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by: Doreen Atkinson

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CITY, STATE AND CITIZENSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA:

TOWARDS A NORMATIVE APPROACH

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South African historiography is ripe for change. Since the emergence of revisionism in the 1960s, South African politics has been studied using certain hitherto unquestioned assumptions. The radical paradigm has been responsible for extraordinary insights in South African political and historical analysis; however, also it needs to be transcended in important ways. It is the aim of this paper to subject these assumptions to critical scrutiny, and to develop an alternative approach to the study of political phenomena in South Africa - an approach from the perspective of 'political morality'. To some extent, I will have to overstate my case - most notably by underplaying the important dynamics of conflict and coercion. I feel this is legitimate however, because these issues have occupied, unchallenged, the centre stage in political analysis in this country. After a review of the existing literature and some theoretical comments, I will apply the notion of 'political morality' to a specific historical context, viz. township administration in South African cities during the 1950s.

A. Realism, functionalism and Hobbesianism: Common themes in contemporary South African political analysis

During the 1970s, the prevailing 'liberal' or 'reformist' approach to South African political analysis was decisively dethroned by the materialist assumptions of the revisionist school. In the last two decades, the revisionists and their successors, the state-centric theorists and the ideology-critics (all of whom I gather under the term 'radical tradition'), have interpreted political reality from several key assumptions:

a) Realism: The revisionists were methodological realists, in the technical sense that they distinguished between several layers of reality. Causal power was attributed to underlying, usually invisible, structures and forces. Consequently, revisionists adopted a posture which has been described as the **'hermeneutics of suspicion'**, a view that holds that actorsd do not have direct access to the meaning of their discourse and practices, and that our everyday meanings work to cover up a deeper kind of intellegibility [1]. For this reason, methodological realists (and

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[1]. The term is originally Paul Ricoeur's. It is discussed by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, University of Chicago Press,1983; p. 123.

especially those with a materialist bent) had very little respect for what 'ordinary people's consciousnesses have to say for themselves' [2].

For revisionists, social analysis was used to destroy putative masks and illusions in a relentless effort at 'demystification'. Thge revisionists' main theoretical innovation was their portrayal of apartheid ideology was seen as a mask for more fundamental practices, notably capitalist exploitation.

b) Function, structure and agency

A second claim made by revisionists was that underlying economic forces were actually functional to the maintenance of racial segregation [3]. In the light of this assumption, revisionists have concluded, illogically, that segregation has served the interests of specific sectors of society. This argument contains two logical fallacies: (1) the fallacy of division and (2) the fallacy of imputation. We will comment briefly on these two problems.

First, as regards the fallacy of **division** [4]: The claim that something is functional to a system as a whole does not mean that it is functional to a segment of the whole. Functionalism is a form of teleological inquiry: social practices are explained with reference to the systemic functions they serve. To reduce the concept of systemic function to that of the function to serve the interests of specific social sectors is quite unwarranted.

Second, this has often led to a confusion between **interpretation** (saying what a policy or a practice means) and **imputation**

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2. Peter Sloterdijk, Critique of Cynical Reason, New York: Verso Books, 1988. He provides an extended critique of different kinds of 'cynical reason', most notably Marxism and Freudianism.

3. A critique of the functionalism inherent in the revisionist paradigm is provided in D. Posel, 'Rethinking the "race-class debate" in South African historiography', in Social Dynamics, vol. 9, no. 1, 1983. Unfortunately her analysis improves the revisionists' account merely by adding the notion of 'dysfunction', thus leaving the theoretical constraints of the paradigm virtually intact.

4. The claim that a characteristic applicable to a whole is also applicable to individual parts of the whole. An analogy is the claim that the functional effect of AIDS on population control in a society can be translated to the interests of specific members of that society.

(attributing a particular motive to a social actor) [5]. In revisionist historiography, this illogical shift has often been made. Despite revisionists' claims, the fact that racial segregation was functional to capitalism does not imply that segregation was introduced with the conscious motive of promoting capitalism [6]. The notion of function has been allowed to lapse into the concept of individual **motive**.

From these logical errors, it was a short move to developing an understanding of human motivation based on the notion of **interest-maximisation**. According to revisionists, capitalists must be analysed from the perspective that they are always busily promoting their interests, making rational calculations, making alliances, worrying about their labour supplies, and generally promoting the conditions for accumulation of capital. This approach remained 'realist', since it was deemed that political phenomena were reducible to 'underlying interests'. Terms such as 'control', 'exploitation', 'needs of capital', 'mobilised capital', 'onslaughts', 'dominant and subordinate classes', 'interests', 'material needs', 'accumulation', 'domination' and 'hegemony' became an insistent litany of any respectable radical social research in South Africa. Political analysts have adopted, in Peter Sloterdijk's terms, an attitude of **cynical reason**, ever-intent on exposing layer upon layer of 'egoisms, class privileges, resentments, steadfastness of hegemonic powers' [7].

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5. I am endebted to Dave Christianson for this distinction.

6. This point is made by John Plamenatz, Man and Society (Vol. 2), London: Longman, 1963; pp. 364-5, p. 367. In the South African context, see Christopher Saunders, The Making of the South African Past, Cape Town: David Philip, 188; p. 188-9. Also Saul Dubow, Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936, London: Macmillan Press, 1989; p. 8.

