Contesting Philosophical Authority in the Belly of El Monstruo:

A Case Study in Nonideal Political Theory and Epistemic Democracy

by

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What is philosophical inquiry about, how does one do it, and what is it good for? This paper draws upon original empirical work and is, in part, an instance of what students of the social sciences, especially those engaged in qualitative approaches to research such as ethnography, will recognize as what Fred Erickson termed a "natural history of inquiry."

During the summers of 2009 and 2010, I spent about two months conducting research in collaboration with a small, independent community located in Itztapalapa, an impoverished neighborhood of Mexico City. I set out to test one possible conceptualization of a political philosophical problem (related to self-determination, though specifics of this stage of the research aren't the focus of my paper) against the actual discursive practice of a community in conflict with powerful and often corrupt government institutions. I initially hoped that this empirical work would enable me to test a hypothesis concerning the usefulness of a particular conceptual schema in practice. When my initial research questions ran up against the constraints and exigencies of democratic inquiry, beyond the ordinary parameters of the (white, Anglophone) academic community, new questions emerged that concern philosophical methodology at its foundations. The unexpected turn my research has taken speaks to a

contemporary struggle in the self-understanding of (again, mostly white, Anglophone) philosophers (including philosophers of education).

This paper reviews recent developments in nonideal theorizing as well as attempts to naturalize and democratize moral epistemology. Using my own experience in Mexico as illustrative, I assess the promise of attempts at naturalization and democratization for revitalizing philosophy as a professional discourse. I argue that efforts to naturalize and democratize philosophical methodology are necessary if we are to clarify what philosophical inquiry *can* and *ought* to be good for, in relation to educational issues and other academic disciplines. Ultimately, philosophical inquiry so understood provides an invaluable tool for addressing the pressing problems that motivate all of our best and most justifiable inquiries into the meaning and nature of things.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The question *what is philosophy?* can perhaps be posed only late in life, with arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely.

—Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

1.1. The Problem: Method in Political Philosophy

Perhaps I have grown old before my time. Certainly I was younger when I began writing this thesis. At that time, I was more interested in doing philosophy than in understanding what it might be. The research and reflections reported here could be characterized as expressions of a growing desire to speak concretely, to relate the abstractions that constitute the topography of conceptual life[1] to the richness and immediacy of lived experience. And perhaps this is part of what Deleuze and Guattari meant when they said that a certain question is raised only "late in life": When time is growing short, it is no longer enough to *do* something; now, what one does must *matter*. I mean "matter" here in the double sense of to materialize, to become or to make "concrete," as well as to *signify* what is and in doing so to make a concrete difference, to speak in a way that is *significant*. The paper you're reading is a product of this desire, a document of my grasping efforts to bridge a chasm between a conceptual world and what is seemingly a more concrete one. The questions that draw attention to this chasm may themselves constitute the bridge: *What is political philosophy? What is it good for? How does one go about doing it?*

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[1] Deleuze and Guattari have characterized the practice of philosophy as the creation of concepts, and so contributing to a "geography of reason." Here, I am drawing upon the cartographic metaphors they develop in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983)*, A Thousand Plateaus* (1987)*,* and *What is Philosophy?* (1994)*.*

Philosophy is a form of inquiry, and so the questions posed here are inquiries concerning a particular sort of inquiry. As such, these questions belong to the domain of *metaphilosophy.* Metaphilosophy refers to investigation into, and reflection upon, the question of what the concept "philosophy" means, and what we (whoever "we" turn out to be) expect it to do for us.

The Historical Emergence of Modern Western Political Philosophy

Answering the question "what is political philosophy" may initially seem unproblematic. Robert L. Simon writes that, "[Western] Political…philosophy is concerned with the moral evaluation of political…institutions, and the development, clarification, and assessment of proposed principles for evaluation of the…political order" (2002: 2). This definition usefully distinguishes between two elements of political philosophy: first, it is a form of moral philosophy, concerned with evaluation of existing states of affairs in moral terms (right vs. wrong, just vs. unjust, legitimate vs. illegitimate, and so on); second, it is concerned with the articulation and defense of principles that inform such evaluation.

What does "political" refer to, exactly? According to *The Blackwell Dictionary of Social Thought,* "…the activity of politics is general. It occurs in all organizations, be they businesses, trade unions, churches or social organizations. Politics can…variously be described as being concerned with power, as dealing with conflict resolution, or as providing decision-making mechanisms" (Klosko 2005: 495). Or, as Francis Fox Piven puts it, "politics has to do with the activities through which human actors try to realize their goals by influencing other human actors" (2009: 297). At this level of generality, it seems quite safe to say that every human society practices politics. Thus, it also seems likely that many if not all human communities have practiced some form of political philosophy—that is, they engage in some form of more or less systematic inquiry into politics.

In the West, the systematic study of politics has a long lineage and can be traced back to the Greeks, especially the figures of Plato and Aristotle. The emergence of Western political philosophy

as an academic discipline came much later, the product of a particular cultural tradition that evolved in a specific time and place. Arguably, it appeared in something close to its modern form—a discipline with its own distinctive subject matter, methods, and style—over the course of the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-centuries. Influential works by such well-known figures as Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Thomas More (1478-1535), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were simultaneously a source and a product of the series of European cultural and institutional revolutions known as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment (Hörnqvist 2011; Baylor 2011; Whatmore 2011).

As a result, academic political philosophy in the West has had as its center issues that emerged in the European wars of religion and the Westphalian state system that resulted from that long era of violent political-religious conflicts on the continent (Klosko 1994: ch. 4; see also Rawls 2005: xxii-xxvi). These themes were subsequently influenced by the English civil war (Collins 2005: 267-271). At certain times, it appears as if the task of political philosophy has been primarily the rationalization of the political order that emerged and was consolidated in Europe in the early modern period; at other times, philosophers expressed utopian aspirations and created conceptual tools for the critique and transformation of the status quo. In either case, the contingent and historical nature of modern Western political philosophy is apparent in the profound influence that political events have exerted upon the problems that philosophers posed, and the conceptual language that they developed to address these (MacKenzie 2005: 13-14).[2]

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[2] Here, I merely mean to indicate the contingent historical conditions of the emergence of Western political philosophy; the significance of these conditions to the content of the conceptual "toolbox" available to contemporary political philosophers and the kinds of questions they pose will be explored in greater detail in chapter 2.

If the political upheavals and new institutions of the early modern period shaped the content and conceptual resources of Western political philosophy, an often related but less obviously political set of cultural and intellectual developments shaped its methods. The natural sciences took on their recognizably modern form in experiments conducted by Francis Bacon and many others, notably members of Britain's Royal Society of London, established in 1660 by King Charles II. As the experimental methods of the natural sciences developed and grew in prestige, the distinction between empirical and normative claims became more sharply drawn. Eventually, many philosophers came to see one of their major tasks as addressing the relationship between these two types of claims. In *A Treatise of Human Nature,* David Hume (1711-1776) famously distinguished between "is" and "ought", arguing that the latter cannot be deduced from the former (Hume 1896: 469; see Appiah 2008: 212, fn. 22). In his three *Critiques,* Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) responded to Hume's epistemic skepticism by developing a philosophical system which restricted the scope of scientific claims in order to "make room for faith" (1787; preface). Kant entrenched Hume's distinction between analytic (true in virtue of meanings) and synthetic (true in virtue of empirical verification) statements even as he attempted to go beyond it; this distinction would henceforth provide the theory of meaning that would underwrite philosophical methodology, and provide the basis of Western philosophy's (and so also Western *political* philosophy's) self-understanding (Appiah: 14-21).

Arguably, Hume and Kant thus laid the theoretical groundwork for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century schism between two scholarly "cultures" (see Snow 1990). This divide, which contrasts empirical research (the province of the natural and social sciences), on the one hand, and inquiry into values (deemed the domain of the humanities) on the other, deeply informed the development of academic disciplines within the contemporary Western university. And as these two types of inquiry were increasingly divorced, the divvying up the Western intellectual estate was

markedly unequal. The cultural imperialism of "the scientific method"[3], with its emphasis on observation and experimentation, gained momentum and soon overtook much of the subject matter that had previously been deemed by philosophers as their "turf." This was true of political matters as well as those concerning human nature, biology and psychology, etc. The notion of a "moral and political science", based on the model of the natural sciences, came into use in France around the 1760s (Lassman 2011: 436). What was novel here was not so much the notion that empirical data is salient to political inquiry as the idea that the method of philosophy and those of observation and experimentation were in fact all that different. Kwame Anthony Appiah has argued that the "official history" of the scientific revolution has grown up to explain contemporary disciplinary demarcations (2008: ch. 1).[4]

According to Appiah, "The Great Partition" between normative and descriptive projects, between values and facts, has been read into the history to justify divisions in the contemporary academic scene (5-15, 31). And indeed, just as experimental and observational science and normative political theorizing coexisted in the works of Hume, both can be found in the works of nineteenth-century thinkers Adam Smith (1723-1790), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Nevertheless, such figures understood themselves as contributing to and even leading a shift in the method of political philosophy from speculative inquiry (e.g., social contract theory) to a more

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[3] The scare quotes here are meant to indicate that the idea that there is any *one* thing that can be referred to as *the* scientific method has been challenged and, in the eyes of many philosophers of science, discredited—see especially Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* (1975) and Rorty's "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind" from *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (1991). Nevertheless, as a point concerning the historical development of its public prestige, the notion that science employ's an experimental method fundamentally distinct from the speculative method of philosophers cannot be dispensed with.

[4] Rene Descartes, considered the founding figure of modern Western philosophy, was famous for his contributions to experimental method with his "mechanical philosophy" and contributions to geometry and mathematical physics, as well as for his epistemologically-oriented *Meditations*. Hume himself had given his *Treatise of Human Nature* the subtitle: *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*.

empirically-based, "scientific" political economics (Barens 2004; McArthur 2011: 323-325). The evolution of French sociologist Auguste Comte's *positivistic* approach to social science, especially through the work of Emile Durkheim (Lassman 2005: 447-50; Klosko 2005: 456-7), represented the rising scientism, and a growing chasm between empirical/descriptive accounts of social and political realities, on the one hand, and normative/prescriptive claims on the other (Appiah 2008: 21-32).

In the early twentieth-century, this fissure that Kant opened with his analytic-synthetic distinction was systematized in the *logical positivism* developed most influentially by a group of European intellectuals known as the Vienna Circle. While not often explicitly concerned with political matters, the logical positivists asserted an influential form of verificationism that had a powerful influence on methodology in philosophy and in the rapidly developing social sciences. This occurred at a crucial stage of the institutionalization in the modern University. In its extreme form, logical positivism interpreted all value judgments, along with all metaphysical and non-empirical claims, as strictly meaningless. *Emotivism* is an extension of the positivist position, and holds that claims as the rightness or wrongness of a given act are mere expressions of personal preference or feeling, and so are not subject to rational debate.

Even in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, the exclusion of values and normative claims from inquiry into political realities was not universally accepted. Marx himself maintained that theoretical inquiry ought to be politically salient, even efficacious, as well as empirically adequate—the eleventh and most famous of his *Theses on Feuerbach* is often quoted: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Marx & Engels 1975: 5; emphasis in original). Yet in his two-volume *Capital,* the relation of descriptive "scientific" account of the capitalist mode of production and normative claims as to the justice or injustice of such arrangements have an ambiguous relationship, such that normativity in Marx's mature thought is still a subject of debate (West 1991: ch. 5; Carver 2011: 408-410). In the

Anglophone (English-speaking) academy, the notion that empirical and normative projects are necessarily interrelated and that inquiry is properly (and inevitably) political was championed by John Dewey and the school of American pragmatism (see esp. Dewey 1993).[5] Yet such voices were often marginalized, and the professionalization of philosophy (and the humanities) on the one hand and the social sciences on the other tended to entrench and expand the divide.

The (Discredited) Methodological Divide Persists: Political Philosophy vs. Political Science

The analytic-synthetic distinction and the theory of meaning based on it probably peaked with logical positivism, and by the mid-twentieth-century, academic philosophers challenged these from within. In the view of many, the distinction was decisively discredited by W. V. O. Quine in his 1951 essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." Such critiques occurred within professional boundaries that were themselves expressions of "the Great Partition." Consequently, the analytic-synthetic distinction and the segregation of facts and values from one another continue to exert pressures upon academic philosophers and, overtly and sometimes covertly, to condition their professional self-understanding. As Appiah notes, philosophy is today defined primarily via reference to what it is *not* (psychology, economics, anthropology, sociology) (2008: 1). And "what it is not" is understood both in terms of a difference in method (conceptual analysis vs. experimentation and observation), and, in moral and political philosophy, a difference in subject matter (norms vs. facts).

The fracturing of the Western tradition along the lines of normative and descriptive disciplinary projects perhaps explains the eclipse of political philosophy in the period following World War II. The experimental physical sciences reached ever-greater levels of social prestige, and were increasingly seen as providing the only legitimate method for generating reliable and true knowledge

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[5] For a discussion of the resemblance between Marxism and Pragmatism's commitment to politically engaged inquiry, see West, Cornel. *The Ethical Dimension of Marxist Thought*. NY: Monthly Review, xxi-xxxiv.

claims. Government and industry allocated substantial resources to research and development, an unprecedented institutionalization of "hard" scientific inquiry. Political philosophy seemed to many observers (and at least a few university administrators) to be on the wrong side of the historic cleavage, stranded with the wrong subject matter *and* the wrong method.

Political science, in the tradition of Comte and Durkheim, was seen as more likely to get at least the method right, emulating the experimental methods of physicists, and developing mathematical descriptions for social and political phenomena. In the 1950s, a movement to establish an "objective" political science sought to articulate truly general (i.e., universally applicable) explanatory models. Originally drawing upon the fields of sociology and social psychology, as the field developed, it increasingly borrowed frameworks of analysis from economics, such as *rational choice theory* and *game theory* (Outhwaite 2006: 496-497). Political science departments were created at universities throughout the US at this time and have since grown in autonomy and influence, although they remain rare in the rest of the world, with the notable exceptions of Scandinavia and the British Commonwealth (496). In the US and the UK during the second half of the twentieth-century, Bacon's dictum that "knowledge is power" became politically manifest in the technocratic and managerial application of social scientific inquiry (on the model of the natural sciences) to public problems (see Fay 1975).

The 1960s and 70s were a period of social foment and widespread questioning of established institutions. It was in this context that political philosophy experienced a resurgence in the Anglophone academy. This resurgence is usually dated precisely to the publication of John Rawls' path-breaking book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls' recasting of the liberal tradition involved several innovative methodological devices, and self-consciously asserted a comprehensive method for political philosophy. Followed shortly by "applied" philosophical work like that exemplified by Peter Singer in his 1972 essay, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", the resurgence of political philosophy

carved out a niche and won the perception of a return to relevance. With greater recognition of the value of work in normative political theory, political philosophers regained a modicum of legitimacy and social prestige. This was entirely compatible with what was, by this time, the received view of the subject matter and types of method appropriate to the field.

The disciplinary boundaries had been established, and political science retains its pre-eminence in dealing with issues of the accurate description of the nature and causes of political problems, as well as the technical tools for their amelioration. Philosophers, on the other hand, make the best of the congenital squeamishness that political scientists seem to have towards normative issues, perhaps a product of their social scientific (read: positivistic, in the broad sense) training.[6] Whether or not they explicit identify their work with the analytic side of Kant's analytic-synthetic distinction, many political philosophers still assert that their primary method is the analysis of concepts and formal logical argumentation, both of which can be carried out independently of engagement with the empirical political world. A typical response to objections that refer to actual states of affairs in the world, from a political philosopher, is the dismissive: "That's an empirical question" (i.e., the answer would be in the form of a synthetic, rather than analytic, statement).

Closing/Bridging/Dissolving Methodological Divides?

I've briefly outlined the historical context in which both the content (conceptual toolbox and problems posed) and the methods (conceptual analysis and logical argumentation) that distinguish contemporary politically philosophy from its "Others". Philosophers reading such an account may find themselves experiencing a certain tension, a phenomenon that I would interpret as follows: the claims of philosophers, it is commonly thought in the (Analytic) Anglophone tradition, aim at

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[6] Within the discipline of Political Science, the distinction between "positive" and "normative" theorizing is based upon the fact/value dogma. The ascendant method of political analysis within the discipline, associated with so-called "realist" approaches, is positivistic in this more general sense (Brown 2002: 4-11).

universal and *necessary* truths (as opposed to *particular* and *contingent* ones). Doesn't this claim stand in tension with the recognition that the basic categories of political philosophy clearly emerged at particular historical time and geographical location? Political philosophy as it is practiced remains the legacy of certain responses to political problems that were particular and contingent, not universal and necessary.

At present we find ourselves in a national and, even more so, an international institutional order in flux—for a half-century, the Westphalian international order has been in eclipse, and what many have referred to as a "postmodern" state system seems to be in its nascent stages (Calabrese 2000; Cooper 2000 & 2002). Complexity in global relations, novel technologies and modes of human communication and organization, interrelationships between distant people and communities that are sometimes empowering and enriching, often oppressive and impoverishing, mark a political world that our traditional moral and political categories struggle to capture. Even if the concepts we have in fact worked well for dealing with political realities in an earlier time and another place, why should we believe they are as useful here and now?

This is perhaps why some of the most original and promising work being done in political philosophy attempts to keep itself close to the facts of the contemporary political world—Iris Young (2007) frames her theorizing about self-determination in terms of its implications for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Thomas Pogge (2008) relies upon empirical data in his account of global poverty, and Elizabeth Anderson (2010) synthesis an impressive array of social scientific studies in her arguments for racial integration in the U.S. as an ethical imperative.

When we attend to the facts of our own world, it becomes difficult to avoid thinking seriously about our position within it. Christopher Heath Wellman cites Anderson and Young approvingly (as well as the work of Michael Walzer) when he writes: "the best way to better understand justice is to become more clear about why we care about justice" (2002: 82). Certainly, each of us poses the

questions that we do because, for some reason or another, we care; in the case of justice, Wellman thinks that the best way to clarify why we care about it "is to come out of our academic libraries and listen carefully to what actual victims of injustice are saying" (ibid.). "In this regard," he writes, "Young's work stands as a shining example of how the best theories of justice can be crafted only if we remain sensitive to the actual frustrations of those who long for justice" (ibid.). I agree wholeheartedly with Wellman's sentiments here. His remarks raise a host of questions that neither he, nor Walzer, nor Young, fully address. Given the historical specificity of the development and the social and cultural position of their field, if political philosophers are to "come out of our academic libraries and listen carefully to what actual victims of injustice are saying," what does this mean for the political philosophy's conceptual language, the problems it poses, and the methods whereby it is practiced?

Wellman's remarks reinforce the conclusion that the most basic problems that face political philosophers in the contemporary Western tradition are methodological: How do we go about doing political philosophy that responds adequately to the political problems that we face, given the recent transformation of political realities? Where do we look to find the concepts and categories that can help us to understand and respond to the pressing political problems of our own time? Can normative and empirical theoretical projects be brought together again in a defensible and productive relationship? What are the ethical as well as epistemic implications of how we go about responding to this methodological challenge? Given the historical specificity of our discipline, whose interests will changes in method serve? And who are "we", anyway, and how have we come to be "us"? Whose voices will contribute to what Richard Rorty has characterized as "the conversation of the West" (1979: 389, 394)? Whose views of political realities enter into Western political philosophy, and whose will be excluded?

1.2. Summary of the Paper: A Tradition, an Empirical Case Study, & an Alternative Model

In this paper, I explore these questions through an engagement with contemporary philosophical literature, viewed through the lens of an empirical case study. As a starting point, I consider a snapshot of the literature dealing with two central concepts in the Western political tradition: state sovereignty and self-determination (chapter 2).

Based on questions that emerged from this initial engagement with the professional literature, I designed and carried out an empirical study in Mexico which involved observation, interviews, and dialogue with members of a community locked in a struggle for self-determination against a (sovereign) state (Chapter 3). This portion of the paper draws upon original empirical work and provides what students of the social sciences, especially qualitative approaches to research such as ethnography, will recognize as what Fred Erickson termed a "natural history of inquiry." During the summers of 2009 and 2010, I spent about two months conducting research in collaboration with a small, independent community located in Itztapalapa, an impoverished neighborhood of Mexico City. I hoped to test a hypothesis concerning the usefulness of a particular conceptual schema in practice. I hadn't anticipated the extent to which a cross-cultural engagement would challenge my assumptions as to the *meaning* of my own questions, as well as some of the core common practices in contemporary social, political, and educational philosophy.

This community seemed well positioned to provide some insight into the relevance or irrelevance of political philosophical vocabulary from the perspective of empirical realities on the ground. Initially, I thought of this case study as an experiment to test the adequacy of what I took to be some of current philosophical concepts and language against complex political realities faced by those at a great social, geographical, and ideological distance from philosophers in the Anglophone academy. The issues that emerged in the course of this "experiment" in taking philosophy out of the

academy and into the (political) world led to an unanticipated challenge that struck at the heart of the legitimacy of the practice of contemporary political philosophy.

