* (1965), he famously declared the end of Canada as a country standing apart from the dynamism of the United States. While Grant was lamenting the end of his country and with that the sense of distinctive purpose which his upbringing had led him to discern for it, his reflections were deeper than the regret for the passing of a certain way of life. Grant saw revealed in his lamentation an insight into the very way of being that is modernity. He saw in modernity and its technological ontology an age of deprival and of darkness. This insight into the dark character of modern

life required of Grant that he break with the tradition of his upbringing where he found a too easy identification of God and history in the doctrine of historical progress, which in turn was too readily identified with the development of the British Empire. Grant recognized, rather, a radical separation between the realm of the Good and the realm of necessity or historical existence. When one thinks of George Grant as a public figure, it is above all the Grant of the 1960s, 70s and 80s who dominates: the one who had already made this break with the doctrine of progress and so was able to articulate such devastating reflections on the darkness inherent in modern life, together with an insight, brought forth out of that very darkness, of the deep beauty of the world illuminated by divine love.

When reading the writings collected in this first volume of the *Collected Works*, one cannot but think that Grant is not yet writing in his own voice. From that point of view these writings are not, in themselves—with the exception of the Journal of 1942—of abiding interest. The largest part of the volume consists in the reproduction of Grant's DPhil thesis, a study of the now largely-neglected Presbyterian theologian John Oman's major work, *The Natural and the Supernatural*. The rest of the volume is comprised of a set of reflections upon Canada, adult education, and various book reviews—going back to Grant's days as an undergraduate at Queen's University—and in an appendix some works of poetry and prose from his schoolboy days at Upper Canada College. For those seeking to approach Grant's thought for the first time, none of this is the place to begin. These writings have a dated character largely absent from his later work.

However, for those familiar with the fully-matured Grant, all of these writings are fascinating and of the greatest interest: what we see at work here is a young thinker seeking to hold together in one personality both something of his upbringing, and his lived experiences of the horrors of the second World War, including his religious conversion born in the midst of those horrors. Reading through the lens of Grant's later writings we can find two elements in conflict: on the one side, a desire to preserve the conservative progressive vision in which Canada played a key role in the British Empire as the way to a more humane future (Grant's 1945 paper, "The Empire—Yes or No?" is exemplary of this tendency); and on the other side, a perception of the unrequitable horror and suffering that humans can experience and indeed impose upon one another. This latter tendency is especially and most effectively evident in entries to a journal Grant kept in 1942 when he was home from England recovering from both tuberculosis and the nervous trauma he experienced as a result of the London Blitz.

In one sense Grant's later theological vision is already fully present here. The war has shown to him the need to affirm without reduction or compromise both the suffering of the world to the point of affliction and the beauty and goodness of God. For Grant, these two irreducibles are supremely, but impenetrably united in Christ's crucifixion. All of this is taken up in his DPhil thesis. But in the writings of the period up to and including his thesis,

there is still an assumption that this theology of the cross can be related to positive human institutions and forms: Canada, the British Empire, the cause of democratic socialism. What has not yet appeared in Grant is the perception that there is at work in modern historical life a reality that is related to the Good neither in a contingent nor in a dialectical way, but as a fatality that necessarily darkens our intimations of the Good. It is in the 1950s and early 1960s, through a deepening of his thinking and through his encounters with the writings of Simone Weil especially, that Grant will break from his received assumption that modern historical forms can mediate the Good.

This first volume of Grant's *Collected Works* is helpful in giving us an insight into the struggle and stages his thinking required before his writings emerged in their publicly recognized form. These texts also give us insight into the sources of the distinctive voice Grant came to have. Grant is not alone as a critic of modernity and technology; he is not alone as a theologian who sees a contradiction between modernity and the requirements of Christ's charity. What is unique in Grant's voice is that his conservative, anti-modern standpoint is neither easy nor high-handed, but rather born of failed hopes, uneasy struggles and a traumatized sense of charity. One source of the lilting, lamenting, noble character of Grant's later writings, which can be seen in the writings gathered in this volume, is his sense that the realm of modern historical life ought to be a place of goodness and truth, and yet it is not and may not be; the other source arises in later years when he comes to see that, fatally, it cannot be.

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The English Prophets: A Critical Defence of English Criticism. By Ian Robinson. Norfolk: Edgeways Books, 2001. 336 pages. £30.00.

Looking at the dust jacket on *The English Prophets* for the first time, I wondered whether the publisher had any specific reasons for choosing the screaming bright red-orange colour. Now having read the book, I know why; the colour is surely meant to transport readers into a plaza de toros by invoking the idea of a bullfighter's cape, with Robinson as the matador trying to antagonize the academy. And the audience at the corrida will not be disappointed, because the forcefulness of Robinson's arguments leave the bull little choice but to charge.