7. P. Sloterdijk, Ibid, p. 19. It should be noted that the roots of 'interest-based' theory lie deep in Western political philosophy, since the writings of Hobbes, Locke and Nietzsche. However, a different tradition also exists, which emphasise politics as an ethical activity; a tradition which includes Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Habermas and Arendt. South African historiography has emphasised the former tradition, and ignored the latter. One reason for this is an unacknowledged moral outrage at the complacent and cosy accommodations which elites seem to engender in the face of extreme social distress. Such an outrage is largely valid; my point is that it should not become an unexamined springboard for genuine social analysis.

Historians such as Deborah Posel have challenged this emphasis on economic interests [8], and urged that variables such as ideological and political control, ethnicity, and individual leadership be taken into account. Yet the Hobbesian interpretation of human motivation remains common in radical South African political analysis. We are left with a world populated by supremely self-interested, competitive, calculating individuals - a conception which has flourished in the fertile soil of unpalatable inequality and racism in South Africa.

The generation of 'state-centric theorists' of the 1980s asserted, in reaction to the materialistic bias of the revisionists, that the state was an actor in its own right [9]. However, the Hobbesian conception of motivation and meaning has remained, grounded firmly in the unchallenged primacy of the concept of 'interests'. Therefore, as a theoretical improvement, this innovation was limited in its significance. Only the dramatis personae changed; the theme and tenor of the play remained the same. Furthermore, although some theorists have recently moved away from a monolithic conception of the state, and have analysed the important cleavages within it, they still attribute an unwarranted degree of pragmatism and expediency to state actors.

A second major improvement on the revisionist literature has been a recent concern with questions of ideology and discourse [10].

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8. D. Posel, 'Ibid', p. 61.

9. An early example of this is Heribert Adam, Modernizing Racial Domination, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Recent examples are Mark Swilling and Mark Phillips, 'The Powers of the Thunderbird: Decision-making structures and policy strategies in the South African state', in Centre for Policy Studies, Policy Perspectives 1989: South Africa at the End of the Eighties, Johannesburg: CPS, 1989; and Steve Friedman, 'The National Party and the South African transition', in R. Lee and L. Schlemmer (eds), Transition to Democracy, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991. The entire 'transition literature', centered around Phillippe Schmitter and Guillermo O'Donnel, is grounded on an interest-based theory of politics.

10. For example, S. Dubow, Ibid, 1989; D. Posel, 'The language of domination, 1978-1983' in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa, England: Longman, 1987; and Adam Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990; and Stanley Greenberg,

However, the realist, functionalist and Hobbesian assumptions are rerained in these analyses. In all these studies, the realm of meaning is only deemed interesting to the extent that it purportedly justifies political or economic domination. Social actors' beliefs and language are treated as 'mechanisms' and 'strategies' of political power, 'schemes of legimation ... to achieve ... the objectives of power [11]; and establishment intellectuals are seen as engaged in 'ideological projects' and 'tasks' which results in further ideological 'mystifications' [12].

The discourse-theorists provide no real reasons why the beliefs of state actors should be regarded in this way, other than the pervasive assumption that it is somehow functional to the maintenance of certain power structures. Instead, discourse-theorists simply rely on an abundant use of scare quotes to warn us of the essential dubiousness of almost everything said by state actors, and to indicate that these actors' point of view does not represent reality in any meaningful sense. For Adam Ashforth, for example, the discourse of Native Commissioners is illegitimate, in whole or in part (Ashforth never makes clear), because such a discourse has either (a) the effect, or (b) the function, or (c) the purpose (again, Ashforth never clarifies), of promoting state power.

Because of these difficulties, the 'discourse-theorists' implicitly subscribe to a curious understanding of politics. Their critiques of ideologies are deeply ambiguous. Why, exactly, should we peer beyond social actors' express beliefs? Why should we subject such beliefs to a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'? Exploring the latent assumptions of a theoretical paradigm is always a tricky matter, but there are important issues at stake. Hence I will briefly consider two aspects of their implicit conception of political meaning, viz. (1) their critique of the political effects of ideology, and (2) their epistemological critique of ideology.

Regarding political effects: Simply showing that 'the knowledge of social realities' is somehow 'integrally connected to the formations of state power'[13] is simply not sufficient to challenge the validity of historical beliefs and discourse. All kinds of ideas affect all kinds of power relations in all kinds of (intended or unintended) ways. The further argument that beliefs are suspect because they promote certain interests does not really help

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'Ideological struggles within the South African state', in Marks and Trapido (eds), Ibid.

11. See Ashforth, Ibid, pp. 2-3; p. 8.

12. S. Greenberg, 'Ibid'; p. 394.

13. Ashforth, Ibid., p. 10.

matters. Does the presence of interests discredit beliefs **per se**? Or is it the nature of the interests (i.e. 'illegitimate interests') that disqualify the validity of beliefs? And what interests are legitimate anyway? Can we seriously expect social actors, caught in a specific historical context, to have interests different from the ones they had?