I then returned to the political philosophical literature and discovered that there were many elements of the modern Western tradition, a resurgent pragmatism going by the name of nonideal theory, feminist critiques of philosophical methodology, and attempts to democratize inquiry in the "applied" field of philosophy of education research. Starting from insights gained from the experiment in Mexico, and synthesizing principles drawn from the cutting edge of methodological critique (chapter 4), I propose a new methodological approach to political philosophy that is naturalized and democratized (chapters 5 and 6). My hope is that my (sometimes) inchoate and grasping indication of a productive direction will contribute to a reflexive contemporary conversation in political philosophy about who we are, what we do, and why and how we do it.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptualizing Political Problems in the (Post-?)Westphalian Tradition: Sovereignty, Accountability, & Self-Determination[7]

The study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy.

—David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

2.1. Sovereignty & the Westphalian Tradition

Politics, as described above (§1.2) is a general phenomena occurring in all human (and perhaps some non-human) societies. In the modern era, however, Western political philosophy has been centrally concerned with the justification of coercive power and, at this still general level, it shares its central questions with its predecessors, ancient and medieval political philosophy: Who is entitled to rule others using coercive force, and by what authority? What are the proper limits to such coercive power? Thus, Western political philosophy is distinctively concerned with *normative* questions about authority, hierarch, governance, coercion, and so on. At least three characteristics distinguish the *modern* framing of these questions:

1. They emerged in the period leading up to and following the Peace of Westphalia, and they take these questions to be primarily about the justification of the state system that emerged in Europe at that time.

2. No longer satisfied with appeals divine authority or religious doctrine, modern political

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[7] This chapter is a substantially modified version of a paper that I wrote for a graduate course at the University of Colorado in the spring of 2010. Taught by Alison Jaggar, the course in Contemporary Political Philosophy focused on philosophical issues in international politics, and this course and paper inspired the empirical case study which I undertook that summer.

philosophers sought justifications for political power that were secular and grounded in reasons that (almost) all citizens can (or ought to) accept.

3. At least in the liberal strand of the tradition, the legitimate authority of governors is understood in terms of its relationship to the well-being and/or dignity of the subjects who are governed.

In this chapter, I focus on each of these distinctive features of modern Western political philosophy through an investigation of one of its central concepts: state sovereignty (§2.1). I then consider the traditional conception of sovereignty in light of a cursory but suggestive exploration of the real-world example of internal political conflict and the question of external legitimacy in the modern United States of Mexico (§2.2). In order to make sense of the inadequacy of the traditional conceptualization and move towards an alternative, I draw upon discuss an influential contemporary reframing of the issue provided by Iris Young (§2.3) and on this basis, I offer several proposals for action of international and domestic political agents.[8] Finally, I draw some lessons from this exploration of the tradition that serve as starting points for the empirical case study and the arguments in the chapters that follow (§2.4).

Dilemmas of Sovereignty

Sovereignty is frequently invoked today, as it has been now for centuries, by representatives of states that feel threatened by the actions of other state and non-state actors. Despite, or perhaps because of its centrality to political theory *and* political practice, the meaning of the concept of sovereignty has been vigorously contested (Oppenheim 1905; Carr 1964; Falk 1993; Bartelson 1995; Philpott 2011). Some have suggested it is morally odious, providing a cover for oppression (Maritain 1951). Others have argued that it is simply obsolete (Beitz 1979/2000; Pogge 1992; see Brown 2002:

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[8] These proposals will later be seen to be problematic, as well; I retain them in their original form in this chapter to present to the reader accurately the original starting point from which my empirical inquiry amongst the Pancho Villas began, and so to clarify the empirical and experiential basis for the development of the methodological insights offered later.

4-7). Nevertheless, the concept of sovereignty and arguments about it continue to operate powerfully

in discourses of philosophers, policymakers, and other national and international political actors.

Perhaps we would be better off without it. At the moment, however, the concept remains central to the

prevailing interpretation of international state system—it seems that at the present time, for better or

worse, we cannot do without it.

On one interpretation (which I would suggest is the prevailing one), the concept's normative

appeal lies in an appeal to moral principle that individuals and communities have a *prima facie* right to

self-determination. In the liberal tradition, part of what it is to be a person worthy of respect is to

exercise some form of autonomy and freedom to choose one's life path in accordance with one's own

conception of the good life. In the modern era, the principle of religious toleration emerged and was

justified in part on the basis of respect for autonomy. As the international system of states emerged

following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, some philosophers sought justification for the authority of

territorial governors by appeal to an individual person's right to autonomous self-governance. By

extrapolation or expansion, this principle was thought to apply to states within the context of the

international order. Just as individuals have a right to self-determination, these philosophers reasoned,

so do groups of people who share a common identity rooted in history, geography, and (perhaps, but

not necessarily) in a common conception of the good life. On this kind of view, states have a *prima*

facie right to non-interference, because state sovereignty is understood to be merely the collective

political expression of autonomous self-determination.

Since the Second World War, confidence in the Westphalian order has eroded significantly;

transnational concerns have led to the recognition that sovereignty as a normative value often serves as

an obstacle to honoring other fundamental moral interests, such as providing help and preventing harm

to vulnerable others. The tension between sovereignty and taking human rights seriously forces a

dilemma in which one or the other must be compromised: *either* we honor the right to self-

determination of states *or* we prevent atrocities and other tragedies from occurring. Navigating this Scylla and Charybdis appears to be the unavoidable task of decision-makers in the twenty-first century, especially those in wealthy countries, who would attempt to use influence and affluence to improve the lot of poor and vulnerable people worldwide. But is the dilemma of sovereignty versus human rights inevitable?

Here is where political philosophers ought to be specially qualified to help. In this chapter, I follow several prominent political philosophers in arguing that the dilemma of sovereignty versus human rights is not natural, nor is it inevitable. Rather than accepting as self-evident the value of traditional interpretations of state sovereignty, we can take up a more critical position in which "sovereignty is seen not as a static concept that [states] either have or do not have, but as a concept with many possible meanings; in other words, sovereignty is a social construct with a range of effects on how states perceive their own interests" (Wind 2009: 85). The way in which we understand the basis and meaning of sovereignty has implications for the whole range of issues facing the international community, from the ratification of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Kyoto Protocol and responding to global climate change, to the Right to Protect (R2P) doctrine and other forms of humanitarian intervention, to the dissemination of aid for purposes of disaster relief, military success, and economic development.

Westphalian Sovereignty as the Possibility of "The Juridical Condition"

Thomas Pogge's (2008) provides a concise and, in my view, accurate account of the traditional conceptualization—a characterization mirrored in what Iris Young calls "sovereignty as non-interference." What is this notion? In order to get clear on the language we're using and what is at stake, I will now delineate the connection between the concepts of sovereignty and self-determination, and suggest that, at least within the context provided by our European political-philosophical heritage, *democratic accountability* provides the crucial link between the two.

Pogge's (2008) definition is as follows: "A is *sovereign* over B if and only if

(1) A is a governmental body or officer ("agency"), and

(2) B are persons, and

(3) A has unsupervised and irrevocable authority over B

      (a) to lay down rules constraining B's conduct, or

      (b) to judge B's compliance with rules, or

      (c) to enforce rules against B through preemption, prevention, or punishments, or

      (d) to act in B's behalf toward other agencies (ones that do or do not have authority

         over B) or persons (ones whom A is sovereign over, or not)" (177)

Furthermore, if A's authority over B is exclusive (there are no other entities with such claims in relation to B) then A is said to be an "absolute sovereign." In such cases, sovereignty names a relationship of (moral) inequality. The state ("sovereign") possesses "unsupervised" and "irrevocable" political authority over other persons.

This is unequal relationship is profoundly significant because, "Central to contemporary political thought and reality is the idea of the autonomous territorial state as the preeminent mode of political organization" (178). In its Westphalian conceptualization, "sovereignty is very highly concentrated at a single level – it is states and only states that merit separate colors on a political map of our world" (ibid.). In other words, state sovereignty is typically thought of as absolute – as if for almost any person and territory that you can point to in the world, there "is exactly one government with preeminent authority over, and primary responsibility for, this person or territory" (ibid.).

The justification of the power of the modern state (its sovereignty) requires addressing at least two problems: First, what is the moral basis for such an authoritative relation? By what right does A possess authority over B? Second, why should A have an *exclusive* right over B? In other words, why should sovereignty be absolute? It is my contention that the best, most reasonable answer we can

provide to the first question entails that we reject the "absolute sovereignty" posited in the second.

In modern Western political philosophy, the answer to the first question has often been identified with an appeal to a "social contract." A is authorized to act in an unsupervised and irrevocable fashion in relation to B because B has consented (explicitly or tacitly and actually or hypothetically) to allow A to do so. The response to the second question is less univocal. Hobbes famously writes that sovereignty is necessarily "indivisible." This is based, in Pogge's words, upon Hobbes' "belief that a *juridical condition* (as distinct from a lawless state of nature) presupposes an absolute sovereign" (2008: 178). This belief, which Pogge characterizes as a "dogma," is based upon the following argument:

> A juridical condition, by definition, involves a recognized decision mechanism that uniquely resolves any dispute. This mechanism requires some agency because a mere written or unwritten code (constitution, holy scripture) cannot settle disputes about its own interpretation. But so long as this agency is limited or divided…a juridical condition has not been achieved because there is no recognized way in which conflicts over the precise location of the limit or division can be authoritatively restored.   (179)

This argument states, in effect, that law-governed existence is not possible without an absolute and undisputed agency to adjudicate cases of conflict amongst subjects or between subjects and the sovereign. In such a strong formulation, the juridical condition extends only to subjects *within* a sovereign state. For the juridical condition to apply to relations between states, there would need to be a "world sovereign" with uncontested and global political authority. The lack of such an entity, and the impossibility or undesirability that such an entity might exist, has led many philosophers to conclude that the international order is *necessarily* anarchic, a Hobbesian "state of nature" in which the notion of might is coextensive with the notion of right.

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Sovereignty as Collective Self-Determination

The kind of argument for sovereignty presented above is instrumental. The authority of the sovereign, on the Westphalian conception, is a kind of glue that holds the polity together. If it is not at least absolute within given territorial and constitutional limits, then there is the possibility that the polity will, in Michael Walzer's words, splinter into "a thousand petty fortresses" (1983: 39; cited in Pogge 2008: 180) and the juridical condition will be undermined. On one interpretation, this is bad primarily because it would be catastrophic for the well being of citizens. The anarchy of disunity is presumed to be violent and chaotic, a Hobbesian war of each against all.

Pogge's characterizing the "dogma" of absolute sovereignty neglects the way that the appeal to sovereignty as constituting the juridical condition is about what this condition enables, not only what it prevents. Sovereignty may not be, in a straightforward way, an expression of the self-determination of "a people" so much as what makes the identification the people possible in the first place. If the juridical condition is what unifies the *polis,* then absolute sovereignty constitutes a people as a political unity. Thus, this reasoning goes, *political* self-determination of individuals requires, perhaps even presupposes, the absolute sovereignty of the modern state.

Presumably, the concentration of power in a single territorial sovereign will reach practical and moral limits – practical, due to factors having to do with size of a territory, population size, or communication, and moral, having to do with the cultural character of peoples and divergent conceptions of the good life that perhaps cannot be reasonably accommodated within a single institutional structure, and the increased coercion necessary to reduce or eliminate such differences among citizens. The instrumental argument is thus complicated by the historical fact that minority groups of various kinds have been subjected to marginalization, violence at the hands of the majority and the sovereign state. In such cases, the ideal of absolute sovereignty requires a proliferation of states in order to provide a sovereign for each distinct group. Such a proliferation of states is what has

in fact occurred from the sixteenth-century until the present, perhaps a testament to the influence of this conceptualization of collective self-determination.

The justification of this state of affairs fuses an instrumental argument, that the order predicated upon the absolute power of the sovereign is, on the whole, a more desirable state of affairs for its citizens, with a non-instrumental argument that agreements between autonomous individuals are morally binding. The liberal tradition in particular is marked by agreement that the consent of the governed is the most plausible candidate to provide moral justification for the authority of the sovereign. Contractualist defenses need not appeal to the *reasons* that citizens consent to be governed (the goods produced or harms avoided), since the apparent fact that they do is enough.

On this view, the sovereign state creates the conditions for the exercise of political self-determination of individuals, and simultaneously derives its authority of the wills of individuals who have consented (for this and/or other reasons) to its rule. Thus, the *moral* force of claims to absolute sovereignty do not merely stand or fall with considerations of the actual benefits and burdens that accrue to citizens; nor do they rely only upon considerations of actual or hypothetical consent. We can say, however, that sovereignty derives its normative force from the moral principle of respect for persons, which includes both respect for their well being and their autonomous choices.

Let us return to the questions posed at the start of this section: By what right does A possess authority over B? Second, why should A have an *exclusive* [and absolute] right over B? I have argued that it is a basic premise of the modern Western cultural and intellectual tradition that respect for adult persons entails a right to autonomy, to individual self-determination. Sovereignty, construed in this way, has strong implications for issues of external and internal legitimacy. The arguments and conceptual connections related above are thought by many to imply that the legitimate state stands in a certain kind of relation to other states, but also to its citizens; the latter relation is that of democratic accountability. Many believe that the form of government *required* by the liberal understanding of

state sovereignty is democracy, rule *by* the people and *for* the people, and we can see why this is so. Of course, this and many other issues related to sovereignty are contested within the tradition. I do not wish to assess the cogency of the arguments for state sovereignty presented above, or to work out all of its implications. My goal has been more modest, characterizing what I take to be key features of the concept of sovereignty as it functions in the Westphalian tradition.

Two objections are, however, worth raising at this point in order to segue to the next section: the issues of empirical adequacy and normative feasibility. Is the ideal of sovereignty feasible for real states, and if not, is it appropriate as a guide for action? If the state does not in fact respect and honor the autonomy of those over whom it exercises authority, then we lose the link between self-determination and sovereignty is broken. If the state fails to *actually* secure the juridical condition for its citizens, then it is (at least in respect to those citizens) illegitimate. When we look to the real world, we find that this is the case for perhaps *all* existing states. Ought the principle that states have a right to sovereignty as non-interference guide our analysis and action, even though states imperfectly enact, and sometimes openly flout, protection of its citizens and democratic accountability to them? If not, what alternative might better serve?

These questions become compelling when we turn from the concept itself to consider the results of the concept-in-use.[9] In the case study explored in a cursory way below (§2.2), we see how the claims of governments to absolute authority over citizens in the case of repressive, unaccountable state actors, bring the concept into conflict with its own principles.

2.2. Sovereignty as "Concept-in-Use" in the Case of U.S. Aid to Mexico

The Merida Initiative (also known as "Plan Mexico") is the title of legislation enacted by the

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[9] Here, the notion of "Concepts-in-use" (the way a concept operates in practice as opposed to how it does in the context of theory building, in a more ideal mode) mirrors Kaplan's (1964) idea of "Logics-in-use"; see also Howe (2003: 98).

U.S. Congress in 2008. Designed by the Bush administration, this "$1.4 billion vehicle for bolstering the war on drugs launched by Mexican President Felipe Calderon in 2006…allows for increased military-to-military cooperation in training on policing, forensics, penal and judicial practices" (Carlsen 2009). This "aid" is explicitly designed to bolster the power of the Mexican state, for the presumptive purposes of exerting its increased coercive power in the "war on drugs."

Drug trafficking from Mexico into the U.S. is nothing new. What motivates this enormous aid package, unprecedented in the long history of U.S.-Mexico relations? According to journalist Laura Carlsen, it has to do with a combination of domestic political and economic considerations on both sides of the border: "Alarmist cries of a Mexican collapse help clinch the passage of measures to further militarize the southern border and obtain juicy contracts for private defense and security firms. Local politicians are finding they can be a cash cow for federal aid." On the U.S. side, the prospects of "total anarchy to the south" and "spillover violence" loom large in the mainstream media's portrayal of situation currently facing the Mexican state. The fear generated by these images provides substantial political capital for those who wish to bolster the Mexican state's power in the name of replicating the war on drugs policies already pursued (disastrously, according to critics, in spite of many apparent gains) in Columbia and other Latin American countries.

What is important for our purposes is the *perception* of the prospects for anarchy on the south side of the U.S./Mexico border is rooted in "dogma" of undivided sovereignty—if the official government cannot maintain a monopoly on the use of force and effectively exclude other centers of political authority within its territory, then that territory must be on the verge of anarchy, of the "splintering" that Walzer warns of. This perception overlays a normative, ethical conceptualization on the real material interests shared by US, Mexican, and European elites in "stability", the maintenance of the status quo.

The norm of undivided sovereignty within a territory provides an important dimension of the

lens through which the U.S. views dynamics internal to Mexico. In Alison Jaggar's phrase, "the symbolic world may diverge from the real world" (2005: 7). The view is very different from the perspective of the average Mexican on the south side of the border, where the corruption and abuses by local and federal officials are primary concerns of daily life. Indeed, it is taken for granted amongst the populace that narcotraffickers and public officials are well connected in an intricate web of power, money, and marriage, the more powerful members of both classes occupying a position above and out of the reach of the law. For many ordinary Mexicans, the state itself is understood as a more immediate and salient threat to their livelihood and security than drug cartels or common gangsters. Many organizations representing "civil society", under the umbrella of the "Other Campaign" (*Otra Compania*) and other leftist associations, challenge the authority of the state.

The case of the Mexico is not exceptional. A lack of "democratic consolidation" has been a topic of much debate in the literature on Latin American "third-wave" democracies. Princeton professor of politics and international affairs Deborah Yashir (1999) writes that it would be a mistake to interpret this failure as an expression of a merely internal (national) political and economic dynamics; rather, it must be viewed as inextricably linked to broader economic and political contexts. The basically capitalist Latin American economies have undergone severe crises, which have been accompanied by a crisis of political legitimacy. Deeply authoritarian regimes, massive foreign debt, and austerity programs and anti-populist economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have given rise to widespread popular opposition and political instability. Sociologist Norma Chinchilla writes that,

> [In countries] such as Mexico, ostensibly civilian democratic governments have become increasingly identified with human rights abuses at the same time that their traditionally populist internal economic policies are increasingly dismantled by austerity programs demanded by foreign banks.   (Chinchilla 1991: 292)

As a consequence of economic pressures coupled with the crisis of legitimacy,

new political institutions, rather than securing democratic consolidation across the board,

have in fact had a more checkered effect—as *evidenced by the incomplete reach of the*

state, the survival of authoritarian enclaves, the uneven incorporation of social sectors,

and the emergence of opposing social forces. Indeed, many ostensibly consolidated

democracies now find themselves being challenged by movements rallying against the

failure of states to universalize democratic practices and secure political autonomy.

(Yashir 1999: 76-7; emphasis mine)

It is crucial to differentiate these "new" movements from previous challenges to state power in

the region. Yashir states that, "Unlike the class-based guerrilla wars of decades past, however,

indigenous activists and movements do not seek to overthrow the state but rather are looking to reform

democracy" (77). These emergent movements are best interpreted as a consequence of imperfect

"consolidation" under democratic institutions—as a reaction to a perceived lack of accountability, they

pursue remedies that are themselves democratic and accountable.

The responses are as varied as the contexts from which they emerge.

a myriad of social and political groups have mobilized with new demands, tactics,

utopian visions, and definitions of what it means to "be political" or "do politics" (*hacer*

politica) or, in the case of Central America, "make revolution" (*hacer revolucion*)…The

range of issues represented in such groups and organizations is great - daily survival,

independent labor organizing, human rights, democracy, antiracism, autonomy for

indigenous peoples, feminism, and the environment. Their degree of autonomy from the

state, political parties, or armed revolutionary organizations in the case of Nicaragua, El

Salvador, and Guatemala varies- but all are experimenting with new ways of facilitating

direct political participation by the diversity of groups that arise from capitalism's

multiple and complex contradictions. (Chinchilla: 293)

These larger, regional dynamics are clearly present in the political context in Mexico. In

Mexico City, autonomous collectives have gone so far as to establish local governing bodies through

which members assert their political right to self-governance. When traveling with a group of students

studying social movements in the summer of 2009, I first learned of the *Frente Popular de Francisco

Villa Independiente* (FPFVI), one of a small collection of groups known in Mexico as simply "The

Pancho Villas" or "The Panchos."

The Panchos identify three precipitating events as the source of their movement. The first was

the massacre of protestors on October 2, 1968 at UNAM (National Autonomous University of

Mexico) by government agents. The second was the earthquake on September 19, 1985, which

devastated huge portions of Mexico City and led to the internal displacement of poor and working

class people. The state's response to this crisis supported the recovery of wealthier neighborhoods and

left poorer individuals and families to fend for themselves (La Botz 1996; FPFVI: 5). Third, in part as

a result of the displacement due to the earthquake, in 1988 Mexico City was in the midst of an

unprecedented housing crisis.

In collaboration with student activists at UNAM, groups of displaced people seized land in the

neighborhood of Mexico City known as Itztapalapa. Three cooperatives formed in 1987 and 1988,

"occupying vacant land within the city and defending it against those who wanted them to pay for it, to

defend what they considered to already be theirs" (FPFVI: 6). In 1989, the various groups came

together and formed the FPFVI to coordinate their activities and more effectively resist the state.