In the comments on the inside of the dust jacket, we are told that Robinson "admires and loves the critics who are his subjects, and... is on the inside of the tradition." The tradition to which Robinson belongs can be judged from the critics he admires and the theorists he denounces. *The English Prophets* is a vital attempt to continue the tradition established by Johnson, Carlyle, Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Lawrence, and Leavis, who "are the articulators of the best judgements of the English language" (17). The argument of the book

is extremely ambitious. Robinson's "critical defence of English criticism" is an inquiry into the problems of judgement, culture, language, tradition, religion, and nationhood. And the book succeeds, in more than one sense, in continuing the tradition of English criticism that Robinson admires and examines at length.

The premise of Robinson's argument is the analogy made between the prophets in the Bible and the English authors he discusses. In the introduction, the importance of judgement is established and the analogy between the Biblical prophets and the English critics is made explicit. Robinson defines a prophet as someone "unusually open to the inspirational elements of judgement, who speaks judgement loud and clear enough to be heard" (12). Prophets rely upon a community capable of responding to their judgements, whether they be accepted or not. The hearing is as important as the speaking, because there must be a "sufficient community of judgement" to make the "common pursuit of true judgement" possible (17). Robinson asks us to consider whether "the day of prophesy" is truly over, or if there is a way of continuing "Arnold-like ways of thinking and thereby transfiguring our present life" (18). But the argument is qualified by the recognition of a central flaw running through the tradition of English criticism which Coleridge puzzled over, but became explicit in Arnold's thought. Robinson argues that:

> In the study of poetry Arnold hopes that religious ends will follow from aesthetic means; but the relation between poetry and virtue cannot be anything like one of cause and effect. We may indeed find in poetry an ever surer stay, but only if we begin by bringing a surer stay to the poetry. However much they need each other there is still a difference between poetry and religion. (33–34)

Robinson confesses that he is reading the English critical tradition through T.S. Eliot's idea that judgements must be from within a "definite ethical and theological standpoint" (Eliot, quoted by Robinson, 240). The relationship between religion and literature is the central problem, leading to very uncomfortable questions about whether culture can exist by excluding one or the other while the influences of both remain present in our language and our values. Can we simply ignore the influence of Christianity on our literature and culture after two millennia? Robinson thinks it highly doubtful.

The first part of the book, "The Nineteenth Century and After," divides the criticism of the century into two camps: the greater prophets and the lesser prophets. The lesser prophets (Mill, George Eliot, Gosse, Stephen, and Hardy) are grouped into a chapter entitled "The Liberal Auto-Destruct" in which Robinson examines how each author's relation to and thought about religion affected his or her judgement. Robinson's wit and humour is wonderful, especially in exposing the problems and absurdities in the critics' thought, such as: Mill's arguments which mistake proof of celestial objects for a proof

of God; and George Eliot's propensity to become intoxicated on sentimentality, and "inventing a religion ... as the opium of the aching minded intellectual" (105). In the third part of the book, "Judgement Now," the chapter entitled "False Prophets: the Modern Attack on English Criticism" is the most devastating (and fun to read). Robinson launches an attack on a selection of postmodern theorists including Catherine Belsey, Terry Eagleton, and Anthony Easthorpe for their "dislike and distrust of judgement" while evincing "absolutely no doubt of their own right to judge" (15). For Robinson, these theorists are the decadence and decline of English criticism, committing a slow suicide wherein merely blaming without refuting ideas and Aunt Sally arguments are the norm. He carefully dismantles the theorists' attempts to transform the discipline of English language and literature into "cultural studies" by exposing their demands for a politics of change and for breaking from outdated common sense as a will to nonsense. The truth and humour of Conrad's remark that "all the damned professors are radicals" is made wonderfully alive here. I would like to quote long passages from this chapter out of pure enjoyment; however, I want to turn to the second section, "Leavis and Lawrence vs. Eliot," to discuss briefly how completely Robinson reveals himself as being "on the inside of the tradition."