Regarding the epistemological status of ideology: On the other hand, discourse theorists also tend to question the epistemological validity of social actors' truth claims [14]. Once again, this issue is often left ambiguous in their writings [15]. However, if we as theorists proclaim social actors' beliefs to be unwarranted or illogical or invalid, the onus rests on us to give reasons for our argument, and explain whether historical actors could possibly have been expected to think differently about things, given their social context and the knowledge available to them.

Ultimately, the critique offered by discourse-theorists remains ambiguous. Why are dominant ideologies offensive? Is it (1) that these beliefs have an (intended or unintended) effect on power structures, or (2) that actors' beliefs promote certain interests, or (3) that their beliefs promote **illegitimate** interests, or (4) that actors' have mistaken beliefs? Or is it simply that (5) the fact that powerful, and often arrogant and unpleasant, people hold these beliefs? Thus far, theorists in the radical tradition tend to cultivate an attitude of cynical reason, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' without taking the trouble to spell out exactly what

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[14]. Adam Ashforth's critique of segregationists' claims to expertise and rationality in problem-solving is a good example of this. He implies throughout that their expertise was not genuine, although he never tells us why (Ibid., p. 6).

[15]. For example, Deborah Posel uses the term 'ideology' in two different ways. On the one hand, the definition of ideology as 'vehicles for the constitution of subjectivity' is a value-neutral one, referring simply to a set of beliefs which have profound meaning for us (p. 438). Presumably, on this account, we all operate within 'ideologies'; if this is the case, then, there are no objective ways of choosing between different ideologies. On the other hand, her discussion of apartheid as an ideology implies that it was false, in some sense. For example, Posel claims that 'Apartheid was thus vaunted as the only moral Christian course for South African politics'(p. 433). Presumably we are not to give apartheid ideology the benefit of the doubt, even if it constituted Afrikaners' subjectivity as much as our beliefs constitute our own.

we should be cynical about [16].

Implicitly, the diffuse critiques of discourse-theorists (and radical theorists generally) have led to a neurotic disagreeableness about political life, based on a subterranean anger about the role of interests and and power in politics [17] Because these theorists are unable to pinpoint exactly what the real problem with society is, these unfocused critiques have tend to produce their mirror image - a political utopianism, where politics is stripped of power (or eliminated altogether), where beliefs are freed of interests, and where discourse becomes a transparent window on truth [18]. These difficulties are not limited to discourse-theorists alone; they stem from the entire tradition of revisionist theory, which took refuge in an endless 'critique mode' [19], without ever providing a coherent standard by which political (and economic) activity could be sensibly evaluated. Because they did not have a viable conception of political life, they ended up by blaming politics for being politics.

What is desperately necessary in South African political analysis, is a better understanding of political conduct **per se**. Such an appreciation which would recognise the quest for power and the pursuit of interests as **normal** and **legitimate**, but nevertheless **limited** dimensions of politics conduct - a recognition which would leave significant place for the other dimensions of politics, most notably political meaning and morality.

There are indications that 'discourse-theorists' are aware of the

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16. The problem finds its origin in Marx's critique of ideology. It is never clear whether Marx criticises ideology on the grounds that it promotes interests, or on the grounds that it promotes **illegitimate** interests, or on the grounds that it is false. On the ambiguities in Marx's theory of ideology, see N. Abercrombie et al., The Dominant Ideology Thesis, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980; chapter 1.

17. The radical historians are not alone in this regard. Michel Foucault displays the same anger at the ubiquity of power in society. Unlike South African revisionists, however, Foucault finds it difficult to conceive of a better society.

18. Ashforth approaches this utopianism when he refers to a better world of 'political processes wherein humans of all kinds might freely speak for themselves and act conjointly in pursuit of visions of a more desirable community' (Ibid., p. 63).

19. I am endebted to Khehla Shubane for this term.

limitations of their approach. Saul Dubow, for example, tantalisingly refers to 'the ethic and style of government, the living assumptions of administrative officials', and the moral justifications offered by segregationists [20], but these are not explored at all. Deborah Posel makes the useful suggestion that the manipulatory dimension of discourse is properly a matter of empirical proof, not an **a priori** assumption. In addition, her distinction between 'languages of legitimation' (which are consciously employed by social actors to further certain interests) and 'ideologies' which genuinely shape the identity and meaning of individuals, is a fruitful one [21].

I am not making a realist claim in a new guise. I do not maintain that there is a hidden reality of which social actors are unaware. Rather, it is an argument for the **ubiquity of political morality**, and that **any meaningful discourse always constitutes social actors in a moral way.** Ironically, it is only by taking political morality seriously that we can appreciate both the **importance** and the **limitations** of power and Machiavellianism in political conduct. Politics can be reduced neither to morality nor to power. I will explore the implications of these claims in the rest of the paper. It is only then, I maintain, that we can begin to make sense of the nature of community and citizenship in our cities.

B. The nature and importance of political morality

In political and social life, people's motives are extremely complex and diverse. People engage in politics for many different reasons, ranging from enjoyment, novelty, conformity, thrill and self-fulfilment, to the pursuit of power or morally-defined goals. The public world cannot be reduced to private material interests [22]. Furthermore, political activity itself helps to define people's individuality, their identities, and the self-understanding of communities [23]. Political activities are forms of human

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20. S. Dubow, Ibid., pp. 14 and 26.