When the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war on the Mexican state on

January 1, 1994, the Panchos' history states that they "saw in the Zapatistas a reflection of themselves,

and spilled out into the streets in support of their struggle" (FPFVI: 11). This was the beginning of

more direct confrontations with the state on issues other than the occupation of land.

The most dramatic clash with the state occurred in 1994, when, at least according to the Panchos' own record, federal riot police tried to remove 300 squatters that had begun to organize on vacant land. The squatters defended themselves with sticks, rocks, and Molotov cocktails. After taking several police officers hostage, the Panchos negotiated the release of those taken prisoner by the police and had "their new colony and a chance to live a dignified life" (ibid.).

Statements from government officials characterize the Panchos as lawbreakers, as opportunistic thugs who claim benefits for themselves at the expense of other groups. More important than the question of the impact of the Panchos actions, from the perspective of governing officials, is that their political strategy and tactics bypass bureaucratic channels. Representatives of the state and the Panchos recognize that what is at stake in the struggle is the legitimacy of the state. Indeed, a major factioning of the Panchos' movement occurred in 1996 when some members of the community chose to align themselves with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), Mexico's mainstream left-of-center party (FPFVI: 14).

For members of the faction that remained "independent" (and added the word to their official title, FPFVI), refusal to make use of established political channels, especially electoral politics and major parties, is a central to and symbolically significant to their struggle. Integral to the struggle of the FPFVI for self-determination is the refusal to recognize the state as legitimate. And yet, despite the antagonistic relationship between the FPFVI and the state, the development of infrastructure within the communities (which provide a stark contrast to the almost entirely undeveloped barrios that surround them) has been financed by the government. Through direct action, they have secured dozens of credit contracts from the Federal District Housing Institute. Yet the Panchos often deny that they have been "given anything" by the state, that they have laid their own water pipes, built their own houses: "Nobody has done it for us" (Bricker 2008). The leveraging of funds from a government that

they perceive to be completely illegitimate is described as laying claim to what actually "belongs to them"; this rightful possession has, in their view, been unjustly appropriated by corrupt government officials in collaboration with the national and global capitalist class.

In this respect, their struggle for self-determination mirrors those of indigenous communities in the United States, New Zealand, and throughout Latin America (Young 2007). The Panchos' rhetoric and practice seems consonant with Young's proposal that self-determination as non-domination implies federalist forms of political organization. *Federalism* implies, in Young's view, both vertical and horizontal lines of authority and accountability, coexisting within the same territory in a "nested", multilayered network. In the next section, I discuss this alternative conceptualization and apply it to the case of the Panchos.

2.3. Re-visioning State Sovereignty

Given the history of conflict between the FPFVI and the Mexican state, it seems likely that U.S. aid in the form of the Merida Initiative and others that will undoubtedly follow will entail drastic consequences for them and for other movements that have formed to challenge the policies and authority of the state. Yet the Panchos demonstrably enact, *vis a vis* their own members, the ideal of democratic accountability presently lacking in the Mexican state. International actors therefore face a real dilemma if they accept the Westphalian conceptualization of the relationship of political self-determination to state sovereignty. The prevailing social construction (the traditional conception) of sovereignty is not only inadequate: taken to justify the bolstering of a coercive state apparatus, it now appears to be a source of oppression of individuals and collectives. This case gives us compelling reasons, it seems to me, to think that the moral bases of modern political authority counts against the claim that such authority is rightly construed as *exclusive, irrevocable,* and *absolute.* In other words, the principle of respect for persons counts against the absolute sovereignty of the Westphalian state.

Recall that key arguments for absolute sovereignty construe this as necessary for establishing

and maintaining the juridical condition. To critics of such rationalizations of state power, the presumption that the juridical condition requires an absolute political authority appears to be based upon an unwarranted, even ideological pessimism towards human nature. And indeed, the claim such a condition requires the sovereign of the modern, Westphalian nation-state is belied by the obvious empirical fact that some form of the rule of law predates this system in the West by at least a millennium, and occurs in perhaps all other non-Western contemporary cultural and political traditions as well. Furthermore, within paradigm examples of the Westphalian nation-state, political power is exercised in complex ways from a variety of centers of authority.

But perhaps Pogge's construal of sovereignty as a "dogmatic" commitment to an ideal of highly concentrated and exclusive authority is a bit uncharitable. In a weaker formulation, the argument might claim the following: *insofar* as political authority is divided, there is always the possibility of lawlessness; periodically, this possibility will be actualized with negative consequences for people; therefore, the concentration of sovereignty in as few centers as possible is, *prima facie,* a good thing. Young (2007) challenges even this worker formulation of the principle of sovereignty, arguing that we ought to reject the traditional notion and work to conceptualize self-determination in a way that *actually* respects persons. To this end, she offers a reconceptualization of "self-determination as non-domination" rather than "non-interference." She argues that the latter does a better job than the former at capturing many important political realities on the ground, latter fails to recognize the interdependence of distinct peoples, "the fact that groups often dwell together in territories; for this reason they have shared problems, and the activities of those in one group often affect the possibilities of action for others" (59). Thus, Young writes, "I offer a conception of self-determination as compatible with being-together-in-difference" (59).

Young also claims that this greater recognition of complex political realities makes her alternative conceptualization more likely to provide guidance for decision-making in situations that are

politically contested. Young makes her case for the second point via reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She suggests that, in the place of a two-state solution which seeks to differentiate two distinct populations in separate and sovereign territories, or a single, individualistic and multicultural state with authority over both populations, we might build "a vision of dispersed Jewish and Palestinian jurisdictions, organized in a federated system whose constitution minimizes the possibilities of domination" (59). Minimizing oppression while recognizing interdependence means recognizing claims of groups (e.g., colonized indigenous populations) to land and resources; certainly, self-determination as non-domination requires that a group has significant decision-making power when it comes to language, culture, and education. But self-determination as nondomination does not assume that a juridical condition requires a single, absolute sovereign in a given jurisdiction. Rather, authority over different domains of life coexist simultaneously, based upon the interests involved in living in a common environment (2007: 65).

Young's proposed reconceptualization is offered, she writes, in order to "fuel our political imagination" when analyzing protracted, even seemingly intractable, political conflict. In the remainder of this chapter, I extend her argument to a specific question for state and non-state actors in which the question of sovereignty is often thought decisive: that of distributing financial and material aid to a sub-set of the population of another country.

Implications for International Actors: Supporting Self-Determination as Non-Domination?

If we take the self-determination of peoples (however constituted) to require a definite territorial possession in which other entities have no right to interfere (the "non-interference" conception of self-determination") then this precludes in advance the possibility of aiding those within that territory if the sovereign behaves badly towards its citizens. If, by contrast, we conceive of self-determination as a right to "non-domination," claims to sovereignty cannot preclude the intervention of a third party on behalf of citizens dominated by their own states, or the actions of politically

autonomous domestic groups.

Political economist Christopher Kilby affirms the principle that states have a *prima facie* duty to avoid interference in the affairs of other states, and to be free from the influence of "foreign powers"; his version of this claim is, however, in accordance with the analysis of self-determination I have elucidated above, as he explicitly ties this duty to the representative (read: accountable) nature of the sovereign. Thus, his definition of a *foreign power* includes "any organization not directed by and primarily composed of citizens of the state" (84).

So the duty to preserve sovereignty is rooted in the state's charge to act in the best interests of its people and to preserve their autonomy. Accordingly, Kilby applies the following requirement for a state's legitimacy: it must be "one considered legitimate by a substantial majority of its citizens…not maintained by continual threat of force against its citizens…that does not engage in criminal activities such as the widespread violation of human rights, including subsistence rights" (84). He then argues that we have a duty to withhold foreign aid to states that fail to meet this criterion. This duty is an instance of our negative duty not to sponsor undue harm visited upon others.

Even if the Merida Initiative and others that follow accomplish their stated goal of curtailing illegal drug trafficking, diminishing through the exercise of expanded state power the status of narcotraffickers as *de facto* governors of many realms of Mexican life, why should we think that this will be the only impact of a strengthened Mexican state and military apparatus? Giving aid in this case is likely to violate the negative duty not to harm the Panchos in both their right to self-determination and because if the Mexican government succeeds in removing them from their colonies, this would significantly compromise their ability to meet their subsistence needs.

Kilby's assertion that states have a right to non-interference *only in cases that they are accountable to their citizens* is quite intuitive; for if sovereignty derives its moral weight from its relation to the concept of respect for persons then it is contradictory to suppose that a government that

violates the rights of its citizens can't claim a right to sovereignty (understood as a right to non-interference). Notably, Kilby's criteria are strictly negative, specifying what a legitimate government must not do, and in the case of the government that is illegitimate, what foreign powers must not do in relation to it.

With the facts on the ground in view, the Merida Initiative seems to violate the negative duty not to harm others, in this case, contributing to domination of an authoritarian government over groups within its borders. But philosophers also speak often of positive moral obligations. What of the positive duty to help others who are vulnerable or in need? Do such obligations simply not apply at the international level? Does self-determination as non-domination require something of international actors beyond the principle when interpreted as non-intervention? It is tempting to say, based on this analysis, the US government would be right to give the aid directly to the independent organizations already governing at the local level. This proposal is radical from the point of view of the status quo and, given widespread devotion to the concept of sovereignty as necessarily undivided, runs counter to prevailing political intuitions.

Organizations such as the Juntas del Bien Gobierno in the Zapatista territories of Chiapas, the Consejo Nacional Urbano Campesino (CNUC) in Tlaxcala, and the governing councils of the FPFVI in Mexico City have organized themselves according to the ideal of democratic accountability. All of these organizations have also made concrete gains in terms of quality of life for populations otherwise neglected by the official political apparatus. Thus, it seems reasonable to suppose that aid distributed by such entities would have a more beneficial impact on the lives of the average Mexican, an aim which I take to be at least one of the more legitimate motivations on the part of the U.S. taxpayer and perhaps even a few of our more well-intentioned policymakers and politicians.

Wouldn't this aid strategy undermine the Mexican state's legitimacy further? And, the critic might object, wouldn't this inevitably worsen the situation of Mexicans in general? It is at this point

that we find the conceptual distinctions of sovereignty, self-determination, and the critical link of accountability turns out to have dramatic results. This type of argument reveals itself to be fundamentally flawed, in that it is based on a false dilemma: When we picture sovereignty as necessarily monolithic, then we are forced to recognize only one legitimate governing authority for a territory. Consequently, our hands are tied when it comes to selection of distribution of official aid amongst competing authorities. The failings of the Mexican state and the political class that constitutes it must be ignored in practice, since further undermining this authority by supporting other centers of political power would only make the situation worse. So the argument from the necessity of undivided sovereignty goes.

If, by contrast, we picture sovereignty as distributed in a web of shifting, evolving power centers—both horizontal *and* vertical (Pogge 1992; 2008), implying institutions belonging to some species of federalism (Young 2007)—some with more legitimacy than others, then we (whether we are states *or* non-state actors) have the right (and, extending Kilby's analysis, even the responsibility) to consider the relative merits of each competing center of sovereignty in the distribution of aid. If some centers of political authority oppress others, then self-determination as nondomination seems to imply that the authorities who honor the rights of their own group members, without violating the rights of others, are more legitimate and so more worthy of legitimation by other authorities/states.

If it were put into practice, this alternative normative picture would lead in many cases to the support of grassroots organizations tied to specific communities rather than the official governments that claim a monopoly on force within the territories that these communities find themselves within. This conclusion might appear, at first glance, open to the criticisms of the distribution of aid through "civil society" organizations raised by Alison Jaggar in "Arenas of Citizenship" (2005)—i.e., that private, less-accountable groups are perhaps even more likely than states to oppress individuals on the basis of gender, race, etc. I would propose, however, that groups like the Panchos ought not be

understood as belonging to the realm of civil society. It is more accurate to understand these organizations as competing centers of sovereignty—along the lines of domestic instantiations of the "novel assemblages" described by Saskia Sasskin (2008)—that directly challenge the legitimacy of the Mexican government. They are not "non-governmental" and "private" organizations, at least not in the way that many articulations of civil society require. Indeed, they engage in direct conflict with the state, pursuing a strategy of "traditional" politics while simultaneously developing an independent and autonomous political space, free from the domination of the state. It seems reasonable to suppose that the strategy of providing aid to these novel assemblages would actually lead to a proliferation of these types of organizations, as it would increase the likelihood of their survival and success.

Far from defeating the principle that respect for legitimate political authority hinges upon considerations of accountability, the potential consequences of the strategy outlined above for the Mexican state seem to support this. It seems to me that it implies that distributing aid through these alternative centers of authority could very well be part of the solution for Mexico and for other troubled aid recipients as well. This is because the illegitimate state (in this case, the Mexican state) is put in a position of either adjusting its behavior to meet the criteria of effectiveness and accountability, or else finding itself increasingly isolated from the international community and obsolete within its own territorial boundaries. And this, from the perspective of a great many Mexicans and others suffering throughout the world under *de facto* and undemocratic governance, would occur as a welcome change.

Does legitimating existing democratic governance that honors the rights of individuals and the integrity of communities more important than curtailing drug trafficking? If these local centers of political authority were to be strengthened through foreign (U.S.) aid, would this weaken the stranglehold of both the official (but illegitimate) state apparatus and the *de facto* (and illegal) governance of the drug cartels? These and many other questions emerge when we take seriously the

concrete political context in which contemporary struggles for self-determination occur.

2.4. Sovereignty as "Essentially Contested": Is Political Philosophizing Also Political Action?

Marlene Winds suggests that sovereignty, as a "social construction", can have multiple meanings, and that these meanings will evolve to serve different interests and account for changing circumstances. What would it mean to rethink the sovereignty and the international state system it justifies in a way that recognizes complexity of the political organization of the modern world, and more adequately realizes the respect for persons deeply rooted in our Enlightenment heritage? Sally Haslanger (2000) has argued that, when doing analysis of concepts such as race and gender, the question is not "what does this concept mean?" but rather, "what do we want this concept to mean?" The latter question depends on a conception of concepts as tools, and so can be put in another way: "What do we want this concept to do for us?"

The case study of the Panchos reveals that sovereignty does not simply misconstrue political realities in an innocent way. Sovereignty, as a political concept, belongs to a special class of social constructions—it is "essentially contested." W. B. Gallie (1955) asserted that certain concepts exist such that the contest over their meaning is not a result of factors external to that meaning itself; rather, the meaning of the concept is *necessarily* a site of contest, because different interpretations serve different interests and lead to different effects. By weighing in on the question of what sovereignty and self-determination ought to mean, we are knowingly or unknowingly implicated in the political struggles that such concepts help to characterize.

Perhaps we should hesitate to draw conclusions about what self-determination means in the case of the Panchos. Why not ask instead: What would the Panchos choose to do if international actors were to offer them material support in their struggle? Would this be consistent with *their* vision of their community as a self-determining, autonomous political entity? If we take seriously the claim that direct support for such assemblages would be rooted in the principle of respect for persons and

their autonomy, respect for what the Panchos have to say is certainly salient. Is foreign aid consistent with their struggle for greater powers of self-determination? Should recognition of the right to self-determination of groups like the Panchos imply that their point of view, their aspirations and beliefs, must be accounted for in any solution one might propose for their conflict with the state?

Could it be that, in general, the principle of self-determination as non-domination means that political philosophers must incorporate the voices of real parties engaged in struggles for greater autonomy? What would this mean for our methods in political philosophy, and for the validity of arguments and conclusions of the sort considered in this chapter? What would it take to explore these questions seriously, to generate satisfactory answers?

CHAPTER 3

Observations, Interviews, and Dialogue with the Pancho Villas

3.1. Study Design & Methodology

Rationale and Research Questions

In order to attempt to address the questions raised at the end of the previous chapter (§ 2.4), I decided to attempt to take philosophical inquiry out of the armchair and into the world. As mentioned above, in the summer of 2009 I had travelled with a group of undergraduate students to Mexico, where we were hosted for a week in one of the communities associated with the Independent Popular Front of Francisco Villa (FPFVI). Inspired by the issues that emerged when I used the Panchos as a case study in a graduate-level political philosophy course at the University of Colorado (chapter 2), I decided to return to Mexico City the following year to actually discuss the issues with members of a community struggling for self-determination. My plan was to conduct interviews with various members of the FPFVI (known as "the Panchos"), explicitly seeking clarification of the concepts of sovereignty, self-determination, autonomy and democracy that inform their understanding of their own practice, and to do field observations that would enable me to develop a "thicker" description of the context in order to better situate their statements and activities. This would, I thought, provide evidence for the inappropriateness of the traditional conception of sovereignty for understanding struggles for self-determination in the real world, and perhaps experimentally validate the alternative conceptualization of the sort developed by Young (2000; 2007).

I contacted Mexico Solidarity Network (MSN), the Chicago-based organization that had arranged our 2009 visit with the Panchos. MSN provides programming beyond its undergraduate-level study abroad opportunities, and when I contacted the staff in the spring of 2010, they were in the

process of inaugurating a program designed to support graduate student research at multiple sites in Mexico. This presented an opportunity to return, sponsored by an organization that maintains positive relationships with the community I hoped to study. I worked with their staff to coordinate a return visit in the summer.

MSN's website summarizes its history, from its inception in 1999:

> Over the past decade, the Mexico Solidarity Network has gone through significant changes, developing from an NGO with an activist-oriented solidarity agenda to a community based group with strong relationships with Mexico's most important social movements, including the Zapatistas, the Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente, and the Consejo Nacional Urbano y Campesino. We work from a strong theoretical/political framework with a long range vision for profound social change. (http://mexicosolidarity.org/about/history, accessed 2/9/12)

Significantly, MSN's academic goals are explicitly motivated in terms of a political commitment to support the aspirations of the host communities with whom they place students. Prior to my return to visit the Panchos' autonomous communities, a version of my research proposal would need to be approved by the community. Furthermore, I agreed that any manuscript that resulted from my research would be submitted, in Spanish, for approval by the Panchos prior to publication.

Such stipulations were the first indication that the politics of research, of knowledge creation and dissemination, would be overriding concerns throughout this project. At the time, I was merely pleased that the Panchos thought my proposal worthwhile and agreed to host me in their community from mid-June until mid-July. I arranged for travel to Mexico City in early June 2010. My own Spanish-language ability is limited, and so I was joined shortly thereafter by my partner and, for purposes of the project, translator, Joanne Esch.

My study design focused on addressing the following cluster of questions:

1. How do the Panchos talk about "Sovereignty," and what discursive functions does this talk serve in the context of their political practice?

2. How do the Panchos define the state? How do they delineate its boundaries?

3. What concepts underlie their claims to autonomy from the state?

4. How does the "leadership" among the Panchos understand the internal politics of the community?

5. How do the Panchos understand the politics of the community in relation to other communities (revolutionary and otherwise), and towards the State?

6. How do "ordinary" members of the community, including those who are newcomers, understand the politics of their own community?

7. How do different members, in their talk, characterize the relationship of the community to the state, and does this vary by gender, age, etc.?

8. What contribution can an extensive and critical case study of a real world example of alternative political organization (the Panchos) make to the contemporary literature on sovereignty and self-determination?

Qualitative Interviews using "Strategic Questioning" and Participatory Action Research

My research methods included interviews and participant observation. We planned to conduct two sorts of observations: The first were formal observations, which would take place at official community meetings. These would involve an official announcement of our presence, description of our purpose, and brief introduction of our reason for being there (our research agenda). The second were informal observations, documented through notes on interactions with our host family (we stayed with a family in their home for the duration of our visit), typically around meals in the evening, and

with other members of the community in the streets, at the corner store or bakery, or hanging around in "the office", the administrative center of the community.

Reading daily about the escalation of the drug war in Mexico, and thinking about Plan Merida and its implications for the lives of average (which is to say, relatively poor) Mexican citizens, I embarked upon the design of my research project quite conscious of my positive affinity for the Panchos and their organization. I had seen that they had, through collective action, accomplished gains in security and quality of life for some of the poorest and most marginalized Mexicans; these concrete gains were in part the source of my optimism that alternatives to the conception of Sovereignty as a vertical arrangement, residing primarily in the state, hold great promise for legitimating and supporting the aspirations of marginalized and oppressed peoples.

Accordingly, at the early stages of project design, I already explicitly conceptualized my research in terms of a strong ethical commitment to benefitting study participants and collaborators (the research "subjects"). The following is an excerpt from my journal, written upon my arrival in Mexico City on June 7, 2010, as I reflected upon my own ultimate purposes:

> The Panchos' struggle is of utmost importance in this research. In learning firsthand about the struggle, I hope to contribute to the Panchos' articulation of their own vision regarding their organization.

This excerpt indicates the way in which I thought of this research project as inescapably and necessarily politically inflected. My interest in understanding the community's practice was political, related to my affinity for the community based on my experience the previous summer. This basic desire to *serve* the community through my attempt to understand their struggle, to help them clarify their own goals and commitments (this was something I *assumed* they would benefit from) is then linked to a methodological point:

[Research and interview] questions must be open ended. Let them [the Panchos'] tell the story. Attune my hearing to what's between the lines. Develop trust and communication w/ Community? Explain why we returned. Show interest in personal details—family histories, extended family, occupations. [My] Ethical commitment [is] to open, critical inquiry in community [contributing to] liberatory praxis.

