Book reviews / Comptes rendus

*The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights*
GARY B. MADISON

Readers acquainted with Gary Madison’s writings to date (most notably *Understanding: A Phenomenological-Pragmatic Analysis, The Logic of Liberty*, and *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*) will not be disappointed with *The Political Economy of Civil Society and Human Rights*, an ambitious and wide-ranging investigation of numerous issues of political economy. This book carries forward the hermeneutical-liberal approach to politics Madison presented in the earlier *Logic of Liberty* while shifting focus to the classical liberal notion of civil society and its contemporary implications for issues of democracy, human rights, globalization, the market economy, and related matters. In wake of the Eastern European revolutions of 1989, Madison argues, it is especially pressing at the current time in those nations as in our own both to gain an explicit theoretical understanding of the internal dynamics of civil society as well as to fashion civil institutions in nations presently struggling to overcome the legacy of authoritarianism. The revolutionary events in Eastern Europe that culminated in the collapse of the Berlin Wall signal not only the demise of authoritarian rule but the revival of the idea of civil society — an idea that while of Western origin is also, Madison contends, of universal moral-political legitimacy. The book’s principal thesis is that institutions of civil society and liberal democracy are alone able to accommodate demands universally expressed for both economic prosperity and political liberty.

"[T]he concept of civil society," as he writes, "can serve as a crystallizing notion in our current attempts to think a post-1989 or, more generally, a postmodern politics. The concept of civil society, I maintain, is that concept which both designates and defines a certain state of affairs, outside of which those other most prominent concepts in current political discourse, viz., democracy and human rights, are, and must forever remain, totally vacuous" (p. 8).

It is as an exercise in political hermeneutics that Madison takes up the theoretical task of explicating the logic or immanent dynamic of civil society. Having previously spoken of liberal democracy as a comprehensive
philosophy of human being-in-the-world, one that enshrines in its institutions both communicative rationality and the associated virtues of hermeneutic *praxis*, Madison in this text describes civil society as well as displaying in political-economic form the logic of communicative reason. While noting with approval the apparent renaissance that the concept of civil society is presently enjoying, Madison argues that the concept has been largely misconceived by its proponents and critics alike. Civil society is commonly misunderstood as a public domain intermediate between the state and private (particularly family) life rather than, as Madison prefers, in the broader connotation of John Locke. The latter signification regards civil society as a more all-inclusive category roughly interchangeable with “political society” and comprising matters of political, ethical, economic, and cultural import. It designates not a special domain of society but “society organized in a particular way” (p. 36) — i.e., one fashioned in accordance with liberal-democratic principles.

Civil society, he argues, is constituted by three identifiable “orders” of human agency. These are the moral-cultural, the political, and the economic, each of which constitutes a “spontaneous order” in the sense employed by F. A. Hayek and others influenced by the Austrian school of economics. This is a rule-governed order, neither “natural” nor “artificial,” which is the spontaneous outcome of human action and intersubjectivity while not a product of express design. Each order is organized around a particular object: truth in the sphere of the moral-cultural (or truths in the plural), justice in the political, and prosperity in the economic. Further, each order possesses relative autonomy while exhibiting subtle and synergetic interrelations with other orders of social *praxis*. While oriented toward distinct ends and constituted by a logic peculiar to each — a logic that Madison investigates in detail — such orders more fundamentally display an immanent dynamic that is animated by communicative reason and the freedom that is its principal condition. As Madison writes: “... no civil society can be said fully to exist where individual agents are not endowed with the freedoms and rights appropriate to each of the three major spheres of human agency. As classical liberals would have said, freedom is indivisible: no one can be genuinely free who is not free culturally, politically, and economically” (p. 37).

This work demonstrates an abiding concern to apply premises of hermeneutical and postmodern philosophy to questions of public policy and political economy. While of classical liberal inspiration, Madison’s approach refuses problematic metaphysical and related assumptions common to earlier forms of liberalism in favor of a conception of liberal democracy premised upon a postmetaphysical or postmodern hermeneutics. Communicative reason in particular serves a prominent role for Madison both in fashioning political principles, several of which he views as normative entailments of hermeneutic *praxis*, and in interpreting the structures of social life. In their
combinations and interrelations, the social orders that comprise civil society constitute an interpretive account of social reality broadly conceived. It is thus as an exercise in hermeneutics that Madison approaches questions of human rights, representative democracy, the market economy, and globalization, all of which are presently at the forefront of political discussion in both Western democracies and the various nations around the world currently endeavoring to cast off the remnants of authoritarianism and/or colonialism. Madison argues forcefully and persuasively throughout this text for a conception of political economy that is animated by a concern for equal liberty in the several realms of human agency.

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Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical
DAWNE McCANCE

This concentrated but lucid book shows that, far from being an evasion of the ethical, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and other postmodern projects are crucially and in an ingenerate way about addressing the ethical. That is, as McCance’s title indicates, they are re (meaning “about”) addressing, as one addresses a letter, and taking into consideration, and speaking to (as one responds to a questioner) the ethical. About re-addressing it, too: about putting it on the agenda of an age that is consciously “after” (post) and asking how it is possible to write or to signify not only after modernism but in the wake of a century that by its inability to prevent a cycle of genocidal conflicts appears to have forgotten how to address ethical issues in any credible way.

It is true that the ethical imperatives driving deconstruction were always there for anyone willing to listen for them. When Stephen W. Melville wrote that “Derrida’s achievement has been to find a new and necessary way to assert, in detail, that the task of philosophy is criticism” (Philosophy Beside Itself), he clearly meant that philosophy has to do with ethos, and the critical appraisal thereof, and not only with logos. Unfortunately too many professors of philosophy, perhaps following misleading signals about deconstruction sent out by its North American interpreters, have been happy to leave Derrida et al. to their colleagues in French, English, and Comparative Literature, assuming that deconstruction and other “French” inventions were just about style and would have nothing to say to real philosophers. But as McCance shows in her introductory chapter, literary theorists have brought their own