21. D. Posel, 'Ibid'; pp. 428 and 438. Unfortunately, her discussion of technocratic discourse as a manipulatory language of legitimation does not go far enough; it fails to explore the very real moral dimension of technocratic meaning, which involves an important (and often quite heart-felt) redefinition of rights, obligations and meanings on the part of social actors.

22. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959; p. 48.

23. B. Parekh, Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy, London: Macmillan, 1981; p. 54.

sociability; hence they do not only make sense in terms of their consequences, but also as important expressions of inter-subjective meaning.

An indispensable part of human sociability is moral life [24]. All actions are intrinsically **moral**, not because we judge them to be **virtuous** (they often are not), but because they always take place within a social framework of meaning and notions of justice. (The only exceptions are the actions of psychopaths). All normal social conduct is structured by rules, and by notions of rights, obligations and appropriateness. 'All properly social relations are moral and customary' [25].

It is necessary, therefore, to attempt to disentangle the concept of 'political morality' itself. At least five characteristics can be pinpointed:

a) Morality and custom: Political morality does not simply consist of lofty and abstract principles. Political morality involves diffuse patterns of social obligations and decencies, including 'absolute prohibitions, elementary decencies, the recognition of a plurality of prohibitions which do not all serve a single purpose' [26]. The rituals, good manners and social mores of a society help to define more abstract principles of political morality [27]. To understand a persons' choices, we need to empathise with his or her entire **weltanschauung**. Our morality arises from dense personal experience, and our choices are often taken absent-mindedly, or by intuition.

b) Morality and institutional context: Institutions involve shared dispositions and mutual expectations [28]. The institutional constraints on political and governmental actors have consequences for their moral sensibility. For example, they are often morally encapsulated in their roles, shielded from the

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[24]. It is worth emphasising here that a discussion of the morality of social actions does not imply an approval of those actions.

[25]. John Plamenatz, Man and Society (Vol. 2), London: Longman, 1963; p. 283.

[26]. Stuart Hampshire, 'Morality and Pessimism', in S. Hampshire (ed), Public and Private Morality, Cambridge University Press, 1978; p. 15.

[27]. Stuart Hampshire, 'Public and private morality', in S. Hampshire, ed, Ibid., p. 26.

[28]. Bernard Williams, 'Politics and moral character', in S. Hampshire (ed), Ibid., p. 64.

consequences of their actions. Also, official roles tend to justify actions which would be impermissible from the point of view of individual morality [29]. Bureaucratic cultures entail a certain style of political morality, e.g. standards of moral debate, or the a certain style of trade-off between means and ends.

c) Moral conflicts: Social actors often experience moral problems as quite intractable. The application of a moral principle to a specific practical problem is often not a simple matter. For one thing, problems yield themselves to very different interpretations [30]; and must then evaluated in terms of a perplexing array of moral prescriptions. Especially in politics, actors may be torn between the moral claims entailed by political effectiveness and those which apply to private life, such as scrupulous honesty and integrity [31].

d) Moral choice: Because moral choices are not self-evident, social actors have to make up their own minds, using their own information and moral sensibilities. This point is important, in order to temper our sociologistic inclinations towards social determinism and causal analysis - an inclination which may, on occasion, tempt us to excuse cases of moral abdication [32]. Moral dilemmas are a part of life, and can produce unpredictable results - ranging from extraordinary moral grandeur, on the one hand, to moral lapses and even betrayal, on the other.

d) Moderation and extremism in political morality: Moderation and extremism are different forms of moral commitment. At stake is the relationship between **means** and **ends** in political conduct. Moderation is the acception of moral limits in the choice of means to achieve a political end, whereas extremism is the willingness to use exceptional means (which often justify the ends being pursued, e.g. the use of war to achieve peace). Moderation involves an awareness of a plurality of possible and reasonable

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29. Thomas Nagel, 'Ruthlessness in public life', in S. Hampshire (ed), Ibid., p. 79.

30. W.H. Walsh, 'Open and closed morality', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (ed), The Morality of Politics, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972; p. 27.

31. S. Hampshire, 'Public and private morality', in S. Hampshire (ed), Ibid., p. 42.

32. For example, when we argue that political actors' breaches of morality must be excused on account of their deprived background, intellectual isolation, etc. While it is crucial that their social circumstances be taken into account, we should also recognise that political decisions almost invariably involve moral choices.

ends, whereas extremism tends to fasten on one overriding end [33]. It may be noted that neither moderation nor extremism has **a priori** superior moral worth.

e) Morality, Machiavelli and 'dirty hands': Machiavelli's understanding of politics contains the following three claims: (1) Public policy often involves greater resonsibility than private actions, because it has more far-reaching consequences; (2) the occasional use of force or other unpalatable methods is a normal part of government; and (3) in modern politics (especially a democracy) political actors are reasonably required to protect the interests of those represented, whether they be fellow party members, a social group, or fellow citizens. According to Machiavelli, it is irresonsible to apply to political action the moral standards appropriate to private life. A certain measure of ruthlessness, deceit, guile, promise-breaking and force are normal in politics - especially when it is felt that certain beneficial consequences will justify unethical means. It is worth noting, especially in the light of my criticisms of revisionists, that the notion of 'interests' is certainly an indispensable theoretical tool in political analysis - my only reservation is that we should know when to stop wielding it.