Here a vague commitment to advancing the Panchos' agenda—which in retrospect depends upon an overly simplistic assumption that the Panchos have a single story to tell—stands in tension to my methodological commitment, which was to open-ended and responsive questioning and listening, the desire to simply "Let them tell the story."

Two traditions of empirical inquiry seemed particularly appropriate, given the methodological commitments described above. First, qualitative interviewing, common in ethnographic research, uses open-ended questions to provide a space for the interviewee, through language, to represent to the researcher the meanings that a given topic holds for them. Rooted in the epistemology of *interpretivism,* from the 1970s on this approach has become common in anthropology, sociology, human communication, and many other social science disciplines. As a rejection of the often caricatured positivist ideal of the researcher as objective (as opposed to subjective) and unsituated (occupying a "view from nowhere"), interpretivist social science maintains that, if we are to understand the nature of human activity, it is essential that we discover the meanings that these activities hold for their participants. The "insider's point of view" is valorized as authoritative, and scientific explanation is understood to be an instance of hermeneutics (Taylor 1994). It is for this reason that some describe interpretivism as requiring a *phenomenological approach*—that is, one that seeks to accurately describe the content and structure of first-person ("subjective"?) experience. Given my interest in understanding the concepts that the Panchos used to explain their own political

practice, and the relation of these concepts to personal experience, qualitative interviewing seemed an essential method to employ.

The second relevant tradition that informed the study design speaks directly to the political and ethical dimensions of the project. From the 1980s on, a growing awareness of relations of power implicit in the subject/researcher relationship led to what many have termed a "crisis of authority" in the social sciences (Taylor 1994; Rorty 1970, 1991; Fay 2002). While the move towards interpretivism was motivated by ethical concerns in addition to epistemic ones, many researchers argue that deference to the insider's perspective alone fails to resolve the issue of interpretive authority (the researcher is still in the position of interpreting that perspective, privileged as it may be). Participatory Action Research (PAR) was developed as a democratic alternative to traditional modes of social scientific inquiry. Developed by researchers who came to see their role as not merely documenting the experience of research subjects, PAR explicitly makes values and, in particular, political values, central to the research endeavor (Fals-Borda 1987; McTaggart 1989).

In contexts shaped by political struggle (and, in the view of many PAR advocates, this is most contexts), merely describing a situation fails to appreciate the responsibility that a researcher, understood as an agent with special expertise in the construction of knowledge, has to her subjects. PAR conceives of the knowledge construction process, from start to finish, as serving the interests of research subjects. On this model researchers engage in procedures that, often through deliberation, help participants to identify social problems and construct plans for facing those problems, with the ultimate goal of empowering them to make positive change in their own circumstance.

Our limitations in terms of resources (time) and capacities (in my case, linguistic; for both Joanne and me, cultural) meant that a more robust PAR design was beyond our reach. Yet the political dimension of our work, our desire to empower our subjects through our collective endeavor to understand, meant that PAR principles were still relevant if not imperative. We settled upon a model

for interviewing which synthesizes the open-ended questions and deep listening of qualitative interviewing, with the focus on solidarity and political empowerment of PAR. This model for democratic listening (not designed for "research" *per se*), developed by activist and social critic Fran Peavey (1994), is called *strategic questioning*. Strategic questioning begins from the assumption that something is not right, that inquiry begins from felt difficulties that occur in the unfolding of lived experience. It assumes that the nature of these felt difficulties can be uncovered through the linguistic exploration of personal and communal experiences.

"Level I" of Peavey's model consists of questions that explore experience in the past and the present, focusing on the interviewee's observations, thoughts and analysis, and emotions. "Level II" of Peavey's model builds upon the description and analysis developed at Level I. Level I can be thought of as the exploration for "what is", Level II explores possibilities for "what could be." By framing questions in terms of the interviewee's values and aspirations, Level II explores his or her visions of alternatives for the present and future. Once this vision has been articulated, the questioner moves on to pose questions related to how that vision might be brought about, what obstacles stand in the way, what coalitions must be built and what supports sought, and what actions the interview subject herself will take. Thus, while Peavey's model has not been applied, to my knowledge, in the context of formal research, it provides a rough-and-ready synthesis of relevant features of the interpretivist and PAR approaches.

Using Peavey's strategic questioning model as our template, we designed an interview protocol (see Appendix A). This protocol is made up of open-ended questions, designed to allow participants to characterize the phenomena in question in the terms that they found most appropriate, and then to also articulate norms and aspirations for alternative realities. Of course, the assumption that our questions were "neutral" merely because they were open-ended later proved to be rather naïve—the underlying conceptualization of political reality that frames the questions, the schema we ourselves

bring to questioning, imposed limits on participants responses. Recognition of these limits becomes, in effect, one of the most important aspects of our findings. Some insights emerged during the process of conducting the interviews. Others were the result of a process whereby the transcripts were read closely and "coded" for emerging themes. The coding scheme that eventually developed is based on a process of reflective equilibrium, whereby initial themes and concepts were repeatedly revised in light of alternative interpretations or shades of meaning that came to the foreground after repeated readings, and in light of the interview data as a whole.

In retrospect it is clear that, while I explicitly stated my interest in letting the participants in my study *respond* to my questions in their own way, it hadn't occurred to me that my questions themselves, which in each case served to frame the topics under discussion, were not open-ended in this way. What I would learn as I moved from the design of the study to its implementation was that, in order to help me to understand the varieties of experience and political consciousness that inform their political practice, members of the FPFVI would have to first reframe—sometimes subtly, sometimes not-so subtly—the interview questions *for us*. These acts of redirection or reframing served in many instances to expose and occasionally to resist underlying conceptual categories that are not neutral, but rather are bound up with the views of the world, people, and the international order that are part-and-parcel of the Panchos' struggle.

3.2. What We Found: Data Collection and Analysis

A Brief Orientation

My time in Mexico City began with a two-day orientation with MSN's founder and director, Tom Hansen, and another graduate student in a social science discipline who was planning to conduct research in a rural community. The first evening, the three of us sat down and the other student and I described our research projects. I attempted to explain concisely the location of my study within the

contemporary literature, and described my hope that my study could contribute to this conversation by enriching "*our* philosophical imagination" as we consider alternative ways to conceptualize sovereignty. Tom's response was direct: "If you go to the Panchos and start spouting this abstract theory about sovereignty and the authority of the state, they're going to take your proposal and wipe their asses with it."

Taken aback by this response, I stumbled over words as I sought clarification of what in my proposal was, in Tom's view, potentially so offensive. The Panchos themselves had, after all, approved my initial proposal, which was quite explicitly about sovereignty, autonomy, and learning what they thought was the basis of legitimate authority. What I took away from Tom's reaction to my project, after some discussion, was that the questions I was posing betrayed assumptions that belong to the Anglophone academic community (which I will refer to throughout this § as *academe*), but that are not shared and even actively resisted in the way that the Panchos understand their struggle. Tom asserted that my questions themselves were, at best, out of touch with the experience and political understandings of the Panchos; at worst, my language was an ideological artifact, contaminated by an ideological apparatus that serves to legitimate the repression and exploitation of the national and global political and economic order that the Panchos challenge and resist.

While Tom's critique bruised my ego a bit, there is a sense in which the discussion that first night was, for me, quite theoretical—I couldn't, at this point, grasp the extent to which the way that I had framed my inquiry was an expression of my "positionality."[10] A concrete understanding of this reality developed in the context of the interviews, and this is the central point I hope to convey in this § to the reader. In what ways do the questions we ask, the very problems we pose concerning key concepts in political philosophy, embody assumptions that either misconstrue or distort the phenomena

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[10] This term provides a useful way to think about social position as informing one's assumptions and perspective. Feminist theorists and methodologists have given this term academic currency—see, for example, Alcoff (1991) and Geiger (1990: 171).

under consideration? Perhaps more importantly, what are the political implications of such framing assumptions? What are the implications for our actual practice of philosophical inquiry?

These questions themselves were beyond my formulation in the initial stage of my research project. I had, however, been put on notice that my questions weren't so straightforward as I had supposed. As I entered the phase of data collection, I was sensitized to the way in which participants were responding to the way that my questions were framed, and more open than I would have been to the ways in which they creatively redirected and even corrected the framing that my questions (now more tentatively) imposed.

Outlining our 2010 Visit with FPFVI

On the morning of June 10, Tom accompanied me to the metro station near his home, where we parted ways. I didn't see him again for the duration of my time in Mexico. From there, the train ride to Itztapalapa, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Mexico City, takes about an hour. Here, one has the sense of being deep in the bowels of one of the world's most populous and sprawling urban centers, and perhaps begins to grasp why this city is sometimes referred to by its residents, with a mix of affection and disgust, as *El Monstruo* ("The Monster").

The streets here are narrow and uneven. The outer walls of the houses, concrete one or two feet thick and often two stories high, come right out to the sidewalk to create what can be a claustrophobic effect. Running water and electricity are rare here, as are other public services. Garbage and stray dogs line the streets, which are busy with the traffic of taxis, buses and private automobiles. After catching a taxi ride from the point at which the metro line ends, and careening through the maze-like streets for about twenty minutes, I spot the old sand mines that give this part of neighborhood its name, *Minas de Polveria* ("Dust Mines").

I disembark from the cab twenty feet from the main entrance of the Panchos' walled-off and gated community. The gate is black with the letters "FPFVI" spray-painted in white. Properly

speaking, FPFVI is a network of affiliated communities throughout Mexico City. This community (or "project", as the Panchos call their residential centers), where we would conduct most of our observations and interviews, consists of about 450 families made and over 2000 individual residents. There is a small structure just inside the gate, usually occupied by two or three women, sometimes with small children. The job of the gatekeeper seems to be to pay attention to who is coming and going. The change when one enters the gate is dramatic. It is relatively much quieter, and there is no traffic. The streets are wide, as are the sidewalks. Within the walls, the houses are concrete, but they are painted bright colors—pink, green, yellow, purple and blue. There are unpaved areas between the sidewalk and the houses, where grass, trees, shrubs have been planted.

I find my way to the office, a building in the center of the collection of houses. "The office" is a kind of "nerve center" at the heart of this community. It is a focal point for organizing and educational activities of the community. It is where those who are most involved in orchestrating these activities spend much of their time. It was in this three-room, concrete building that we conducted many of our interviews, observed several different sorts of meetings, and socialized with some of the most active members of the Pancho community.

It was upon my arrival there that I met with my "Advisor", Manuel,[11] whom I had gotten to know a bit during my stay the previous summer. We sat down and drank some coffee, and discussed my plans for the coming days, identified a couple of meetings that I ought to attend, and some candidates to participate in interviews. That afternoon, Manuel took me over to the house of Monica and her family, where I would be sleeping and sharing in evening meals during the coming weeks.

During the next week I get to know Monica and her family—her husband, Mauro, Her elder son and his finance are planning their wedding while we are staying with them. They have a son of

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[11] All proper names in this and the following section are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants in the study.

their own, and are expecting their second child. Monica's younger son isn't around much, as he works for wages outside of the community (as most male members do), in his case for a large US-based retail chain. Monica and Mauro also have a primary-school-aged daughter. There are four rooms in the house, which is built according to a standardized layout. Two doors down is the family of Monica's sister, and extended family members would daily come and go. Monica is involved in a working group called the Vigilance Committee, which is made up mostly of middle-aged and older women, who police the perimeter of the Project and have begun excursions into the nearby neighborhood in the evening (which we were not allowed to observe) *en masse* in an effort to increase community safety.

With Joanne's arrival in Itztapalapa a few days after my own, we begin conducting interviews. Ultimately, we conduct formal interviews with a dozen community members. Four of these candidates were interviewed in pairs, one group visiting from another Project. We learn a good deal about the life of the community from Monica. She shows us a short documentary that someone has made about the history of the community. We attend meetings of various committees (working groups tasked with an aspect of community life or political activity), and of the General Assemblies, where representatives of each family and the various committees convene weekly to make decisions, discuss duties, and share updates.

A common generalization concerning Mexicans is that they are gracious and hospitable people; during our time with the Panchos, this was certainly our experience. The participants in our study seem very willing to answer our questions, tell us stories about their lives and their community. As far as Tom's warning, thankfully no one ever attempted to take our interview protocol from us to use as toilet paper; I don't think they were ever tempted to. Of course, the short period of time we were present and the limitations of linguistic and cultural communication, mean that my understanding of the Panchos' reception of us and our project is partial, and I cannot judge whether our approach ever

did offend anyone. There were clear instances in which we appeared to our interviewees to be ignorant or misguided, and graciousness was extended for a misstep.

3.3. Interview Subjects as Participant-Pedagogues: Reconfiguring the Conceptual Terrain

Why should the difference between the Panchos' concerns and those of the Anglophone academy trouble us? What significance does it have for our results? If the Panchos had responded negatively in the way Tom suggested they would, why not attribute this to their lack of understanding? Aren't I the one obtaining an academic credential? Surely our study participants hadn't had much opportunity to engage with contemporary political philosophers on the topic of state sovereignty? Why not dismiss the distance between their conceptions and my own as a result of their ignorance or lack of relevant training? I believe that this is, unfortunately, a response that is all too common among professional academics to the reception that their discourse, written and spoken, receives amongst the wider public. A kind of intellectual elitism shields philosophers, as technical specialists, from critiques of the relevance of their work—the most trenchant critique of any intellectual activity being, in the context of political struggle and injustice, that it has nothing meaningful to do with life.

And indeed, after reading and re-reading the English-translation transcripts of the interviews that we took, it becomes clear that the Panchos' did not accept the terms in which we had initially conceived our project. They responded not by challenging us or our intentions, but rather used our open-ended questions to redirect our focus in a way that accorded with their own conceptions of political reality. At the time, this often felt like we were failing to communicate, and that we weren't getting responses we had hoped for to the research questions we had posed. In retrospect, it was this gentle but consistent redirection which reveals the assumed categories built into our questions which were, at the time, invisible to us. Attending to these acts of redirection does in fact reveal something about the Panchos' own political concepts, the meaning of their practice; moreover, I believe that these

moments reveal a great deal about the practice of political philosophy in the academe, and what it might mean for academic philosophers to take political realities seriously in their work.

Redirection 1. Historicizing/Theorizing

In my orientation with Tom Hansen, he paraphrased the words of a member of one of MSN's partner communities in Chiapas to explain this difference in approach to political questions to a student from the US: "We [poor and indigenous Mexicans, perhaps Mexicans in general] think that history is dense. The present matters. The future is uncertain. For you, history doesn't exist. The present [sic], and the future is all that matters" (Journal Notes, June 8). From this anecdote, Tom drew the following implication for my research questions: "If you're theorizing the state, it can be whatever you want. The state needs to be historicized as well as theorized." The problem with the state being "whatever [I] want" it to be is that my assumptions, my biases, my interests will likely inform my theorizing. Historicizing the state ground conceptualization in the dense and rarely cooperative (with my preferences) developments that provide the background conditions constituting the present realities in question. Thus, historicizing recognizes firm limitations and constraints that theorizing does not.

This sense of the density and limiting role of history in conceptualizing political reality can be seen in excerpts from an interview with Eduardo, a second generation Pancho. Eduardo's parents came to the community when he was very young, about eight years old. "They lacked a place to live," he explains. "I lived in a provisional [temporary] home with my family when we first got here, and little by little the program [project] advanced. I grew up in a cooperative community. My parents were involved in social and political work. I was always going to marches and political events." As Eduardo got older, he began to get involved in his own right, to see his participation as not "just [his] parents' work." He participated in decision making in the community, advocating for his own views and those of his friends on how communal spaces should be used—should there be a new parking lot, or a place for kids to play soccer? Responding to such internal political questions led to Eduardo's

increasing sense of his own efficacy, and eventually, he took on a leadership role on the Cultural Committee.

Eduardo's description of his role in the community is an account of his history and that of his family. This historical mode of explanation was just as present in the way that Eduardo expressed his ideas about the state:

JE: Why is the state like this… why isn't it better?

E: The country we have today is the result of many years of domination. So now the country functions like it does today, in the way I described earlier, because those who have the means of production and the economic, social, and political power are only a few [algunos cuantos].

…So the state acts on behalf of those few. It caters to those few who have power. I believe it functions this way because the people [el pueblo] have not had, have not generated the possibility of taking the [inaudible]…At the moment, this is precisely part of what the organization [FPFVI] wants to do, of what we are working for…for the pueblo to have its own government [el propio estado del pueblo], that the people direct and decide what they have to do for themselves.

In his response to this question, Eduardo begins by describing the state in terms of its development in the past: "The country we have today is the result of many years of domination." This history of domination is *present* in the way the state functions today, serving the interests of only a few. The explanation for why this history has unfolded in this way is stated in terms of what the FPFVI is attempting to do now—the political activities of the organization, and the problems in the present that are understood in terms of a living past, are related, on a stronger interpretation, identical.

It seems to me that the conceptual equation here—that political struggle in the present is understood as a strategy or strategies intended to transform or resolve the inequities of history as they

manifest in the present—is illustrative of a close link in many of the Panchos' responses to our questions between normative and ideal claims, on the one hand, and descriptive historical claims on the other.

When asked what he thinks is the solution to the problem that the state poses in Mexican history and in the Mexican present, Eduardo replies in the way that all of our interviewees did: what's needed is a "revolution." He elaborates on this point in pedagogical terms: "Our task is to raise consciousness of class; consciousness of the class to which we belong, and that we all belong to this class." Consciousness of class is consciousness of one's own position in the economic structure of the nation. "If you don't have the means of production," he says, "you're poor; you're part of the lower class."

We asked a follow up question about what these revolutionary aims mean for the relation of the FPFVI to other organizations and communities, and how these relationships fit into the notion of class-based revolution. In response, Eduardo moves from analysis of class in terms of current relations of individuals to the means of production and historicizes the question.

JE: How are you connected to other revolutionary communities? How do you envision going from this community to a revolution in Mexico?

E: I believe, in a certain way, that in the country, if we look at the history…there was Mexican Independence, and in 1910, the Revolution. So the question of the Revolution has to do with many factors: It has to do with how, precisely, we see the state today. If the state is weak, if the state is strong, or however it is. So it has to do with this… it's a process that's not going to take place in the short-term. We don't believe that tomorrow's the Revolution, and within a week everything's changed.

The historical perspective on the state informs not only the analysis of the present reality of state power (and so sets the parameters of the problem of responding to it), it also provides the structure, sets the time horizon, for revolutionary expectations. In this way, the future of the revolution that Eduardo projects mirrors the historical analysis that provides the basis for understanding the present and the past.

Redirection 2. The State as Instrument of Repression and Exploitation

In the context of our interviews, some participants in our study consistently responded to more theoretical questions such as "What is the nature of the State? What is essential to it?" by narrating, in an abbreviated form, the history of modern Mexico. Others began with more recent events, narrating the history of the FPFVI.

"Historicizing" the state leads directly to one of the central features of the concept in use: the state is constituted historically as an agent of *exploitation* and *repression.* The state is defined less by its *claim* to legitimate authority than it is by its position as the enforcement arm of the powerful in asymmetrical political and economic power relations. Within mainstream political philosophy, this is a familiar enough notion. It has, however, much less cachet than it once did. Marxist analysis has, in the view of many academic philosophers, been either refuted or eclipsed. Within the context of the Panchos' political practice, there is no substitute for this historically Marxist notion that the state serves the interests of a certain segment of society at the expense of the others. It captures a central feature of their lived political experience.

"Neoliberalism" is understood in terms of an imperialistic expansion of the agenda of an international class of industrial capitalists. This interpretation is grounded in the lived experience of the actions of the Mexican State *vis a vis* its own citizens, especially the indigenous, the poor, and the young. The view of the state as a historical process—the same historical process that expressed currently in trends towards neoliberal globalization—rather than as an idealization, a theoretical

construct that applies across geographic and historical contexts, does not readily lead to the question: What is the basis for the legitimacy of the state? From the perspective of inquiry grounded in the Panchos historical experience (narratively constructed through a collective process of political education or *conscientization*), such a question appears naïve to the point of absurdity. The presumption that the state *has* a form of legitimacy appropriate to it fails to connect with the Panchos' experience of the state. The ideal, we might say, is too far afield from reality to hold even aspirational significance. The question that emerges from the felt difficulties cumulatively expressed in the community's historical narrative is: How do we, as a community and as a class that have suffered assault, exploitation, and marginalization at the hands of the state, effectively resist its attempts to dominate our lives? Questions of accountable and legitimate political authority are relatively restricted to the grassroots level, mostly internal to the community. The litmus test for legitimate authority is the level of conscious political development, the extent to which a person has studied both political theory (mostly Marxist texts and the community's materials rooted in its own experience) as well as built relationships with members of the community.