Early in the book, Robinson explains that "it is in the nature of the tradition ... [that] to participate in it a defense has to be a critical defense" (18). I agree. And Robinson is right in thinking that "influence is often registered as resistance by the influenced" (77). Hazlitt and Carlyle's resistance to Johnson, Arnold's resistance to Carlyle, T.S. Eliot's resistance to Arnold, and Leavis's resistance to T.S. Eliot: recognizing this chain of influence and resistance, which manifests itself at each stage as a kind of critical ambivalence, is very important to understanding the tradition of English criticism. So Robinson is only half right when he confesses that "T.S. Eliot is influential enough on my argument not to need much detailed discussion: his thought can be seen in most of what I am saying" (237). It would be more correct to add Leavis and Lawrence's names, but Robinson does not, because those are the two critics who are haunting his thought and judgement. The chapters on Lawrence and Leavis are the heart of the book, wherein Robinson articulates some necessary reservations concerning the weaknesses in their thought. Robinson criticizes Lawrence's tendency to overvalue individual, spontaneous judgement as absolute, and discusses various flaws in Leavis's work, culminating in a criticism of his arguments about T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. These chapters also register Robinson's attempts to resist their influence. Robinson is quite decisive in his arguments concerning the weaknesses in their thought, but offers little evidence to justify thinking "D.H. Lawrence the best literary critic we ever had" (159), his being "the greatest genius amongst our prophets" (324), or that "Leavis was the prophet to [England] in the 1960s and 1970s" (236), because "there was nobody else to show us English criticism" (235). It is strange to read Robinson trying to use Eliot's ideas about tradition while exposing the flaw in English criticism after commenting on

Eliot's failure to understand tradition in his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Robinson's resistance to Leavis and Lawrence leads him into difficulties he cannot avoid; he wants to think that Eliot might be right in his ideas about religion and criticism while knowing that Lawrence is the last writer of importance in the great tradition. If Robinson really believes that "Lawrence's great work is the end of the story Shakespeare started" (181), then he must explain how Eliot relates to that tradition. And while Robinson is right to argue that Leavis's work is greatly indebted to Eliot, he must explain why Leavis's greatest work was only made possible after he published *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, and made a break from Eliot's influence. These days, everyone attacks Leavis and Lawrence; Robinson could have been more fair in his critical defence by giving us more evidence for why criticism cannot survive without the continued influence of the greatest critics of the last century.

The English Prophets is an important book by an intelligent critic, and I hope Robinson publishes the promised sequel on English literature and judgement in the near future.

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Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty. By Isaiah Berlin. Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002. xvi, 182 pages. $24.95 US.

Isaiah Berlin, the celebrated Oxford don and Russian-born intellectual, died in 1997. This posthumous work—the latest in a series edited by Henry Hardy, one of Berlin's literary trustees—is of considerable historical interest. It recreates the six radio lectures delivered over the BBC in 1952 which first made Berlin known to the public outside academia. Devoting each lecture to a different anti-liberal theorist, Berlin defended and promoted an idea central to classical liberal thought: that human liberty means nothing but the absence of interference. In other words, liberty is inconsistent with norms and values imposed on individuals either externally by a given society or internally by some criterion of universal reason.

In defending this "fundamentally negative concept of freedom," Berlin had in mind the kind of view typical of Hobbes, Locke and the great majority of Anglo-French thinkers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but he referred his listeners particularly to "the great classical thesis—the essay on liberty by John Stuart Mill, which to this day remains the most eloquent, the most sincere and the most convincing plea for individual freedom ever uttered" (52). The reference is a helpful one. Berlin's lectures do in fact throw light on the significance of Mill's philosophy and supplement his plea for individual freedom with succinct criticisms of Helvétius, Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Saint-Simon and de Maistre. These thinkers, Berlin

argued, formulated theories of freedom that betrayed individual liberty by advocating more, not less, coercion and restraint.

This classical thesis no doubt had a different impact on Berlin's Cold War audience than on Mill's Victorian one. It was a time cruelly marked by Soviet expansionism and the decline of the European national states. In part, Berlin offered his British listeners a vindication of the customs and habits of their own greater past. In part, he gave them new insight into competing and even incompatible principles, insisting that "true freedom" is "the ability to choose as you wish to choose, because you wish so to choose," without the sanction or support of a comprehensive social order or an all-embracing theory (103–04).

This may be why Berlin's concept of liberty found a ready-made audience in Britain fifty years ago. Friends and critics alike could find in it a very contemporary European preoccupation with both a vanishing past and a seemingly open future. Looking back, it is perhaps easier for us to see that the weakness of Berlin's liberalism lay hidden in the gap between the past and the future. For the concept of freedom he affirmed is one that individuals cannot possibly possess in the present. It is a freedom that is constantly transcending the immediately present social order, negating universal principles of action and withdrawing into itself. But is this not—as Jean-Paul Sartre would have observed—an impossible freedom, a freedom that is hopelessly dependent on that to which it is opposed, a freedom whose betrayal is the necessary result of its own activity?

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