Machiavelli's claims are both indispensable and limited. They do not imply that 'anything goes'. To be truly effective in politics, Machiavellianism in politics must take moral limits into account. Politics generally involves both political seriousness (the use of power) and moral seriousness, decencies and sensitivities. This moral caution stems from two sources: (1) Intelligent political actors are usually aware that unethical means may have undesirable political consequences; and (2) political actors are also social beings, steeped in their society's norms of decent conduct.

C. Political morality and the construction of moral communities

At this point, we need to begin to look at South African politics from a new vantage point. So far, we have emphasised the importance of political morality in the realm of public life; in the process, we also emphasised the importance of inter-subjective meaning and sociability in the constitution of political morality. Morality is a communal affair. Communities are deeply permeated with shared moral preconceptions; it is in this sense, then, that we can talk of 'moral communities'.

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[33]. R. N. Berki, 'The distinction between moderation and extemism', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (eds), Ibid.; p. 66.

One further key factor in social integration is the degree to which people share the same kind of moral sensitivities (even though they may disagree on specific moral principles). According to W.H. Walsh, communities often have 'closed' systems of morality, in which certain moral virtues and expectations are postulated for one's own community. Any harmful effect of their actions on outsiders is often deemed regrettable, but not to the extent that their actions will be condemned [34]. Walsh warns us not to exaggerate the prevalence of genuinely universalistic moral principles in ordinary social life.

Another way of making the same point is to contrast Kantian with Hegelian ethics. Whereas the Kantian notion of ethics postulates universalistic rules which should apply irrespective of the social characteristics of persons, we could usefully adopt a more Hegelian approach, which emphasises that morality is intrinsically social [35]. We should analyse ethical life as vested in the established norms, ideals and self-interpretations that constitute an ongoing communal life. This is an essentially hermeneutic method of understanding political morality: We must start from a 'reconstruction of the shared conceptions of citizenship and of social co-operation...' [36].

How does this cast light on the South African experience? The arguments of Hegel and Walsh imply a coherent and shared sense of identity and community amongst individuals. In practical situations, however, such an assumption is not always appropriate. Communal identity may be under threat, thus causing widespread social anxiety.

In situations of rapid social change, communal solidarities tend to break down, leading to severe existential anxiety: 'When we see individuals defending an ideology it is often because they believe that the alternative is chaos, an undoing of themselves as

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[34]. W.H. Walsh, 'Open and closed morality', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (eds), Ibid.; pp.19 and 24,

[35]. This discussion is based on Paul Stern, 'On the relation between rational autonomy and ethical community: Hegel's critique of Kantian morality', in Praxis International, vol. 9, no. 3, 1989.

[36]. P. Stern, 'Ibid', p. 245. For this reason, it is simply inappropriate to evaluate the political ethics of historical actors with some abstractly derived system of universalistic morality - a tendency which implicitly informs much of revisionist and post-revisionist writing in South Africa.

persons, the annihilation of their identity' [37]. In such situations, much of politics becomes concerned with maintaining or imposing an identity system.

The native administrators in South African cities were, during the 1950s, the state's front line in coming to terms with urban change. Unlike other whites, they were in constant close contact with black residents, and were witnesses to the social distress and moral decay prevalent in black townships. This, they believed, gave them some authority in understanding the problems of townships, for they had first-hand information of 'the aspirations of the urban Native; of his aspirations for home and family life and security; of his frustrations in our economic framework; of his weakness due to his backwardness and his limitations' [38].

Consequently, these officials were particularly prone to exercise their minds about the problems of black townships. Dr. Language, the Manager of Non-European Affairs in Brakpan, made eloquent testimony of the

> ' ... harmful effects such as the tremendous wastage of valuable time, of opportunities, of labour and of capital, not to mention the threats to personal life and safety and the ruination of family and of community life. This is a problem affecting the social, economic, administrative and religious institutions of the country as a whole, including all living creatures - not even the dumb animals in our locations escape injury and ill-treatment' [39].

The ravages of modernisation had to be dealt with. The crucial question was - how?

D. Modernity, discipline and categorisation

In this regard, Michel Foucault's analysis of modernity becomes very useful. Foucault has drawn attention to the peculiar ways in which power operates in modern society. Instead of a repressive notion of power, which emphasises concepts such as manipulation, coercion, and domination, Foucault has introduced a 'productive' understanding of power. Patterns of power structure the roles of all members of society, thereby producing crucial identities and

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37. P. Du Preez, Ibid., p. 48.

38. Mr. J. Matthewson, Native Administrator of Benoni, IANA Annual Conference Proceedings, 1953; p. 47.

39. Address to Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA), 1954; Conference Proceedings, p. 32.

motives through processes of 'self-formation or autocolonization'[40].