Redirection 3. Meanings of "Community," "Democracy," and "Leadership"

The first time I attended a meeting of the General Assembly with the FPFVI-UNOPI was in July of 2009. Manuel had invited me to join him. We walked to an open structure without any walls and a tin roof, an area of perhaps three or four hundred square feet, adjacent to the soccer field and what has since become a greenhouse. There were about sixty or seventy people gathered, chatting together, smoking cigarettes. It was beginning to grow dark, and a few yellow light bulbs hung from the four-by-four posts that support the tin roof. Children were running around, weaving through the crowd and shrieking with laughter. One of the members of the Cultural Committee, Jose, stands in front of a table at one end of the meeting space. He called for the attention of the companeros, at first without much effect. He called again, and then again, and there is laughter and some comments about

his youth and his eagerness—he's getting a bit of a hard time from some of the older members of the group. Then group is silent, even the children have disappeared or somehow been quieted down. As Jose speaks, it's clear that he is highly respected within the group. He speaks at a brisk pace, as there are many agenda items to be covered. He says that there are duties that members of the community have to work to keep things in good order, and that some of these have been neglected. Will there be more problems with this in the future? There is this proposal from this committee or that, are there any questions about it? What does the community decide? Who is in support? Moving on, this action will be held in two weeks in support of our companeros in [another nearby community]. If you have any questions about it get in touch with [a young women on the Cultural Committee].

Manuel leans over to me and says, "You're going to say a few words." A moment of panic, of course, as I realize that Jose is now speaking to the group about me, and the group of students that I'm traveling with—none of whom are anywhere to be seen, at the moment. I step forward, closer to the center of the semi-circle. I thank Jose for introducing me, and then I state that we are from the University of Colorado. Our students are very interested in learning about how social movements in Mexico are organizing and working to accomplish positive social change, and we are very grateful to be welcomed by the Panchos into this community. I thank them for their willingness to educate us about their work. A woman with a broad grin asks me a question that I don't fully understand, and I respond with an apology about my poor Spanish. The whole crowd erupts in laughter—apparently they had noticed that I wasn't a fluent speaker (perhaps the only thing that I had managed to communicate?).

It was at a similar assembly, in that same location, with the same format, that just under one year later, Joanne and I presented our research proposal to the General Assembly for their approval. This weekly meeting is the political lifeblood of the community, where those laboring in the various committees and organizing speak with the members of the community as a whole. In theory, at least

one representative from every (extended) family is present at the General Assembly, which ensures that everyone has a voice in the collective decision-making, and that information passed down from those more involved in the organization can reach all the members of the community.

One of our research questions was about the internal organization of the FPFVI. The issues of political leadership and of the meaning of democratic participation seemed central to the issues of autonomy and legitimacy that appeared key to understanding what we might learn about the concepts of self-determination and sovereignty at this grassroots level. Already, at that first Assembly that I attended, the interactions I observed in that setting went against the grain of certain assumptions concerning participatory democracy. Participating in various community meetings nearly a year later, and especially in light of our interviews, these assumptions were clarified, and the concept of democracy operative in the Panchos practice became more intelligible in its distinctiveness.

The term "democratic centralism" of course has a long (and for many checkered) past. It is a term that has, along with Marxist terms such as "exploitation" has fallen out of fashion in the mainstream Anglophone academy. It is, however, one of the central normative concepts that govern the Panchos' social and political life. Those who have belonged to FPFVI for decades insist that "here, we are all leaders," referring to all the members of the community. Those who are more recent inductees in the community are, in our observations and interviews, more likely to refer to "the leaders" as a distinct subgroup, made up of those who are most involved in the educational and organizing activities of the community, and who have been Panchos, typically, for many years. For the Panchos, it is a fusion of Zapatismo and revolutionary solidarity, community praxis.

The intersection of notions of community and democracy illustrates one way in which our initial assumptions proved limiting. Perhaps we should have anticipated this—as Adrian Little observes, "Community is one of the most contested concepts in contemporary political and social theory" (2005: 433). Tenets of liberal democracy, including an atomistic notion of the individual as

the source and significance of "autonomy" are misleading. In explaining the difference in the struggle

for gender justice in a rural Mexican community, Tom explained: "Women in [name of town] are

struggling for equality, but not in terms of an individualistic demand for rights. Rather, they struggle

to stretch the boundaries of what the community can expect" (Field notes, 6/8/12). A "thicker" sense

of identity as something substantially *given,* determined by responsibilities rooted in family and

community ties, proscribe the possibility of conceptualizing one's own rights as incompatible with the

needs of the community. The experiences of mistreatment, of abuse, of marginalization that many

women share in the rural Mexican community Tom referred to (and which we were to visit later), are

not readily interpreted as indicating a need to defend one's individual rights at the expense of the

expectations of "the community". The experience of injustice is interpreted not primarily as a

violation of an individual's rights, but rather as a collective and social malady, as evidence that the

community's expectations need to be transformed.

Manuel has been a Pancho since the beginning, and he is one of the few identifiable as a

"leader" in this sense. MSN's website summarizes the organizations vision of leadership, influenced

by the organization of the Zapatista communities in Chiapas:

> Mandar obedeciendo (lead by obeying) is the central mandate in the construction of direct
>
> democracy and the ethical foundation for movement leadership. In this understanding of
>
> leadership, leaders are facilitators and administrators with high ethical standards grounded in a
>
> history of service to the community. Fundamental decisions are always in the hands of the
>
> directly affected community. Leaders facilitate the development of direct democratic
>
> processes that involve community members in decision-making, always challenging
>
> participants to assume increasing levels of responsibility and gain increasing levels of
>
> knowledge and experience, and thereby construct increasing levels of direct democracy.
>
> (http://mexicosolidarity.org/about/history)

This description overlaps substantially with what the Panchos articulated as the proper understanding of the internal structure of their organization (FPFVI). A historical appreciation of the rhetoric of the Soviet Union, for instance, demonstrates that such language *can* be used to mask totalitarian tendencies. But bringing such ready-made interpretations to the inquiry prevents authentic dialogue and risks misconstruing the meaning-in-practice for the Panchos themselves. Questions that are open-ended allow the interlocutors or interviewees to characterize their political practice in terms that they themselves would recognize and endorse.

And when we bracket our assumptions about terms laden with baggage of Marxism-Leninism in the mainstream Anglophone academy, we find that the Panchos' political struggle is based on a very different framing of what I would term "the problematic" of democracy. The concept of democracy is complex, and scholars range in their approaches to analyzing it. These range from more empirically grounded descriptions of the actual practice of "ordinary democracy" (Tracey 2008), to normative theories that set out procedural conditions for political practice (Fishkin 2002), the more comprehensive verging on full-blown theories of justice (ibid.).

In retrospect, it is clear that I expected to discover practices amongst the Panchos that would be readily interpretable as instantiations of principles of deliberative democratic theory, as developed in the past three decades by philosophers and political theorists in the context of academe (Barber, 1981; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Young, 2000; Fishkin 2002). This tradition has emerged in response to a set of questions concerning the practice of democracy in modernized, pluralistic societies. Deliberative theorists begin from a rejection of aggregative conceptions of democracy, in which just outcomes are thought to be determined via the aggregation of the express preferences, at a given point in time, of individual citizens. Deliberative theory does not take individual preferences as given, postulates that these are subject to revision, and so refocuses questions concerning democratic processes in terms of issues of publicity, discourse, and communicative reason. Amongst deliberative

theorists, issues of identity and difference, of culture and individuality, of pluralism and civic unity are central to understanding the possibilities and problems of contemporary democratic politics.

The issue, from Manuel 's point of view, does not seem to be how to negotiate difference in a process of determining collective action. Rather, it is how to respond effectively to challenges to the well-being—oftentimes, this means direct assaults upon—a community already understood as unified by its position relative to the state and the means of production. The struggle for democracy is not a struggle from within institutions to include outsiders. Rather, it is a struggle of outsiders to make their voices heard and their actions efficacious in Mexican politics. This is a clear instance where social and economic position, features of one's distinctive epistemic "standpoint", clearly constrains and enables the theoretical framing of problems that political theory ought to address.

As a first attempt of aspiring researchers, our study has significant limitations. Many of our original questions were vague in unhelpful ways, showing a lack of clarity in our own sense of purpose and self-understanding. As I've noted throughout this chapter, lack of fluency in the language of the Panchos limited our understanding, and a lack of cultural literacy presumably means that many important narratives and symbols invoked by the Panchos were missed or misunderstood. If we were to start from the beginning, we would pose more questions related to gender justice, and we would have made greater efforts to gain access to diverse voices within the community.

The insights we gained in the process and the limitations and problems we became aware of provide the basis for several principles that might guide our attempts to understand political problems and "on the ground" practices that emerge to resolve these. If we are to adequately characterize the practice and theory developed by groups such as the Panchos, our inquiry can be assessed in terms of:

(1) Psychological and social relevance: Problems posed should emerge from the felt difficulties of members of a community or communities, significantly impinging upon the well-being and/or aspirations of a significant number of individual group members.

(2) Historical development: Problems are framed in terms of their development over time, and in terms of likely proximate causes in a specific historical context—prior to being theorized, an institution or phenomenon must be historicized.

(3) Multivocal characterization: The characterization of problems should be open or at least multifaceted, leaving room for different candidate characterizations of the historical and material causes of felt difficulties.

CHAPTER 4

From (Hidden) Idealizations to Nonideal Theory

There is no hero. Above all, the theorist is no hero…Theory does not stand above the fray but is simply part of the articulation of our daily existence of struggle. It does not look down at society from above, but is part of the daily struggle for emancipation, striking out at the forms that negate our subjectivity. Theory is practical because it is part of the practice of living: it does not have to jump across a gulf to become practice.

--John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*

4.1. Dethroning the Political Philosopher

The above quotation from John Holloway, professor in the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in Mexico, captures something of the experience of inquiring into the meaning of self-determination and sovereignty among the Pancho Villas of Mexico City. It suggests the main theme that I explore in this penultimate chapter.

As Holloway so aptly puts it, the recognition that "theory" doesn't "stand above the fray" undermines the pretensions to which political philosophy often, in an unreflexive and uncritical mode, aspires. Our experience of interview subjects as pedagogues, and the reconfiguration of our own ready-made conceptual map, was one of moving from theorist to learner, or perhaps more accurately, from interrogator to interlocutor. Philosophical training and use of conventional, received categories not only distorts the phenomena under investigation, it reveals the extent to which we are ourselves unconsciously enmeshed in ideological constructs that work like weapons in ongoing political struggle.

In this chapter, I consider an exemplar of this kind of reorientation (or as Dewey puts it, "recovery"; see Chapter 5) provided by Elizabeth Anderson (2010) in her recent book, *The Imperative of Integration.* While specific to the contemporary US social, economic, and political context, Anderson's argument for racial integration as a requirement of justice is an impressive and robust methodological model for political theorizing in a *nonideal* mode. Drawing methodological lessons from Anderson's work, I believe that she retains an element of privileging the theorist, and so of excluding voices of those whose "problems" her theory is intended to help resolve. The critical insights gleaned from my experience attempting to understand the political practice of the Panchos, augmented by methodological critiques of feminist and other critical theorists—in particular, theorists of standpoint epistemology—suggest a more radical reconfiguration of normative projects to include a dialogical and democratic dimension. Recognition of our own positionality as "first world" academics, and the essentially contested nature of all politically significant concepts, require a methodological shift from analysis to conversation, from exposition and interpretation to dialogue.

In necessarily provisional but what I hope are clear and compelling conclusions drawn from my experiment bringing political philosophical inquiry into the field, and the cutting edge of an interdisciplinary methodological literature, I argue that epistemological and ethical considerations converge on a single professional imperative incumbent upon all political philosophers in the Anglophone academy: our methodology must not only be naturalized, but democratized as well. This alteration in the way we go about conceptualizing the problems of philosophy and how we construct the basic categories used to articulate those problems cannot be neglected if we hope, by our efforts as intellectuals, academics, and human beings, to contribute to the resolution of pressing political problems and the creation of a more just and humane world.

4.2. The Distinction Between Descriptive and Normative Projects Revisited: Ideal Theory

My initial approach to the project of understanding the significance of self-determination in the Panchos' practice would qualify, I think, as what John Dewey (1916) described as an attempt to deal with "the problems of philosophers"; while I hoped to *use* real-world referents in order to explore philosophical problems, the problems themselves were worked out in advance (chapter 1). The questions that informed our interview protocol and that initially guided field observations had to do with the relation of the individual and the community to the state, and posed the problem in terms of the legitimacy of the state or lack thereof. Our interviews evidence the distorting influence that this approach can have on the empirical phenomena under investigation. How do we move from this to a different approach, one that is "a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men [*sic.* and women]"?

In our research, we learned something of the limits of concepts imported directly from the Anglophone academy into a context of political struggle in Mexico. If the problems posed by conceptual categories generally accepted for the interpretation of political reality in the "first world" distort political realities on the ground in Mexico, then what are the alternatives, and how do we choose amongst these? What is at stake here is a basic methodological issue: When we approach any given political context, how do we identify the problems to be addressed by normative philosophical work, and what is the appropriate perspective from which we ought to conduct inquiry?

In chapter 1, I discussed the "received view" of the relationship between normative and descriptive work in the political domain, with political philosophy or theory developing the former, and political and social sciences providing the latter. This is the view expressed in what is perhaps *the* dominant methodological approach to doing political philosophy, at least since John Rawls' seminal book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). This method is today frequently referred to by political philosophers as *ideal theorizing*. In ideal theory, the task of a philosophical theory of justice is the

articulation of moral and/or political principles (e.g., principles of justice) under ideal (that is, general and, in empirical terms, non-existent) conditions. As Rawls puts it:

> Something is right, a social system say, *when* an *ideally* rational and impartial spectator would approve of it from a *general* point of view *should* he possess all relevant knowledge of the circumstances. A rightly ordered society is one meeting the approval of such an *ideal* observer. (1971: 183-92; emphasis mine)

The counterfactual and hypothetical nature of the subject of moral reasoning is made quite clear in this and many other passages in *A Theory of Justice.* Taking our cue from Charles Mills' critical engagement with Rawls' most influential work, we can discern at least three separable senses in which this approach to philosophizing is "ideal":

1. It provides normative ideals of social justice and of personhood.

2. It asserts that the main task of a theory of justice must be to design principles of justice for an imagined, well-ordered society (rather than the world as it actually is).

3. It makes use of many counterfactual assumptions that set aside less-than-ideal circumstances that exist for moral agents in the real world (e.g., disability, moral pathology, etc.).

The first two senses of "ideal" here are closely related: normative ideals of social justice and personhood guide the creation of principles of justice in a well-ordered society. The third is somewhat more autonomous—indeed, we might think that we could let go of the stipulation that principles of justice need not account for the limitations of real moral agents without giving up on (1) and (2). Why wouldn't the failure of real moral agents or an entire society to actualize ideal principles of justice discredit those agents rather than the principles? However, it is generally agreed upon by moral philosophers that, while *is* doesn't imply *ought*, *ought* does imply *can.* Morality is essentially practical—it is ridiculous to think that morality requires me to do something that is impossible for me

to do (see Appiah 2008: 22). Thus, the counterfactual assumptions in Rawls' theory are essential to it, since in order to reach the conclusions that he believes his idealized moral agents will, conditions that prevent their being able to actualize these must be abstracted away.

As a contemporary version of the idea that the "moral point of view" is, necessarily, a "view from nowhere"—unattached to any particular moral agent—ideal theory in political philosophy situates moral reasoning in a hypothetical and counterfactual situation. The epistemological challenge of accessing and reasoning from such a point of view is met, in Rawls' view, through the methodological device of the "original position", a point of view *outside* of, or perhaps *above,* political society from which principles of distributive justice are constructed and actual societies may be judged.

The epistemic problem is: how can "we", as situated agents with particular interests and value commitments, conscious and unconscious biases, come to know what such agents *would* choose? The answer is methodological: we get from here to there through a series of imaginative thought experiments in which we stipulate certain parameters. The perspective that this enables us to occupy, according to Rawls, is what he calls *the original position.* The following quotation clarifies the purported importance of the original position as a perspective or a standpoint:

> This standpoint is also objective and expresses our autonomy. Without conflating all persons into one but recognizing them as distinct and separate, it enables us to be impartial, even between persons who are not contemporaries but who belong to many generations. Thus to see our place in society from the perspective of this position is to see it *sub specie aeternitatis*: it is to regard the human not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view. (Rawls 1971: 587)

The methodological stipulation of a-historicity and interchangeable identity in the quotation above stands in contrast to the framing of Rawls' principle in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. In

this later text, Rawls situates his theory of justice as a philosophical response to specific (if quite sweeping and broad) historical developments. He writes, "…the historical origin of political liberalism (and of liberalism more generally) is the reformation and its aftermath, with the long controversies over religious toleration in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (xxiv). The modern concepts of liberty of thought and freedom of conscience were developed, according to Rawls, at that time. The rise of these concepts represented a transition away from the civil religion that was the mark of political community in the Ancient world, based on outward conformity and collective action (often ritualistic), and in which, according to Rawls, "Intolerance was accepted as a condition of social order and stability" (xxv). The shift to a focus on liberty of conscience and freedom of thought cleared the way for the possibility of cooperation in maintaining a just society. Modern liberalism emerged as the distinctive political philosophy that emerged in this context, resolving conflicts related to the problem of pluralism—that is, of different conceptions of the good life within a single community.

With a little knowledge of Rawls' biography, one cannot help but see a connection between his own personal concerns that generated his philosophical interests, and his narrative of the development of Western political philosophy in the revised edition of *Political Liberalism*. As a child Rawls attended an Episcopalian preparatory school and later, while attending Princeton University, he became "deeply concerned with theology and its doctrine" (Cohen & Nagel 2009). At that time, he considered attending seminary and studying for the Episcopalian priesthood. After service in the army in World War II, however, Rawls returned to Princeton and focused for his Doctoral degree on moral philosophy from an explicitly secular perspective. The movement from Rawls' early commitment to a particular religious conception of the good life, through participation in a massive and violent political conflict of World War II, to his becoming the champion of a secular, non-comprehensive version of liberalism conspicuously mirrors his account of the development of Western political philosophy from the "civic religion" of the Ancient Greeks to the modern pluralist state (2005).

Pointing out parallels between Rawls biography and his account of the historical specificity of his theory do not, in any straightforward way, help us understand his claims, much less to assess their validity.[12] My point is that Rawls' own recognition of the historical and cultural specificity of the problems to which his philosophy responds, which he might have also acknowledged were rooted in the specificity of his own biography, seems at odds with the scope or range of application that Rawls believes are appropriate to his principles of justice. "I still think that once we get the conceptions and principles right for the basic historical questions, those conceptions and principles should be widely applicable to our own problems also. The same equality of the Declaration of Independence which Lincoln invoked to condemn slavery can be invoked to condemn the inequality and oppression of women" (2005: xxv). Presumably, Rawls would make the same claim regarding issues of racial justice as well. "For this reason," Rawls writes, "[*A] Theory [of Justice]* focused on certain main historical problems in the hope of formulating a family of reasonable conceptions and principles that might also hold for other basic cases" (2005: xxix).

Political philosophy in the ideal mode relies upon methods of *idealization* and *abstraction*. Onora O'Neill defines abstraction as "a matter of *bracketing,* but not of *denying,* predicates that are true of the matter under discussion" (O'Neill 1996:40). Idealization, by contrast, involves the imaginative isolation and augmentation of certain aspects of reality; Rawls' idealization of moral agents in the original position picks out certain features of real moral agents (rationality) and de-emphasizes or erases other elements (particular social position, disabilities or moral pathologies).

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[12] In *Twilight of the Idols,* Friedrich Nietzsche famously characterized Kant's moral philosophy in terms of the latter's biography, asserting that "all philosophy is simultaneously secret autobiography." It is worth noting that Rawls was personally acquainted with misfortune and disadvantage—he spoke with a stutter; two of his siblings died in childhood, from diseases they contracted from him. His main Libertarian rival, Robert Nozick, by all accounts was an extremely fortunate individual, born of a well-off family, eloquent and, according to standards of the day, quite attractive. In light of their biographies, the differences in their philosophical dispositions are quite conspicuous.

Both idealization and abstraction, it should be clear, are matters of *selection*. By choosing which aspects to augment and which aspects to bracket, ideal theory frames inquiry into political arrangements in a way that illuminates some things and obscures others. Rawls' later admission that the problems addressed by his theory of justice are historically and culturally specific indicates just one way that idealizations mask the biases that enable and restrict the focus of inquiry. Is it wise to assume that the concerns of (some) European Christians in the sixteenth-century properly frame the problems faced by a contemporary pluralistic society? Perhaps. Should we assume that the basic categories derived to address those problems will be useful in interpreting international relations and prescribing international obligations in an era of economic, cultural, and even political globalization?[13] This seems highly improbable. In either case, the question that some critics of Rawls philosophical method is not whether his principles can be applied to make sense of these contexts, but rather what such an application illuminates and what it renders invisible or obscures.

Methodological Critiques of Justice-as-Fairness

Whose perspectives reveal the bias inherent in Rawls theory? Critiques of Rawls' method in *A Theory of Justice* developed by Susan Okin (1989) and Charles Mills (1997; 2004) propose we consider the project in terms of the interests of women and of black Americans, respectively. Okin (1989) objects to the way in which Rawls includes the family, in a particular configuration, as one of the basic structures of society. Okin argues that by construing those in the original position as "heads of households", representatives of family units, relationships *between* family members are *systematically* excluded from consideration in terms of justice. The distinction between public and private spheres enshrined here renders questions of justice in the family, as it exists in contemporary U.S. and European societies, beyond the scope of a theory of justice.