For Foucault, modern societies are characterised by 'disciplinary' power - the division of society into formal categories; the minute attentions paid to each individual; the uninterrupted surveillance which ensured proper and enthusiastic performance; and the use of scientific knowledge with which to diagnose society's ills. A crucial point is that discipline is not something done by one actor (or group of actors) to another. It is reciprocally exerted - 'supervisors, perpetually supervised ...'[41]. It is an impulse towards social order which encompasses government and governed alike.

All this presupposes the development of numerous valid social categories in which to classify members of society (including, for example, residence, age, education, citizenship, military obligations, and taxation status). The crucial point is that there are no classifications that are **a priori** appropriate to the imposition of discipline. While Foucault is correct to emphasise the need for classification, the content of such classifications is a practical problem for each specific historical context.

The problem in South Africa has been precisely the difficulty of delineating appropriate categories, with the result that the imposition of disciplinary power has proven extremely confusing to political elites as well as ordinary people. South Africa in the twentieth century has consisted of a bewildering combination of languages, cultures, classes, degrees of urbanisation, and modes of acculturation to the rising giant of capitalism. These problems bedevilled the universal application of disciplinary techniques by government and non-government agencies alike.

To put this matter in the terms of our discussion on political morality: in the context of ambiguous moral communities in South Africa, the application of appropriate standards of moral conduct to different groups of people was a hazardous affair. Different moral communities, delineated by racial, linguistic, class and other divisions, have co-existed in uncomfortable proximity. They are often not quite insulated from one another, and certain moral outlooks have, on occasion, overlapped with one another. The result is that political actors have had to constantly navigate the boundaries between moral communities, with only the fragile signposts of their own moral preconceptions to guide them.

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40. H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, University of Chicago Press, 1983; p. 186.

41. M. Foucault, Discipline and Punish, New York: Vintage Books, 1977; p. 177.

The crucial point is that, in a context of shifting boundaries between communities, the question of appropriate rights and obligations becomes highly problematic in practice. Different conceptions of moral decency and appropriateness exist. Hence social actors not only have to make sense of the shifting fortunes of their own community in times of rapid change, but with the relatively alien cultural institutions of other communities living nearby. This produces an extremely complex social and moral universe, in which mistakes and misinterpretations become very likely. And when people's conceptions of their own identity and worth are infringed, it causes distress, hurt, and confusion - occasionally with explosive results.

In South African cities, the notion of the 'urban community' has been a particularly problematic one. One can regard the history of the city in South Africa as the history of (generally unsuccessful) attempts by local and central government actors to resolve the ambiguities of local community membership [42]. The key question was, of course, the following: In what ways were black residents part of the 'urban community'? Should the black community be seen as internally homogenous (a moral community in its own right), or does a certain sector of black residents truly belong to the established urban community? In studying the meaning of 'the city' in the history of South Africa, we need to recognise the intrinsically normative and emotive dimensions of community feeling as distinctly public questions that cannot be reduced to private sentiments.

E. Political morality and urban communities during the 1950s: The question of paternalism

So far, we have simply prepared some theoretical ground for a new approach to the understanding of the urban community in South Africa. For the rest of this paper, we will attempt to apply this approach to a specific problem: The definition of the South African urban polity during the 1950s. Our discussion will of necessity be brief, and is intended to be an introduction to future work. It will simply focus on the way in which white officials and City Councillors perceived their moral relationship with black urban residents.

It is extremely difficult to portray the exact quality of this moral relationship. I will describe it using three different conceptions of moral relationship, viz. 'paternalism', 'patriarchy' and (for lack of a better term) 'proto-liberalism'.

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[42]. I believe it was also a matter of some debate within the black community itself. However, that would be the subject of another paper.

a) Paternalism

Paternalism refers to a certain kind of moral justification for specific actions [43]. It can be defined as intervention by a paternalist (say A) in the liberty of a subject (say S), in such a way that A's motive is concern for S's welfare. A's actions may take place without the consent of S, and may involve unpalatable actions, such as the use of force, coercive threat, or manipulation [44]. It may be noted that specific altruistic and paternalistic actions are quite compatible with broader patterns of exploitation; however, it is a mistake to regard paternalism simply as a mask of exploitation.

There are, in fact, numerous valid ways in which paternalism can be justified morally: (1) It is often the case that A claims to have some expert knowledge which legitimises his or her interference; (2) A may believe (rightly or wrongly) that the desirable consequences of his or her action will outweigh the unpleasant means employed; (3) A may believe that S does not have the intellectual or psychological competence to promote her own best interests; and (4) A may claim that S had consented in the past, or will do so retrospectively in the future [45]. In the words of an advocate of paternalism: 'If ... the object aimed at is good, if the compulsion employed is such as to attain it, and if the good obtained overbalances the inconvenience of the compulsion itself, I do not understand how, upon utilitarian principles, the compulsion can be bad'[46].

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[43]. In this regard, I use the term differently from, say, Eugene Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made, New York: Vintage Books, 1976; or Charles van Onselen, 'The social and economic underpinnings of paternalism and violence on the maize farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900-1950; ASI Seminar Paper, 13 May 1991. These authors use the term 'paternalism' in a more diffuse way, to refer to an 'ethos' or a 'relationship' or a 'regime'. These uses are not wrong; but I feel that my act-based definition is more useful for my purposes.

[44]. This definition is drawn from Donald VanDeVeer, Paternalistic Intervention: The Moral Bounds on Benevolence, Princeton University Press, 1986; p. 22.

[45]. D. VanDeVeer, Ibid, p. 67; Gerald Dworkin, Paternalism: Some second thoughts', in R. Sartorius (ed), Paternalism, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; p. 107.

[46]. J. Fitzjames Stephen, quoted in R. Sartorius, 'Introduction', in Sartorius (ed), Ibid.; p. xi.

The concept of paternalism brings us some way to understanding the pecualiar relationship between the white 'city fathers' and black residents of South African cities during the 1950s. White officials frequently introduced measures which, they believed, were to the benefit of black residents, regardless of the latter's opposition.

We must be clear, however, what the concept of paternalism actually explains in our case study of the cities. The paternalistic quality of certain actions invariably refer back to the characteristics of moral conduct outlined above. For example, officials' paternalistic actions involved, **inter alia**: the existence of morally-based motives; the norms of social decency which the paternalist intuitively subscribed to; the institutional context which encouraged paternalistic officials to justify actions normally impermissible in private life; moral conflicts and choices; and the need to reconcile paternalism with the Machiavellian predilection to 'dirty one's hands'. In any specific case study, these dimensions of paternalism could serve as guideposts for investigation.

b) Patriarchalism

For the white city fathers, intervention in the liberties of black residents was not an occasional affair. They also often assumed that black residents would generally consent to their interventions. Paternalistic acts occurred against a more pervasive moral structure, which we will term 'patriarchalism'. VanDeVeer's definition is admirably succint:

> 'The term "patriarch" in ancient times referred to a male ruler, typically a venerated elder. A community hierarchically organized with such persons having supreme **de facto** authority is called "patriarchal" ... Such "authorities control others. Whether for their own good ... is a further question. In addition, whether patriarchs exercised control with altruistic aims ... is an open question. **There is, then, no necessary connection between "acting in a patriarchal fashion" and "acting paternalistically"** [47].

In other words, paternalistic acts may take place in a non-patriarchal social structure, and a patriarchal structure may exist without altruistic or paternalistic acts on the part of the patriarch [48].

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[47]. D. VanDeVeer, Ibid., p. 23. My emphasis.

[48]. In fact, 'reverse paternalism' may take place in a patriarchal context; the mother or sons may, for example, conspire to intervene in the circumstnaces of

It is important to note that patriarchalism is not a morally irrational system. There are several possible justifications for patriarchalism. The family represents ethical life based on feeling and intimacy; the individual is assured of belonging; and there is little place for the loneliness and alienation found in more individualistic contexts. Clear, ascriptive patterns of authority may be experienced as preferable to the diffuse, competitive authority patterns which characterise individualistic societies [49]. If such characteristics are carried over to a social setting, these justifications may appear quite attractive to certain parts of people's psyche. However, on the negative side, there is little room for privacy and individualistic rights in the family (although there may be other kinds of rights).

In patriarchal contexts, the parents have a moral duty to teach their children about ethics. This education process invariably has a harsh dimension: 'Children are punished less because they deserve punishment than in order to be made moral; they are not only taught by precept and example, they are also taught by the infliction of pain' [50]. In a well-functioning patriarchy, such coercion is accepted as legitimate by a child. Once again it is necessary to differentiate between **acts** and **structures**: a child may resent specific paternalistic acts, while consenting to the patriarchal structure in general. **It is in this light that white city fathers in South African towns understood their moral relationship with black residents.**

c) Proto-liberalism

The complexity of the moral relationship between white officials and black residents does not, however, end with paternalism and patriarchy. In the light of rapidly changing social circumstances, there was an inherent ambiguity in the application of these principles to a confusing world. Many officials recognised appropriate limits of paternalism and patriarchy. Blacks' status was never simply that of 'children', unlike the slave societies of the American South. There were two reasons for this. First, the

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the patriarch for his own good - usually, one would imagine, without his knowledge.

49. Hegel's comments on the family as ethical unit are quite insightful in this regard. See John Plamenatz, Man and Society (Vol. 2), London: Longman, 1963, pp. 231-235. In Hegel's terms, the family is the sphere of particularity, difference and locality; as opposed to the universality of rights in civil society.

50. See Plamenatz's discussion of Hegel's theory of the family, Ibid; p. 244.

remnants of erstwhile independent black polities meant that blacks were not intrinsically childlike. Secondly, the existence of a well-educated, articulate Western sector in black townships created difficulties for a doctrine of patriarchalism. The result was a diffuse awareness amongst officials that (some) blacks had claim to individualistic rights and to treatment as formal equals. In the patriarchal metaphor, blacks were 'growing up'.

This produced exactly the kinds of anxieties about the nature of the moral community described above. The assumptions of patriarchy were being challenged:

> '...[T]he urban Bantu harboured many grievances for a variety of reasons: a feeling of desperation, of no trust in the white man and of utter frustration was evident among the educated, and in some instances the Bantu demonstrated against the European and force had to be used to quell disturbances...'[51].