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[13] See John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Similarly, Mills criticizes Rawls for his almost complete omission of the category of race and of considerations of racial justice (1997). Unlike Okin, who endorses ideal theory and suggests that a modification to Rawls' categories is sufficient to address the structural obfuscation of important considerations of justice, Mills argues that the systematic exclusion of important considerations as built in to the project of ideal theory itself. The bias in Rawls' theory is not, as Okin supposed, in his omission of this category or that, neglect of the interests of some social position or another. If that were the case then the statement of justice-as-fairness could simply be amended to capture the relevant information, without any alteration to the principle—this seems to be Rawls' own response to his critics (see 2005: xxv).

Okin's objection is not to Rawls' method, but to his application of the method. In her view, he has the right tools, he just didn't apply them as skillfully as he might have.[14] Mills, by contrast, offers a genuinely methodological critique. He believes that the bias in Rawls' theory is not due to a blind spot in his application of his method, but built into the very structure of the method itself. According to Mills, Rawls neglects the issues of race and racism, failing to appreciate the white supremacist nature of contemporary US society and institutions. Perhaps racism is one of the "moral pathologies" that has been methodologically "bracketed" out of the theories purview. Ignoring such issues is, according to Mills, biases Rawls' theory in ways that are deeply problematic ( ). Neglect of issues of racial justice suggest that this is not central to justice, but rather a merely contingent matter of application of correct principles (see Rawls 2005: xxiv). In effect, the question of racism is, in Rawlsian scholarship, "endlessly deferred"—of course this means that, in the end, it is not deferred at all but philosophically marginalized as a significant form of oppression. Marginalization of the issue brings the risk that justice-as-fairness will be systematically biased against those who suffer from this form of oppression, obscuring and even justifying their plight. Thus, Mills believes that Rawls'

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[14] Much to the contrary, Okin calls Rawls' method "brilliant" (1989).

commitment to ideal theory masks important biases, making his theory (perhaps inadvertently) covert

ideology.

It is important to note that this charge that political philosophy is covertly ideological does not

apply to Rawls alone. *A Theory of Justice* is part of a broader social as well as intellectual project, as

can be seen in the voluminous literature that emerged, almost immediately, in response to it, and

which continues to develop.[15] What Rawls and his critics share in common is the basic set of

conceptual categories that, taken together, delineate contemporary political philosophy as a discipline.

Thomas Pogge (2007), in his book on Rawls, provides a long list of the key ideas that play a role in the

concept of justice-as-fairness, such as: *person, goodness as rationality, primary goods, reciprocity,*

fairness, legitimate expectations, basic needs, equality of opportunity, sense of justice, burdens of

judgment, strains of commitment, stability, self-respect, moral powers (173). This is true, I might add,

of Okin and Mills as well. While these terms themselves may be contested and evaluated differently

by various Western political philosophers, they belong to a broad but limited constellation of concepts

that provide the map of the terrain for the debate in Western political philosophy. While they may be

on different teams, Rawls, Sandel and Nozick, Mills and Okin, Pogge and Young (and me, in this

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[15] Numerous critiques of Rawls work emerged in the wake of *A Theory of Justice,* perhaps
most prominently Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) and Michael Sandel's *Liberalism
and the Limits of Justice* (1982). From a libertarian and a communitarian perspective, respectively,
these two authors developed critiques of Rawls' account of distributive justice on the grounds that the
moral point of view ought not to be conceived as a "view from nowhere," at least not in the sense that
Rawls method seems to require. Nozick's argument relies upon the claim that justice is not merely
distributive but procedural, as well. For Nozick, the history and background conditions that have
given rise to a certain distribution must be considered when making judgments as to its justice or
injustice. Sandel argues that it is not only the historical and procedural development of a distribution
that matters, but even more basically, the social and cultural constitution of moral subjects themselves.
Representing a communitarian (as opposed to liberal or libertarian) view, a "thick" description of
selves as "encumbered" by social and political life that takes into account the values of real, historical
moral agents are necessary conditions for moral judgment. Both Nozick and Sandel agree that Rawls'
account of the principles of justice is *methodologically* inadequate because the original position and
the imaginary agents in it are not the proper representatives of "the moral point of view."

chapter?), are all "playing" the same linguistic and conceptual "game."[16] While agreement upon basic terms and parameters are essential, as they constitute social practices (Searle 1995), critiques of ideal theory point out that the rules of the game serve to exclude as well as include, and that they thus have great ethical and political import.

We can imagine that if we had posed our questions for the Panchos, not about self-determination and the state, but rather about the nature of justice, we probably would have encountered similar dynamics of redirection and contestation. Indeed, Mills claims that the oppressed would be quite baffled by Rawls' approach—based on our experience with the Panchos, I am inclined to agree with. Mills (2004) points to the common sense realism that lends this critique intuitive plausibility: "Why should anyone think that abstaining from theorizing about oppression and its consequences is the best way to bring about an end to oppression? Isn't this, on the face of it, just completely implausible?" (170).

The traditional conception of sovereignty developed as part of the historically and culturally-specific milieu that Rawls identifies as the source of basic concepts related to justice (i.e., freedom of thought and of conscience). The conception of the state informed by both is at odds with the historically specific account of the evolution and nature of the Mexican state that provides the basis of the Panchos practice. Rawls' theory of justice illuminates certain dimensions of public life in the U.S.; Bill Clinton remarked that Rawls "gave intellectuals a renewed commitment to democracy." On my interpretation, it functions primarily to rationalize a form of life that already existed, which was, in its own way, fully formed when Rawls took upon himself the task of theorizing it. Thus, Rawls' attempt to theorize political liberalism is a political act—and, from a certain perspective, it is a decidedly conservative act (in the sense that it rationalizes, at least in its basic elements, the status quo).

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[16] In the sense in which Wittgenstein termed philosophical problems or puzzles as resulting from specific "language games." See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* Remark 83.

If we grant that ideal theory, as a methodological approach based on idealizations and the "view from nowhere", is inadequate for the realization of our epistemic and ethical aspirations for normative theory, what is the alternative?

4.3. Nonideal Theorizing? Elizabeth Anderson's Method as a Model

In contrast to the critics considered above, more recent respondents to Rawls' work have positioned themselves as alternatives to *any* approach that postulates moral categories *independently* of consideration of real contemporary social and political reality. The problems that are posed to guide inquiry and the categories presumed to be the language of their resolution, no longer go unquestioned. The rules of the game are themselves subject to critical scrutiny, viewed as politically inflected and consequential, and so as (perhaps unconscious) sites of political struggle. It has recently become fashionable among some political philosophers to describe theorizing as "nonideal" (Mills 1997 and 2004; Anderson 2010). Like the term that it negates, the term "nonideal theory" has been used in a broad range of ways and often with different senses. Some of these are primarily critical (i.e., critiques of ideal theory and its pitfalls), others are more constructive. Some are also more problematic than others, and range from a near complete rejection of counterfactual normative claims as theoretical valuable (Mills 1997) to defenses of the use of such claims that call for re-evaluation of their epistemic status (Anderson 2010; Jaggar & Tobin, forthcoming) and heightened awareness of political biases. The lack of consistency in usage within the field means that an appeal to this approach requires a fair amount of explanation in order for it to illuminate more than it obscures.

In this section, I describe what I take to be the most important features of Elizabeth Anderson's (2010) approach and argue that, while it has important limitations, it can provide a model for understanding the importance of developing concepts that are empirically adequate within the context of normative theoretical work.

Anderson argues that ideal theory is problematic for three reasons: First, "we need to tailor our principles to the motivational and cognitive capacities of human beings" (3). Rawls' principles of justice are meant to produce a just world when they regulate the conduct of perfectly just and rational human beings; they will not do so "when we ask human beings, with all of our limitations and flaws, to follow them" (4). Second, we might "leap" to the conclusion that any gaps between our idealizations and reality "must be the cause of the problems in our actual world" (Ibid.). By misidentifying the causes operating in our actual empirical situation, ideal theory leads to solutions that are ineffective or counterproductive, as when some on the multiculturalist left advocate racial policies of color-blindness as a remedy to race-based injustices. Finally, starting from ideal theory "may prevent us from recognizing injustices in our nonideal world" (5). Anderson's example of how this works is, following Mills (1997), the example of racial injustice: in an ideal society, she asserts, racial positions do not exist. "Since no racial positions exist in the ideal society, they do not define a standpoint from which to assess racially unjust societies" (5). The hypothetical contractualist criteria applied by Rawls (that perfectly rational members of society, occupying a "view from nowhere", *would* agree to a given arrangement) fail to supply us the necessary conceptual categories for understanding race-based injustice. Ideal theory can thus be "epistemologically disabling", preventing us from discerning real injustices by positing the "moral point of view" as the position of perfect justice.[17]

In order to avoid these limitations and pitfalls of ideal theory, Anderson describes her own method as nonideal. This means that the problems she seeks to solve are rooted in the lived

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[17] April Shaw (2010) argues that Pogge's (2008) analysis of global justice fails to take into account categories of gender and race, and the historic role of these categories in the development of global poverty. She argues that his proposals for remedying global poverty are, as a result, unlikely to produce the desired result.

experience of members of actual contemporary US society. Drawing upon the pragmatism of John

Dewey, she suggests that nonideal theory reflects how normative thinking actually works.

"Unreflective habits guide most of our activity. We are not jarred into critical thinking about our

conduct until we confront a problem that stops us from carrying on unreflectively" (3). The source of

philosophical reflection, according to Dewey, are "felt difficulties" in the flow of everyday experience,

when our purposes are unattainable for whatever reason, when a gap emerges between our practical

desires and what we are able to actualize (Dewey 1910: 196-200).[18] Given this basis, philosophical

reflection need not have a perfect ideal in mind to make meaningful claims about how to improve

problematic situations. Theorizing may be understood in terms of a metaphor of sickness and health:

if I come to the doctor with complaints of fatigue, insomnia, and a headache, we don't need an

idealization of perfect health to determine that I have a problem. Nor do we need such an ideal in

order to resolve these issues. We do, however, need a thorough investigation of the underlying cause

of these symptoms, if we are to resolve them adequately.

Thus, Anderson shifts the purpose of normative theorizing from assessment of the actual in

terms of an independent ideal to the identification of imperatives of justice based on empirical

investigation of the proximate and distal causes of our felt difficulties. "Nonideal theory", she writes,

"begins with a diagnosis of the problems and complaints of our society and investigates how to

overcome these problems" (6).

Against arguments of the sort made by Mills (2004) that we should in general avoid

counterfactual assumptions in moral and political philosophy (i.e., in a nonideal mode), Anderson

follows Dewey in conceiving normative claims as *hypotheses* to be tested in experience (Anderson,

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[18] This perspective is, of course, not unique to Dewey and the American Pragmatists. It goes back at least to the Sophists in Ancient Greece, and in the modern period has been endorsed by diverse thinkers, informing theoretical projects as diverse as Sigmund Freud's psychology and Martin Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics.

2010: 6; Dewey: 1991, 59-68, 229-30).   "We test our ideals by putting them into practice and seeing whether they resolve the problems for which they were devised, settle people's reasonable complaints, and offer a way of life that people find superior to what they had before" (Anderson 2010: 6).

Nonideal theory, on this construal, relies upon empirical experience in both the *formulation* of problems to be addressed, and in the *assessment* or *evaluation* of the remedies proposed. Thus, race-based injustice is understood in terms of the history of slavery, segregation, and race-based discriminatory practices in housing, hiring, and admissions. Democracy, as a set of principles, institutions, and a way of life, is understood in terms of the struggle for black-white equality in US history. The *correctness* of remedies, including desegregation and affirmative action, are assessed in terms of their real outcomes in addressing the causes of race-based injustice. Nonideal theory requires concepts that are empirically adequate. The distinction between empirical and normative work is not erased, but the difference is a matter of two related, even interdependent moments within a single organic intellectual project—*not* of two fundamentally different and independent projects.

Empirically adequate concepts, rooted in the experience of felt difficulties of a given community or set of individuals, cannot be conceived as universally appropriate. Thus, Anderson explicitly limits her argument to the context of the United States, and part of the rationale for this is that we must understand political problems in their historical context. She further limits her analysis to one set of intergroup relations in the US context, and that is white-black inter-race relations.[19] Her goal is not to articulate universally applicable criteria of justice; rather, by discerning the nature of

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[19] One possible objection to Anderson's analysis is that by focusing exclusively on race, she omits salient categories, such as gender, from consideration. Anderson anticipates this critique, and asserts emphatically that nonideal theory does not claim to be comprehensive—rooting inquiry in a particular set of felt difficulties inevitably will limit an inquiry's scope and exclude important aspects of political reality. Yet it will be essential to assess whether her restriction of the scope of her inquiry accords with the way that those whom "the shoe pinches" would characterize their problems. The question of whether a restriction of scope eliminates relevant information for characterizing political problems is not one that can be reliably undertaken monologically—i.e., without dialoguing with those who actually occupy the epistemically relevant social positions. See chapter 5.

injustice in a particular context, then articulating requirements of justice in terms suggested by the articulation of the problem, Anderson provides a model for how we can approach these in different contexts. The lessons are normative (integration is an *imperative* of social justice) within the US context, but there are also prescriptions that we can generalize for philosophical methodology in other contexts of inquiry, as well. These are relevant for understanding our discoveries in our study of the Panchos' political practice, and can be used to guide further future research.

To sum up, some elements of ideal theorizing are retained in nonideal projects. For example, the procedure of reflective equilibrium which puts deeply held values into harmony with practicable principles, a method which finds its fullest development in Rawls' *Theory of Justice,* remains an essential component of the development of normative claims. Nonideal theory has additional or different requirements that distinguish it. Those that I believe are most important in Anderson's model are as follows:

(1) Empirical adequacy: Non-ideal theory produces concepts that account for observable features of the phenomena under investigation, which means that they must be historical as well as theoretical

(2) Practical normativity: Non-ideal theory should provide principles that can guide the action of real, situated, fallible human beings,

(3) Openness to verification, refutation, and/or revision: Normative concepts in non-ideal political theory are subject to reconsideration in light of new information and, most importantly, as the results of implementation in experience and practice.

CHAPTER 5

Democratizing Political Philosophy (Methodologically)

Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men [*sic.* and women].

—John Dewey, "On the Recovery of Philosophy"

5.1. Towards a Naturalistic & Democratic "Recovery" of Philosophical Inquiry

I argued in the previous chapter for the claim (made by John Holloway and others) that political theorizing (philosophizing) is best conceived as a form of political practice—that is, it an activity that expresses one's positionality in the socio-political world. This does not, however, imply that political philosophy can be nothing other than one more narrow-minded and/or self-interested contestant without a contribution to make to the interests of others or even the whole. In this chapter, I explore the implications of our social and political situatedness, and call for a Deweyian deepening of our understanding, in the Anglophone academy, of the purposes and promise of philosophical reasoning in contexts of political struggle.

Our experience with the Panchos is that the discursive game that most Anglophone political philosophers are playing has unexamined assumptions built into the basic normative categories used to interpret (and rationalize) political reality. In the case of the Panchos we can see how the language of political philosophy, with its historically state-centric interpretation of the political community and central principle of state sovereignty, interpreted as a right to non-interference, distorts the interpretation of moral facts on the ground. As we saw in chapter 3, the picture of the state as a

unitary and absolute sovereign frames the Panchos practice as contradictory, even hypocritical. The

benefits that members of the Pancho community receive from the state (in the form of, for example,

housing credits or waste management services) appear to compromise their struggle for autonomy, and

even to cast doubt upon their sincerity and integrity. The Panchos have only limited territorial

autonomy, and remain economically, educationally dependent upon state institutions. Some would

surely interpret the Panchos' relationship with the state as parasitic, and that this *prevents* the

realization of just political outcomes by subverting and further weakening the state. And it is the

sovereign state that is the condition of possibility of the juridical condition and the guarantor of

justice—or so it seems if one assesses the actual in terms of a pre-determined idealization of the state

as arbiter of pluralist conflicts, of sovereignty as monolithic, and of self-determination as non-

interference.

Iris Young's (2007) alternative to the Westphalian conception of sovereignty is self-

determination as non-domination, which helps a great deal. I argued in §2.3 that this conception takes

the moral principle and the instrumental argument most commonly invoked to justify sovereignty, and

reconceptualizes the latter to bring principle and pragmatics into greater alignment. This strategy is

what Rawls would term the "systematizing [of] our public political culture." My application of

Young's terms to the question of the Merida Initiative and international aid, however, reveals the

likelihood that even when making such a significant leap forward in terms of the *integrity* of our

principled judgments concerning politics, whenever thinking from the comfort of the philosopher's

armchair we are likely to reproduce hidden ideological biases. Consider my proposal (§2.4)

concerning the relationship of international actors to groups like the Panchos assumes some legitimacy

of those actors and of the international order itself. It thus already is at odds with the Panchos'

understanding of their relation to the state. The application of self-determination as non-domination in

chapter 2 highlighted *internal* political dynamics in Mexico and failed to emphasize and explore the

complex forms of intervention and dependency by the U.S. government that are part-and-parcel of the Mexican state. The Merida Initiative is not a mistaken policy but only a recent moment in a pattern whereby the U.S. government, which is beyond all formal accountability to the Mexican people, has bolstered the repressive capacities of the Mexican state, and the war on drug cartels is one pretext amongst many.

Suppose, through a herculean stretch of the imagination, that the analysis in chapter 2 was taken up and informed policymaking in the U.S., in Mexico, at the World Bank or the IMF. This might lead to improvements, from a moral point of view, over current policy. However, the issues obscured in that analysis would also be significant—given the ideological nature of the theoretical blindness we have uncovered, we can assume it would help preserve much that is unjust in the status quo. It would, at the very least, have been ineffectual at helping to address injustices that it obscures. The crucial methodological lesson here is that, if we hadn't entered into dialogue with the Panchos, we may never have been aware of what our analysis obscured. This is not due to some failure of effort or good intentions on our part; rather, it is a product of our limited epistemological access to all the features of the political world relevant for theorizing in the nonideal mode.

In this fifth and penultimate chapter, I explore the issues that emerge when we take seriously the requirements of nonideal theorizing, given the limitations and contradictions that accompany our own social situatedness. Starting from a sympathetic critique of Anderson's methodological model (§4.4), I argue that feminist standpoint epistemology and contemporary models of deliberative democratic inquiry set the direction we must follow to establish contemporary political philosophical inquiry on solid ethical and epistemological footing. In particular, I conclude that political philosophers *must* enter into dialogue with oppressed peoples concerning theories and principles of justice. Our own dialogue taught us a great deal about our conceptions of self-determination and autonomy, and about the contemporary practice of political philosophy. Just imagine what else we

might learn from this and other methods about ourselves and our ideas, about our place in the world and the significance of our work.

5.2. Issues in Nonideal Theory

Nonideal theory (see §4.3 and §4.4) provides a method for political philosophy that is a real alternative to ideal theory and many of its pitfalls. It does not, however, neatly resolve all of the issues that emerged from our experience with the Panchos. Indeed, what we learned in our inquiry with the Panchos points to questions we might raise to extend or augment Anderson's method into complex, intercultural contexts. The three key epistemological issues that emerged in our case study are:

1. Which questions are we to investigate?

2. Framed in what (and whose) terms?

3. How are we to assess competing answers?

Patricia Hill Collins helpfully frames the question of what criteria (implicit or explicit) we use as we assessing evidence as an epistemological issue, in addition to a political and ethical one. Collins writes that, "Epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge…It investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true. Far from being the apolitical study of truth, *epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why*" (in Jaggar 2005: 247; emphasis added). Epistemology, then, is the field of inquiry concerned with discerning the right response to competing testimonies: of our senses, of our interlocutors, of our own intuition, and our own reason. Sources of epistemic authority are diverse—obviously, different individuals and communities take different sources to be authoritative. For nonideal theory, the question becomes quite concrete: whose characterization and analysis of social and political problems counts as appropriate contributions to theory? Does recognizing that philosophical problems emerge from the felt difficulties of real people and communities mean that the

solutions recommended by those whose difficulties they are more authoritative than those offered by others?

Political concepts are essentially contested. Appeals to evidence are relevant in adjudicating such contests. Like scientific theories, however, political theories are by their very nature underdetermined by evidence. Indeed, what counts as evidence and what does not is precisely what is at stake in political theorizing. Our case study has illustrated that philosophical concepts that pervade the academy are in important respects different from those that inform the Panchos' self-understanding. Differences in conceptual categories do not, of course, determine for us how we ought to interpret them. Given the underdetermination of theory by empirical evidence (including testimony), how do we adjudicate between divergent conceptual schemes? How do we go about assess the relative merit of each? Responding to this question requires the discovery or invention of some sort of decision procedure, and justifying such a procedure is a metaphilosophical task. It requires that we define criteria of adequacy that answer the questions: What is it that we want political theory to do?

Before offering such criteria, a crucial addendum to Collins' definition of epistemology is necessary: we need to attend not only to who we believe and why, but how "we" are constituted as such. This "we" may be understood as the political community whose issues are investigated—the "objects" of research, which often includes the researcher as a citizen or political agent. Second, "we" refers to the *presumed* subject, rather than the object, of inquiry, and expresses what the philosopher or the researcher takes to be the appropriate epistemic and moral point of view—the "we" of the author and audience, as constituted *by the author* in academic papers, conferences, etc. Finally, it also refers to the *actual* discursive community that participates in the production of knowledge, in the case of contemporary Western political philosophy, the academy—overwhelmingly white, upper middle class, male.