If blacks were 'growing up', what kind of adults were they going to become? Once again, Dr. Language expressed the problem succinctly: 'I must admit that a substitute for the lost community pride and discipline for which the traditional Bantu were so renowned still has to be found' [52].

The problem with social patriarchy is that the familial metaphor does not transpose neatly to social life. What exactly constitutes a social 'family'? Amongst the confusion which characterised white officials' deliberations, at least three possibilities can be discerned - all of which made sense from the background of patriarchalism and paternalism.

The first option was the development of a **'dual patriarchy'**, in which blacks did not belong in the cities at all. Black people would rightfully belong to a moral community situated in the rural areas, where a legitimate black patriarchy was entrenched. On this view, the location in the town was simply a tribal enclave; it was an urban component of a fundamentally different social order. Black people were **in** the towns, but they were not **of** the towns. This was the view propounded by Verwoerdian officials.

The second option was the development of a **'dual and equal patriarchy'** within the cities themselves. This involved the development of a black leadership structure within the locations themselves. This option allowed for white paternalism in the training of black members of Advisory Boards, until the Boards reached full autonomy. Ultimately, the relationship between white

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[51]. Dr. Lanaguage, Address to IANA, 1954; p. 180.

[52]. Address to IANA, Conference Proceedings, 1957; p. 32.

city fathers and black Advisory Boards would resemble the relationship between two autonomous families, who sould interact with one another on an equal footing. Each may well continue to have patriarchal structures within themselves. In the words of Prof. Coetzee of Potchefstroom University,

> '[W]e will have to realise ... that we will not always be able to choose the Bantu's leaders for him; they must develop their own leaders, and it will largely depend on us whether we will be able to co-operate with them in a friendly, beneficial and responsible way' [53].

A third option was that of **'dual but unequal patriarchy'**. This scenario would resemble the relationship between a patriarch and his adult son, who had established his own family. in this case, a high degree of mutual respect would exist alongside a permanent relationship of equality. Mr. Matthewson of Benoni, for example, did not consider a transfer of power to Advisory Boards to be crucial to their functioning. He maintained that Board members simply wanted some prestige and respectability. Any decent white City Council would look after black residents' interests, and take into account the Board's views on such matters. It was just a question of finding the right attitude and mechanisms to make this relationship work [54].

The last option reflected the beginnings of an attitude of **proto-liberalism**, described earlier. This view can also be construed as a **'dual and temporary patriarchy'**. According to this view, it black residents were on the road to Westernisation and multi-racialism. They did not enjoy equal formal rights with white residents, but they had the intellectual and moral capacities to be recognised as equal citizens in the future [55].

CONCLUSION

Against the background of ambiguous patriarchal structures, moral conduct became a highly complex affair for white officials. Municipal administrators were usually busy and dedicated men; they were not philosophers. Paternalist actions were usually enveloped by other practical preoccupations about administration, housing,

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53. IANA Annual Conference Proceedings, 1957; p. 113.

54. IANA Annual Conference Proceedings, 1953; p. 39-40.

55. Mr. Bourquin of Durban represented this view when he acknowledged the hurtful nature of racial discrimination (IANA, 1957; p. 45). His statement only makes sense when discrimination is seen as arbitrary treatment of essentially similar people in dissimilar ways.

or the never-ending worry about finance. Paternalism was not an explicit doctrine; it did not even offer clear criteria of practical success or moral virtue. It was a muddled guiding sentiment, partly coercive, partly humane, often contradictory, which at least allowed its proponents some sense of moral decency while fighting a hopeless battle to improve the increasingly squalid township conditions.

Paternalism is a typical example of political morality. Its prescriptions are ambiguous, and there is always room for moral choices, which can be resolved anywhere on a scale from absolute virtue to total Machiavellianism. Most political or governmental actors make use of this entire range, at some time or other in their careers.

What is unusual about the paternalism of the white city fathers of the 1950s, however, was the extraordinary ambiguities about the structure of the patriarchal moral community itself. The result was that each locality developed its own understanding of white and black patriarchy, and therefore developed its own bureaucratic ethos. In this way, South African towns indeed reflected the principles of locality and particularity, which, according to Hegel, characterise family structures. The unresolved moral community meant that local government was simply not conducive to universalist bureaucratic principles, dictated formally from a remote central government.

In the meantime, the urgency of social improvements was seldom lost from sight. Something had to be done; and this usually resulted in makeshift rules, regulations, prohibitions, permissions, permits and prosecutions. Frequently, as a last resort, officials had to turn to coercion and deception - often in the name of paternalistic improvements. This was not always an easy way out. Consciences were bothered, and endless debates took place about means and ends.

Under the patriarchal system of native administration in the 1950s, the web of control in the cities was not nearly as systematic and confident as authors in the radical tradition tend to claim. At best, it was an attempt to apply a modernizing disciplinary spirit to a fundamentally ambiguous situation. It is this inherent contradictoriness that differentiated patriarchal control and paternalistic interventionism from the more totalitarian controls introduced by the Verwoerdians, who were as yet only gathering their strength.