My position is that naturalizing and democratizing political philosophical inquiry requires the transformation of how all three of these "we's" are constituted. In order to develop this position, I begin from three issues that seem to me particularly significant in Anderson's method. In this section, I develop each of these issues in turn:

1. Questioning the implications of reliance on different types of social scientific results from academic journals and publishing houses in characterizing the empirical situation.

2. The proscribed situatedness of Anderson's nonideal theory doesn't address certain challenges associated with contexts of inter-, cross-, and multicultural inquiry into political matters.

3. To what extent is Anderson's analysis, like Rawls ideal method which she rejects, monological? To what extent does Anderson's method allow diverse relevant voices to contribute?

Characterizing the Empirical Situation Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data

One way of construing the democratic dimension of nonideal theorizing is that it takes as its proper aim resolving difficulties experienced by real people, rooted in an historical account of the causes of the problems we face. Apart from this starting point, however, it seems to me that Anderson's method doesn't consistently reflect the democratic values identified in her methodology. In order to characterize the contemporary historical, material situation, Anderson relies on social science findings that are, in many cases, experimental and statistical results.

Many anthropologists, sociologists, and feminists and critical theorists in a variety of disciplines have criticized a too-ready reliance on quantitative, statistical analysis of data, showing the many ways that this reliance has functioned to mask ideological commitments. Quantitative research is useful precisely because it identifies patterns and tendencies by a process of abstracting from particulars. Just as abstraction is probably necessary for thinking at all, abstraction from particulars is

necessary to identify the general patterns documented in quantitative research. This means, however, that such methods can easily obscure significant differences across individual and collective experience.

The "Great Partition" of methods, rooted in the synthetic/analytic distinction and its attendant fact/value dichotomy (§1.2) has manifested within disciplines as well as between them. In many social science fields, this has been in terms of a debate between quantitative and qualitative methods. Proponents and critics often portray quantitative research as striving to be value-neutral (Shadish et al. 1995). Skeptics of the importance and value of quantitative methods have sometimes overstated their case and fallen into a reactionary and, in many cases, relativistic interpretivism. Randomized and controlled double blind experiments, a method developed most fully in medical research and taken to be the "gold standard" in many social science fields, can be applied in a variety of ways and to different ends; furthermore, they can be understood in terms of different epistemologies, not all of them positivistic. Yet the abundant criticism of quantitative methods has demonstrated many ways that purportedly value-neutral framing of problems and posing of questions to be investigated (perhaps unconsciously) relies upon a particular social and cultural position—embodying, for example, culturally masculine values and norms (Messing 1995; Rogers 2004). In contexts of intercultural or cross-cultural inquiry, such research can be seen to have operated in some cases as an extension of imperialistic and colonial ideological practices (Narayan 1997; Smith 1999:).

The dogmatic position that qualitative and quantitative research presuppose different and incompatible epistemologies distorts the ways in which either can serve liberatory or oppressive aims. Certainly, qualitative research is not, in virtue of its methods, immune to critiques along lines similar to the critiques of quantitative methods discussed above. Yet there is an important sense in which qualitative research provides a necessary corrective or compliment to quantitative methods. While quantitative research generalizes and so of necessity obscures particular differences, qualitative

methods attend to the distinctiveness of individual experience and allows for deference to the values expressed by the subject. For this reason, qualitative methods such as ethnography have become an important cornerstone in much critical and emancipatory social research. Qualitative research is most attentive to varieties of experience, most resistant to generalizations that foster essentializing and reductionist conceptualizations, when they are informed by thick descriptions of qualitative research methods such as ethnography or qualitative interviewing (Jayaratne & Stewart 1991; Smith 1999; Eisenhart 2005). By representing the voices, attitudes, and understandings of research subjects themselves as the primary data to be made sense of, qualitative research at its best functions as a mechanism to expand epistemic diversity and inclusion of those often excluded from professional discourses of research.

Anderson is a sophisticated philosopher of social science. Certainly she is aware of the kinds of methodological considerations discussed above. And indeed, perusing her endnotes in *The Imperative of Integration*, we find references to a variety of types of research. In the majority of cases the methods used in the studies she refers to remain unclear. One gets the impression that if anything, she relies slightly disproportionately quantitative and experimental studies in developing her argument, which is what we might expect since her argument concerns society-wide patterns of disadvantage (recall that quantitative methods are well-suited to dealing with regularities across diverse individual cases). Yet this reliance (if it indeed exists) may be problematic, in light of Anderson's framing of nonideal theory as emerging from felt difficulties. Unclear delineation of the different types of empirical research she invokes leaves the source of Anderson's articulation of felt difficulties ambiguous. Explicit reliance on qualitative research documenting diverse experiences of race-based injustice in the U.S. in their specificity seems appropriate to the problem she poses, given the idea that nonideal theory takes as its starting point the technical articulation of felt difficulties.

The above critique is very minor, perhaps even nitpicky. It amounts to the claim that nonideal theory requires a more explicitly articulation of the methods used in the social scientific research used to characterize an empirical situation. It highlights the necessary question of how a philosopher decides what counts as data, and what methods ought to be used to collect and interpret it. This cannot be determined, I would suggest, *a priori*. Anderson's approach skillfully synthesizes important elements of a vast body of social scientific literature. Nevertheless, given what has been said above concerning the quantitative/qualitative debate, it appears that the epistemic and ethical dimensions require that we carefully consider what *type* of research is most appropriate for characterizing a given political problem. What counts as "evidence" that nonideal theory ought to use in characterizing the empirical situation? At the most general level, we can respond that depending on which aspect of the situation being characterized, it seems reasonable that both quantitative and qualitative methods will have a distinctive and vital role, given the advantages and limitations associated with each.

Nonideal Cross-, Inter-, and Multicultural Inquiry?

The second major issue to be clarified in the application of Anderson's model is whether it can be applied in the context of cross-cultural inquiry such as our case study of the Panchos. Here, Anderson's method seems to share a basic issue in common with the Rawlsian approach. Rawls describes thinking in the original position as a strategy for making explicit and elaborating the sense of justice "that everyone has in himself" (50). Reflective equilibrium appeals to moral intuitions, but limits their role. Rawls believes that there will be agreement on the most fundamental issues, an "overlapping consensus." Rawls writes that, "If men's conceptions of justice finally turn out to differ, the ways in which they do so is a matter of first importance" (ibid.). It is unclear how such fundamental disagreements can be adjudicated, should they be discovered. If philosophical reflection depends upon clarifying the basis of "our" public political culture, then cross-cultural and inter-community inquiry seems

As I have presented Anderson's version of it, situated, nonideal theorizing poses problems rooted in the felt difficulties of members of a specified political community or society. Nonideal theorizing contributes to the process of democracy as a mode of collective inquiry. Certain background assumptions are taken for granted, including certain shared values. Anderson takes a commitment to democratic equality as the starting point for her analysis of segregation as a source of inequalities. Does the need for common background assumptions run aground in a case of cross-cultural research, as they sometimes seemed to in the case study of the Pancho Villas?

For Anderson, the most defensible answer to this question—who is the "we" whose felt difficulties define the problems to be addressed in non-ideal theory?—is based on the notion of democratic society. "We" are a people whose common history and common institutional structures which provide some commonality across a multiplicity of differences. She begins from a very sketchy ideal of democratic equality, a distinctive feature of the contemporary US social and political context. Like Alexis de Tocqueville more than a century-and-a-half earlier, Anderson believes that the core organizing principle of democratic society is "equality of conditions." She writes, "The distinctive normative feature of democratic societies is social equality. All of the members of a democratic society have a just claim to stand in relations of equality with their fellow citizens" (18). She goes on to show that segregation of blacks in fact creates democratic inequalities, and for this reason, in a democratic society integration is an imperative of justice.

Anderson doesn't, however, address the issue of cross- or inter-cultural inquiry. How ought we to characterize inquiry if the parties to the inquiry are not part of the same community? The democratic values that she describes explicitly value diversity; democratic inquiry is enquiry which seeks to create solidarity across difference. Yet what if a community is explicitly undemocratic in its value commitments? Can nonideal inquiry only occur in a democratic mode when all the participants to the inquiry are committed to democratic values—i.e., to ideals of tolerance, cooperation, mutual

respect, etc.? Anderson doesn't address these questions, all of which would be necessary to the full explication of naturalistic and democratic political philosophical inquiry.

Monological or Dialogical?

Situating her inquiry in terms of this context-specific ideal of social equality does not necessarily mean that Anderson *enacts* this ideal consistently in her own inquiry. That is to say, there is a sense in which her method, like Rawls', is monological rather than dialogical. This aspect of her approach means that Anderson stands in tension with her explicit construal of democracy as a mode of collective inquiry. Rawls' method is straightforwardly monological in that it assumes that a theory of justice can be worked out by an individual with all of the relevant information, the necessary intellectual faculties, and the right methodology. Principles of justice can be worked out without actually asking any real individuals how they would characterize an ideally just society.

This issue of discourse as monological can be expanded to the social level. Discourse might be carried on exclusively *within* a single social position, made up entirely of individuals similarly disposed within a hierarchy of cultural, economic, and political structures. The body of work that Anderson draws upon in characterizing the empirical situation has been produced primarily by a class of academic professionals in the US (and some in Europe). It seems likely that the discourse of social scientists that Anderson draws upon is monological in this way. As Anderson herself notes in her discussion of affirmative action, this professional community has been a product of race-based discriminatory practices (2010: 135-153), although affirmative action policies have been effective in increasing diversity within certain disciplines and institutions in last half-century.

Thus, Anderson's argument for affirmative action is (or ought to be) reflexive—to what extent does the knowledge base that she draws upon to make her case reflect the epistemic diversity that serves as part of the justification for affirmative action policies? In this context, Anderson doesn't explicitly question the status of empirical results she invokes in light of the power structure in which

such knowledge has been produced. To the extent that the body of research upon which we base our considered judgments reflects the diverse social positions relevant to the social problem (those whom Dewey's "shoe pinches"), it provides a solid basis for the kind of philosophizing that Anderson engages in. Too often, however, Anderson seems to rely upon the special standing of social scientific results, as a form of cultural capital, to bolster her argument without considering the conditions and participants in the production of such findings.

To what extent are academic researchers the members of the community well positioned to decide whether the remedies have succeeding in making life for "us" better than it was before? Recommendations for policy might be based on the best extant sociological data; what might individuals to be benefitted have to contribute here? When it comes to characterizing the normative ideals that, in the context of such research, define better or worse for a given community? Such questions raise the issue of epistemic privilege, of who has *prima facie* authority on a given matter in virtue of one's social position. Do we have reason to trust some more than others? What kind of criteria can help us to judge the relevant participants in a given inquiry, and how different and divergent characterizations can be adjudicated? It is to these questions that I turn in the next section.

5.3. Propositions & Positionality: The Contribution of Feminist Standpoint Theory

In this section, I explore the following questions related to the issue of epistemic privilege: Does the Panchos more "on the ground", action-oriented position mean that their concepts are more adequate? Do those who are oppressed have epistemic privilege when it comes to characterizing and analyzing oppression? Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire answers this question rhetorically: "Who are better than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressed society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the need for liberation?" (1970: 27).

Yet one might also argue that it is precisely this grounded, in the field character that limits their perspective. Perhaps political philosophers in academia have the advantage of standing "above the fray", of taking a more general perspective that situates the Panchos context in terms of broader, even global dynamics described in necessarily more general terms. Both of the possible methodological approaches described have some merit. Balancing fidelity to context-specific features is essential for a concept to have the virtue of empirical adequacy. Yet all thought, of necessity, requires generalization or abstraction across empirical instances. There are reasons we have to recognize a necessary interplay between these perspectives, rather than opting for one at the expense of the other—indeed, the ideal here is "both/and" rather than "either/or." A particularly helpful way to understand this problem of interpretation is via reference to standpoint epistemology, especially as it has been developed by feminist theorists.

Standpoint theory traces its contemporary genealogy to Lukacs and other early 20th-century Marxists, who theorized that the knowledge we produce is a product not of our own unconstrained agency as "knowers," but also of our social position. Marxists are not unique in taking the position that knowledge is socially constructed based on human values and interests. This is the position of John Dewey and the entire school of American pragmatism, as well. What is distinctive to Marxist standpoint epistemology is the notion that the single, cross-cutting social category that matters most is that of economic class (Jaggar 2008: 304). Furthermore, the "knowledge" produced via reference to the standpoint of the capitalist class is compromised, in part because those who benefit from oppressive social relations benefit from ignoring the existence and the implications of such arrangements. The perspective of the proletariat, according to this argument, is the truly *human* (universal) perspective, and as such, it is epistemically superior to that of the self-deceiving capitalist class.

The classical Marxist view, which privileges proletarian positionality as providing access to the singular *truly* human perspective, does not follow from the identification of particularity and positional biases of theorists associated with the capitalist class. Such a claim has become *prima facie* implausible in an increasingly pluralist and globalized social world. Social locations in such a world are nothing if not complicated. Feminist inquiry has, since the 1970s, used intersectional analysis to confront and successfully complicate the notion that there is any such thing as a "women's perspective," or even a "Black women's" or "Chicana women's" perspective.

Claims to epistemological privilege that use intersectionality as a method point not only to the "compounding" oppression of intersecting social categories, but also to the unique understanding available to an individual in virtue of her social position(s). Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins, for example, claims that black women in academic sociology are positioned as "the outsider within," due to their proximity to and intimate acquaintance with "white culture" in addition to their own "black culture". Her argument here mirrors and also goes beyond that presented by Dorothy Smith in her classic 1974 essay, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology." Smith argued that women bring a point of view that, in combination with their sociological training, enables them to raise fundamental critiques of sociological theory and practice not raised by men. Collins characterizes the social position of black women as already multifaceted prior to initiation into the culture of academia. Due to their frequent employment as domestic workers, which often involved participating in child rearing as nannies, black women had an intimate acquaintance with activities central to the reproduction of white culture within racially unjust social structures (Collins 2000). Due to the economic and social imperatives of their position, black women so situated became conversant with white culture from a perspective that white men and women did not necessarily have access to. Black women conversant in both white and black culture entering the context of academic disciplines have at least a triple epistemic advantage—as "outsiders within", they are able to triangulate across

positionalities to help generate knowledge that is, in a strong sense, "objective" (Harding 1993; Code 1993).

This sort of epistemic privilege is not a denial of the fallibility and limitations inherent in *every* social position when it comes to providing a standpoint for describing important features of social and political reality. Friedrich Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy of Morals* that the psychological imperatives of self-preservation and the "will to power" create strong incentives to self-deception among the disadvantaged and oppressed. "Slave morality" (which he associates with the Judeo-Christian tradition) is, according to Nietzsche, an idealization which distorts empirical reality in order to assert the goodness and justness of the weak and the sinfulness and wickedness of the strong. Nietzsche's systematic distrust of the morality of "the weak" is no more plausible than the Marxist assertion that the perspective of the proletariat is scientific and "truly human." But it dramatizes the question, why should we think that the oppressed are immune to self-deception and blindness to important aspects of political reality? Furthermore, where social and psychological pressures distort the perceptions of members of disadvantaged groups, why should we not suspect that such distortions will be systemic?

It's certainly true that there is a great deal that we *all* share in common—as Jaggar puts it, we "live in a common world" (2008: 197). Traditional Marxist standpoint theory may overstate, however, how much members of a particular social category share in common. There simply is no *single* social location shared by the working class, or an analytic position or perspective rightly referred to by the category of "the proletariat." Class, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and other consequential social categories are intersecting, often multiplicative (as opposed to additive) and, in experience, integrated and inseparable (King 1988).

One's social position is not the same thing as one's perspective. One's perspective is constituted by what one sees and experiences, what one notices and ignores, in real concrete lived

experience. One's position constrains one's perspective—from the position of a woman in sociology in the contemporary U.S., one is positioned to encounter certain aspects of social reality, but one might systematically ignore some of these, and so eliminate them from one's perspective. Furthermore, as the method of intersectionality helps us to see, one's perspective might on occasion transcend or transgress one's position—for instance, if someone of a certain social class is mistaken for someone of another, that person might have experiences which reveal aspects of social reality that one's position would typically preclude; one's status due to education might give one access to knowledge that would be denied on the basis of class, gender, or race—Mark Twain's *Prince and the Pauper* comes to mind.

Jaggar (1989) makes use of the claim at the heart of standpoint theory, that those who are marginalized have epistemic privilege in relation to dynamics of oppression and marginalization in a naturalistic way. She points to the experience of "outlaw emotions"—i.e., emotions which go against the grain of prescribed ways of feeling and responding to social phenomena—as an epistemic resource for identifying research questions, programs, and lines of critique that allow us to move beyond the status quo assumptions that have been so formative for all of us in a patriarchal, racist, classist, homophobic, etc. society. The insight that "outlawed" yet persistently recurring emotions shared by members of a given social category, as experiences seeking expression, provides a concrete, naturalistic caste to claims of standpoint theory that social location gives provides unique, domain specific epistemic access.

If we are to recognize the way in which social position constrains and enables the construction of "knowledge", yet we reject notion that any single social position is *the* epistemically and ethically privileged perspective from which to construct adequate non-ideal theory, how shall we proceed with philosophical inquiry into political problems? My proposal is that the conflict between divergent conceptions of political reality, rooted in distinct social positionalities, is generative, at least under certain conditions, of new realities and of socially relevant knowledge about these. The defense of this

claim, and articulation of the necessary conditions for deliberative, democratic political philosophical inquiry, is my concern in the final section of this chapter.

5.4. Democratizing Philosophical Methodology: An Epistemic, Ethical, and Professional Imperative

Feminist standpoint epistemology and non-ideal theory both point in the direction of democratizing philosophy and its method to include all the voices and perspectives of those who have access, in virtue of their social position, to relevant features of political reality. Democratizing political philosophy requires that philosophers employ very different methods than those that currently predominate within the discipline. In this section, I explore several dimensions of what might characterize political philosophy in a naturalistic and democratic mode. I consider some of the consequences for philosophy as a specialized academic discipline, and argue that political philosophers have a social and political position from which to contribute to the development of epistemically adequate and genuinely ethical political theorizing. Contributing to this development is, it seems to me, an epistemic, ethical, and professional imperative.

The notion that research ought to be conducted democratically has been perhaps most fully developed within the "applied" field of education research. Howe (2003) proposes a model for deliberative democratic research in his book, *Closing Methodological Divides,* which I think provides a useful for democratizing philosophical inquiry more generally. Some theories of democracy are heavily influenced by the separation of normative and descriptive projects discussed previously (§1.1 and §3.1). Howe refers to positivistic theories as "emotive", indicating that they regard democratic procedures as facilitating the expression of participant preferences which are themselves not subject to rational discussion and debate. Deliberative democracy provides an alternative model. Deliberative democracy is theory of politics that emerges from the American pragmatist tradition and critical theory, especially in the works of John Dewey and Jurgen Habermas (respectively). As Howe writes,

deliberative democracy holds that there is "something to deliberate about when it comes to values, that values are not impervious to rational investigation and dialogue" (136). It also takes into account the ethical and epistemic value of inclusion, insisting that, "the conditions of decision-making should be designed so as to permit free and equal participation" (ibid.). Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, deliberative democracy is dialogical, in the sense that "participants can actually see their value commitments change, as new, more adequate positions are 'constructed' out of the material of joint deliberation" (ibid.). By not taking participants beliefs and preferences to be fixed by their social position or ideology, deliberative democratic theory allows for inquiry to be generative of new realities as well as understandings.

Deliberative democratic inquiry seeks methods to avoid the influences of covert and perhaps unconscious ideology; as such, it is a natural companion to nonideal theory. As a form of social and political practice, deliberative democratic inquiry recognizes the complex influence of social situatedness on epistemic authority. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss epistemic, ethical, and professional dimensions of the imperative to naturalize and democratize political philosophy. Each of these dimensions is interrelated with the others, and the discussion of each will involve significant overlap with that of the others.

An Epistemic Imperative

One of the central epistemic virtues, in the Western tradition, is objectivity. This stands in contrast to the central epistemic vice, bias. Scheman's (2001) discussion of the *meaning* of objectivity focuses on why we should care about the concept. She comes to the conclusion that science needs to be evaluated "as a social practice, naturalistically understood" (410). The naturalistic approach to objectivity jives well with her pragmatic approach to language and conceptual definition, perhaps similar to the approach to gender and race offered by Sally Haslanger (2000). Scheman's question is why do we care about objectivity, what do we expect it to do for us—or, in Dewey's phrase, what is its

"cash value"? Is it a concept you can, metaphorically, "take to the bank"? The value of objectivity is, for Scheman, social. Claims to objectivity "underwrite a significant degree of…authority, and it does so by rationally grounding trust" (402). Trust is an interpersonal and social reality. The work the concept of objectivity does is at the level of social relations.

Philosopher of science Helen Longino (1990) takes Scheman's conclusion, more or less, as her starting point. She focuses more extensively on the implications of the social and collective nature of scientific inquiry (and so of objectivity) in a way that is helpful, I think, for situating Jaggar's argument concerning "outlaw emotions" (see §5.3) in the context of a broader discursive process of the kind Scheman brings to our attention. As Longino states, what she offers in her essay are "criteria for assessing the objectivity of communities" (398). Individuals are objective to the extent that they participate in "the collective give-and-take of critical discussion and not in some special relation (of detachment, hardheadedness [or heartedness]) they may bear to their observations" (ibid.).

The notion that the community of researchers itself provides the corrective for the bias brought inevitably by individuals, due to the limitations and possibilities of their distinct positions in social reality, is a promising reconfiguration of the picture of science many of us intuitively carry—that is, the picture of scientific discoveries as the products of a solitary and inspired (and typically male) genius. But, given the insight that individuals and groups occupy different social positions, and that this fact has epistemic implications, the makeup of a given community is essential to assessing its objectivity. Howe (2003) argues that *inclusion* is an epistemic imperative that derives from the recognition of epistemic bias. I would add to this the related normative principles of *diversity*. Diversity is an epistemic value because it increases the likelihood that conclusions generated by the community's discourse will be subjected to meaningful, critical scrutiny. Women and others with outlaw emotions as well as other kinds of counter-paradigmatic experiences provide the grist for the mill of status quo critique. Inquiry based on such experiences can expose (and so serve as a control for) the biases of a given community.

The valorization of diversity is limited, however, by what Longino's terms the "requirement of commonly agreed upon canons of evaluation" (1990: 391-392). There is a tension in the principle of diversity as a methodological control for bias: the value of questions and critique of the sort motivated by outlaw emotions is that they call into question fundamental assumptions—what Longino calls "background assumptions"—yet for a community to be engaged in productive, objective inquiry there must be common criteria for evaluation. These criteria would be, one would assume, assumed, and often part of the "background." Howe (2003) describes this as a methodological dilemma: "Those very individuals who should be included to control bias either will be excluded for lack of scholarly expertise, or will be included because they have assimilated the status quo standards and beliefs" (109).

There is reason to think that the requirement of shared background assumptions is overstated. Longino rejects the thesis, associated with Kuhn, that "paradigms" of science (or, more generally, communities of inquiry) are incommensurable, that communication is impossible across communities with different assumptions. She asserts the need for critique of fundamental assumptions—something Kuhn reserved for scientific revolutions, not the practice of "normal science"—as part of the ongoing practice of science if it is to attain objectivity. She acknowledges the problem that, if no one ever agrees (at least for the sake of argument) to consider fundamental assumptions as given, there is little possibility of scientific "progress". Philosophers of social science sometimes bemoan that, allegedly unlike the natural sciences, social sciences have never achieved a shared paradigm that would allow for normal science.

A common set of assumptions must be shared for a community to engage in discourse that produces "objective" knowledge claims. I would suggest that the question of the limiting considerations for diversity in a community of inquirers is precisely where we would expect the site of political contest to occur—contest which all three of the essays under consideration here are engaged

in. The tense and, in the long-term, perhaps unsustainable relationship between commonality and difference marks democratic politics in general. Thus, the second criteria, which is related to the first, is inclusion. Inclusion suggests that the presence of diversity is a particular sort of presence: not diversity in the form of an outsider's perspective, but of the "outsider-within" (Collins 1991). Professional (and, importantly, methodological) canons must be subject to critique, but it is these very canons which make deliberation "scientific" and potentially objective. And, as I will discuss in a moment, the case of the Panchos provides a more radical model whereby such critical engagement may be sought out, in which leaving the community of political philosophers and engaging in dialogue with those engaged in political struggle requires that the background be brought to the fore, and new terms of engagement are learned and new relationships, even communities, are created.

An Ethical Imperative

Formal requirements to guarantee ethical research in general have been based on the model of medical ethics (Thorne 1980; Angell 2005). The focus across disciplines on informed consent seems suited to experimental contexts, less so, Angell argues, to fieldwork involving participant observation. In the contexts of clinical trials in medical research, talk of risks and benefits is fairly straightforward (treatment may work, or it may not; you may be part of the control group and receive a placebo; side-effects may be x, y, or z…). In psychological research that approximates the experimental context, things are a bit messier but still can be plugged into a utility calculation in a meaningful way ("you may experience some level of distress exploring unpleasant memories or responding to a stressful situation; you may gain clarity on your own views and attitudes; you may experience positive emotions associated with success at a task, overcoming a phobia…"). Thorne describes well, I think, the way in which such standards seem like a mismatch for non-experimental research in general, and ethnographic fieldwork, in particular.

I do believe that IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval processes are extremely important, and they have surely helped to eliminate forms of abuse of patients and subjects of research at least in the US and, increasingly, beyond it (Diniz 2008). Along with Diniz, I think we should reject the argument that such bureaucratic mechanisms are antithetical to some forms of social research and that disciplinary "self-policing", relegating ethical considerations to internal disciplinary mechanisms should be enough. Yet there is a real danger that approval becomes a hoop to jump through, ethics as a checklist which doesn't require deep reflection on the ethical dimensions and often intractable tensions in research on human subjects—if IRB approval *prevents* deep discussion of ethical issues by researchers at the level of presenting their results to the scholarly community, then the bureaucratic mechanism *is* detrimental from an ethical perspective. But I see no reason to think the best solution isn't a "both/and" approach.

In the context of our research among the Panchos, the preferred mechanisms of the community were approval of the initial proposal, consent to interviews on a one-on-one basis, and the retention of veto power over future publications. This may might be construed as a form of censorship, and as such, to introduce an epistemic challenge, perhaps even a form of pernicious bias. It does, I believe, indicate the higher level of deference required on the part of the researcher towards the community when intercultural inquiry occurs within a context of political (and often literally life and death) struggle. I would suggest that this stipulation is better understood as a community's attempt to resist colonization and to "talk back" to an academic world that has characterized their struggle in potentially damaging ways (Smith 1999: 67). Democratic methods in political philosophy must attend to the ethical issue of the researcher or scholar's presumed *right* (or lack thereof) to "speak for" and "speak about" others, and consideration of what the consequences of such speaking might be.

Islam's (2000) study of her own South Asian community of origin in Los Angeles, CA, provides an interesting case through which we might explore the ethical dimension of democratic

political philosophizing in intercultural or even multicultural political contexts. Islam herself is an "outsider within" (Collins 1991) in terms of her presence as a racialized (non-White) woman in the discipline of sociology, this does not mean that she is simply an "insider within" when she interacts with members of "her own" community. In the study which she describes, informants/interviewees displayed skepticism towards her which, Islam seems to suggest, was warranted. In fact, she frames her own writing as a form of betrayal. Given the implicit agreement that opinions could be shared openly *precisely because* those opinions were presumably shared (in the sense of assented to) in advance. Islam betrays an implicit trust, vindicating some of her informants' initial hesitancy to speak openly to her. The participants in the study are, she believes, concerned with the issue of representation: "People in the community saw my research project as an opportunity to document their community history for the next generation, to present themselves to the larger (white) American community, to voice their grievances" (479-480). Certainly, some aspects of the picture she presents are not those that her informants would have hoped for. She justifies this decision in the name of being consistent in her own commitment to resist racism—what, in IRB terms, would be the benefits of the research to society/the wider community. In a utilitarian calculation, Islam concludes that the potential benefits of writing openly about the racism within the Bangladeshi community, or the costs associated with being silent, outweigh the fact that her participants wouldn't consent to the way in which they've been represented.

This seems problematic, perhaps to the extent that we treat as our bottom line the Kantian intuition that people should never be treated as a *mere* means, but also as ends in themselves. The correct interpretation of this principle in this case isn't clear. I emphasize the "mere" which modifies "means" because this allows for highlighting the fact that Islam is very clearly not treating the Bangladeshi community in LA as *nothing more than* a means to countering racism in the wider society. She intends to give voice to their grievances, to expose ways in which this community has

been subject to unjust racializaiton and discrimination, and to provide categories for researchers that will make them more sensitive to the distinctive needs of this particular community—all of these goals follow from a commitment to members of this community as ends in themselves. Yet it also seems that research is always, in every case, instrumental. We cannot ignore the likely and actual impact of an act of research (data collection, analysis, or reporting) in material terms. As Alcoff puts it, "one must…look at where the speech act goes and what it does there" (492). Are the sociologists or students of feminist methodology likely to put Islam's characterization of the Bangladeshi community in a way that defames and discriminates against them? If she reports her findings on a local Fox News channel, the consequences of her claims and conclusions would be very different than if they are read in an academic journal or a university textbook, and such considerations are relevant ethical considerations.

One overarching lesson that reflection on our inquiry amongst the Panchos has taught me is that research is always a social practice of particular individuals, and so is politically and socially situated. One gathers information, develops categories for analysis, represents others, etc., in order to produce something useful—whether in the service of human emancipation or for any number of other purposes. And often, the individuals studied belong to the group that stands to benefit. Furthermore, it seems to me that research subjects are probably *always* treated instrumentally in a way that they do not stand to benefit from, and that is the professional accomplishment and perhaps career advancement of the researcher. Producing research is an activity that has some modicum of social status, and those who invest years of study and financial resources in obtaining a degree and an academic position are unlikely to be doing research in a way that will not advance their careers. If we ask why most researchers engage in research, while other reasons might be cited more readily, individuals' professional goals undoubtedly play an important role.

Given that in this and many other ways research systematically treats research subjects as means to some end (whether of socially valuable knowledge, of professional advancement, or whatever), where is the line between permissible and impermissible treatment? Would it be possible to ever treat someone as absolutely nothing more than a means, to disregard someone's dignity entirely? We can imagine this in extreme cases like the infamous Tuskegee Experiment or Nazi medical experiments on prisoners that resulted in the Nuremberg Codes (Angell 2005).

Given that the situations we will face are not so clear cut, and the inevitable combination of utilitarian and deontoligical considerations in any human research endeavor, professional codes of ethics are on the right track, that reliance upon the standards of the community of scholars/researchers to police one another's work is crucial. Remarkably, political philosophy does not presently have such a code of conduct to guide philosophical work. The development of such a code is an ethical imperative if the naturalization and democratization of the discipline is to occur.

In a commentary on the Declaration of Helsinki, Lisa Eckenwiler (2008) provide useful recommendations for collective engagement with important ethical issues in a substantive way beyond bureaucratic regulation (inclusion, democratic agenda setting and consideration of harms and benefits, and attention to issues of the distribution of harms and benefits (164). It is vital that the research community engage in collective exploration of the ethics of their endeavors, and that this community itself be open and inclusive to representatives of various life experience, social and economic standing, etc., to control for biases that attend class, race, gender, and so on. It seems to me that the ethics of research is an essential part of any project, and reports of research (articles and other publications, and presentations) ought to foreground ethical considerations. Bureaucratic mechanisms are essential, but shouldn't allow anyone to get of the hook without a more thorough discussion of salient ethical issues specific to their research. Silence on such issues should, I would suggest, arouse suspicion of the research itself. Much of what is most valuable in *feminist* research and participatory action research—

both social practices explicitly orientated to ends of human emancipation and justice—is how they make ethical inquiry a reflexive practice central to the creation of knowledge. As Alcoff puts the bottom line, the question is always: "will it is enable the empowerment of oppressed peoples?" (494). In the naturalization and democratization of political philosophy, such ethical considerations may be less than straightforward, but they are no less critical (and unavoidable!) for that reason.

A Professional Imperative

What does democratization and naturalization mean for the political philosophers in the Anglophone academy? Becoming conversant in social science findings is a crucial task. Political philosophy in this new mode must become genuinely interdisciplinary. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that disciplinary boundaries can insulate a discipline from "the 'outside', enabling communities of scholars to distance themselves from others and, in more extreme forms, to absolve themselves of responsibility for what occurs in other branches of their discipline, in the academy and in the world" (65). Interdisciplinarity follows not only from the recognition that conceptual analysis and ideal theorizing lose touch with the realities that they inevitably must characterize, but a recognition of the responsibility political philosophers have, *qua* political philosophers, as political agents. Interdisciplinarity not only means drawing upon the resources of other disciplines, but opening oneself to those others perspectives and assessments of one's own work.

Beyond interdisciplinarity, naturalization and democratization requires heightened awareness of one's own social situatedness. Alison Bailey argues in "On Intersectionality and Whiteness" that philosophy remains "decades behind" other disciplines when it comes to recognizing "intersectionality." The pretension to transcend one's own particular social and historical vantage point is very strong in philosophy; indeed, it might be the most distinctive impulse of the tradition as a whole, and still is today, at least in its analytic strand. Philosophy in this mode risks losing site of materiality, of life as it is lived, in the process of theorizing. As I've remarked before, all thinking

requires generalization of some sort (that is to say, it requires, at a minimum, language). The tension between theory and practice and between reflection and lived experience are generative; what disconcerts the philosopher, still enamored (perhaps only in the secret, deep recesses of her heart?) of Platonic stasis, of permanence, is the condition of possibility for thought and for discourse. Recognition of the contingent origins in our own biography, particularly our education, of our interests and our intuitions can lend greater reflexivity to our work. As Peshkin urges educational researchers, political philosophers too ought to reflect self-consciously upon how their own subjectivities inform their inquiries—reflexive research entails "formal, systemic monitoring of the self" (1988: 20).

This monitoring of self is not enough; philosophers must, as Williams remarked when commenting on Iris Young's exemplary work, listen to non-philosophers. Bailey asserts that "we" must become better listeners (she addresses this charge to "white women" in philosophy, but certainly this admits of a more expansive "we" than this). This listening is, however, in both Williams' and Bailey's construal, mostly metaphorical. When Bailey speaks of "rummaging around in other people's toolboxes" (referring to other disciplines, traditions, modes of inquiry), she acknowledges that this might seem like another act of colonization. The task of naturalizing and democratizing political philosophical inquiry requires that we confront the possibility, the necessity, of a more radical confrontation with the limitations of the discipline.

Reading a text is a controlled activity. *Putting* oneself into dialogue with Gloria Anzaldua, or Audra Lourde, or Tony Morrison, or simply reading the Panchos' official history and observing their practice is not the same thing as making a more dialogical and democratic philosophical community. The selection of texts, the choice to engage with this or that tradition, to "learn a new language", all leave the agency on the side of the white scholar. My complaint against such efforts perhaps seems strange: they are efforts. What if the de-centering that is ultimately required comes unsought, undesired? What if we must be *made* to listen? I suspect what the privileged most need to understand

is precisely what we would not choose to. Emmanuel Levinas liked to say that the revelation of the "infinity" of the Other comes to consciousness only in a mode of passivity, of ceasing to impose one's own will-to-understand—of "letting the Other be" (1961; 1974). Over-eager to ply our scholarly trade, do we philosophers (I'm still only an MA student, I know, but the criticism seems less egregious if I identify) retain an unwillingness to be marginal—which is to say, useless—that prevents us from truly encountering the others, and the assessments of ourselves and our discipline, that white supremacy, or sexism, or classism, obscures?

In chapter 3, I related the jarring experience of the redirections and reconfigurations of basic terms that occurred when we entered into dialogue with the Panchos. Indeed, the lessons we learned about ourselves and our positionality were not, and still in many ways are not, welcome. Yet such encounters are generative of new ideas, new theories, and most importantly, new relationships and even new communities, which in turn provide new forms of control for bias. The professional imperative for political philosophers conscious of the epistemic and ethical imperatives of democratization and naturalization is not the dissolution of philosophy as a professional discipline, but the de-centering of prevailing self-understandings, and the inclusion of voices and perspectives hitherto neglected.

As Charles Mills observes, "Philosophy has remained remarkably untouched by the debates over multiculturalism, canon reform, and ethnic diversity racking the academy; both demographically and conceptually, it is one of the 'whitest' of the humanities" (1997: 2). At the time that he wrote, only about one percent of academic philosophers in the US were Black, and even fewer were Native American, Asian American, or Latino (ibid.). Efforts to increase diversity within departments of philosophy, *and* to empower the diversity that is already present, are vital for this reason. Such efforts must go beyond a token representation of gender, race, and class minorities. This goal requires long-term strategies to transform the internal constitution of the community of political philosophers—at

this point, such change is occurring at an almost glacial pace. In the short-term, I suggest that political philosophers ought to go to where the people are, so to speak, rather than waiting for them to come to us. The case study of the Panchos provides one very limited but perhaps suggestive example of how this might look. My experience indicates that a healthy dose of self-discovery (and perhaps grant funding, as well) awaits the political philosopher who chooses this route to creating a more diverse and inclusive philosophical community. It is possible that such activities will have a profound enough impact upon the philosophers who undertake such projects that this alone might help make philosophy departments more hospitable and desirable places for members of underrepresented groups; increasing epistemic diversity need not wait for the demographic transformation of the discipline and, indeed, may precede it.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this short concluding chapter, I propose a new methodological program for political philosophy in the Anglophone academy. This paper has many flaws, to be sure, most of which I believe may be attributed to the scope of the project in combination with the author's limited (but hopefully growing) capacity for synthesis and insight. The discussion has been wide-ranging. It is appropriate at this point to return to the basic questions, the core of the inquiry: How shall we formulate political problems? What sorts of concepts are we to employ (and create) to analyze them? How shall we characterize the empirical situation? Who is properly positioned to participate in the process, and how are they to be included?

How we go about answering these questions will be consequential. Any answer we render will potentially exclude as well as include, empower as well as disable and marginalize. With this inevitable political dimension in view, it becomes an ethical and epistemic imperative to naturalize and democratize our philosophizing. To naturalize, because idealizations inevitably import the biases inherent in a particular social position as we express what we think is most justified and/or desirable; to democratize, because no amount of self-critique can render information that would be visible from a standpoint we don't happen to inhabit. This ethical imperative is epistemic because what we decide counts as knowledge and who we decide is worthy of inclusion in the conversation will have consequences for the adequacy of our conceptualization of the problems and the solutions we propose.

The nine metaphilisophical criteria below are a synthesis of the guidelines for problem-posing drawn from the case study of the Pancho Villas (chapter 3), the criteria of nonideal theorizing in the

model provided by Anderson (see § 4.4), and Howe's three criteria of deliberative democratic research: inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation (Howe 2003: 140-141).

The problems posed in political philosophy are to be identified and framed in terms of:

(1) Psychological and social relevance: Problems posed emerge from the felt difficulties of members of a community or communities, significantly impinging upon the well-being and/or aspirations of a significant number of individual group members.

(2) Historical development: Problems are framed in terms of their development over time, and in terms of likely proximate causes in a specific historical context.

(3) Multivocal characterization: The characterization of problems should be open or at least multifaceted, leaving room for different candidate characterizations of the historical and material causes of felt difficulties. (Chapter 3)

The concepts and constructs generated to analyze problems are judged in terms of:

(4) Empirical adequacy: Deliberative democratic inquiry produces concepts that account for observable features of the phenomena under investigation, which means that they must be historical as well as theoretical

(5) Practical normativity: Deliberative democratic inquiry should provide principles that can guide the action of real, situated, fallible human beings,

(6) Openness to verification, refutation, and/or revision: Normative concepts in deliberative democratic inquiry are subject to reconsideration in light of new information and, most importantly, as the results of implementation in experience and practice. (Chapter 4)

The methods of the inquiry into solutions to political problems are to be judged in terms of:

(7) Inclusion: The process of inquiry centrally involves active participation, in both samples and the community of inquirers, of parties who due to their social position are likely to possess access to epistemically privileged knowledge. This privileged access is domain-specific, and,

whenever possible, inquiry ought to include the full range of perspectives actually expressed by those occupying the privileged social position.

(8) Dialogue: Dialogical methods are open-ended, and allow participants in inquiry to express themselves in the least restricted terms possible. Exchanges are structured in a way that allows participants to resist and reconfigure the terms of discussion.

(9) Deliberation: By *elucidating* and *critiquing* one another's characterizations of the empirical situation and theoretic constructs proposed to interpret political problems, participants in inquiry generate new political realities and understandings through deliberation.

The attempt to challenge reigning categories of political analysis and the desire to generate categories more adequate to the lived experience and political practice of oppressed people in a community of political struggle (chapter 2), the desire to test these categories against empirical reality (chapter 3), and finally the need to understand the challenge that empirical data and dialogical encounters posed to our practice of political philosophy (chapters 4 and 5) were spawned by an inchoate impulse in the direction of the nine criteria above. Were we to begin again, the proposals in the original analysis of sovereignty and of self-determination as non-domination (§2.3) would have been more provisional. Indeed, they probably would not have been made. Rather, a program of information gathering and dialogue would have been articulated prior to conclusions being drawn and actions proposed.

The nine criteria above can be summed up in what I would suggest ought to be our rallying cry: "Out of the armchair and into the world!" There are signs that many political philosophers are already taking up this challenge. It is my hope that there will be many more. What is to be gained in this transformation of a sometimes marginal and aloof discipline is worldly relevance and authentic self-knowledge. What we stand to lose is the isolation of elitist pretension and professional insularity. What is political philosophy good for? The answer depends entirely on what we want it to be, what

we will make it. We have choices to make: what will we take political philosophy to be about, what does it aim to achieve, and how shall we undertake to do it? Not to choose is also to make a choice.

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