

## The possibilities of discursiveness and the contemporary debates

Constantin Sălăvăstru, *Argumentation et débats publics*  
(Presses Universitaires de France, 2011)

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In the prestigious collection „Interrogation philosophique”, led by Belgian philosopher Michel Meyer, Constantin Sălăvăstru publishes a very challenging book about the subject of public debates. For the author, this is, in fact, a major highlight of a career of thirty years dedicated to formal and informal logic, rhetoric and discursiveness. Moreover, *Argumentation et débats publics* is the fifth book written and published in French (after *Identité et altérité: les avatars de la rhétorique contemporaine*, Neuchâtel, CNRS, 1998; *Rhétorique et politique: le pouvoir du discours et le discours du pouvoir*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2004; *Logique, argumentation, interprétation*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2007; *Essai sur la problématique philosophique*, L’Harmattan, 2010), thus marking the fidelity of the author for the French language and culture.

The approach used by Constantin Sălăvăstru is both comprehensive and integrative. In his view, the form of public debates “helps solve the conflicts of opinion between individuals and social groups, has a contribution in discovering the truth in some domains of knowledge (philosophy, politics, religion), represents a good opportunity to exercise the communication skills in the development of the relationships with our peers” (p. 10). The analysis insists upon problems such as public, conflict of opinion, rationality and metaphysical reason, cooperation, persuasion or conversation. Also, Grice’s model of conversational maxims is used in order to provide a theoretical structure that proves good enough to encompass the content of a public debate. In order to take part in public debates, some conditions have to be met. First, Constantin Sălăvăstru mentions the cognitive competence. Second, nothing can happen without the will to participate. A third condition is the participants’ capacity of having an efficient discursive relationship with each other. This goes down to the assimilation of conceptual distinctions and a quick feed-back to the assertions of the others (p. 61). Fourth, in order to have a substantial debate, the participants must have argumentative competence. This means that the participants have to choose the best arguments, to mind the corroboration problem, to identify the most convenient order of the arguments and to prove flexibility and the power to adapt to the arguments given by the opponent (pp. 62-63). Fifth, ideally each participant has to have a good control of his own feelings and emotions. Concerning the roles played by the moderator, we find again a lot of important requirements (pp. 81-89); the expressive analogy between a moderator and a chief conductor is also valuable, because it shows the

difficulties of the moderator in creating the harmony, in trying to get the best out of every participant and opinion, and most of the times, contrary to a chef conductor, with no rehearsals.

The problem of debate type is also tackled by Constantin Sălăvăstru; the author carefully examines the Karl Popper debate (considered a good choice for educational purposes, but rather formal and having weak ties with the social reality), the Lincoln-Douglas debate (consisting in good “cross-examination” of values, useful in political communication), the show-debate form (mainly in television, and with lots of similarities with the previous one) and, also very important, the parliamentary debate.

In discussing the constructive elements of public debates, Constantin Sălăvăstru uses his vast experience and knowledge in logic, rhetoric and theory of argumentation. Thus, the concepts of motion and thesis are analyzed by two sets of criteria, extensional and intentional. Inside the extensional criteria, the public interest and the possibility of conflict solving seem to be prominent, while inside the intentional criteria, Constantin Sălăvăstru talks about the dialectical nature of the motion and the problematological nature of the motion, and here Constantin Sălăvăstru fruitfully uses Michel Meyer's model of problematology (pp. 111-116). The relation between motion and conflict is also studied. Moreover, the author gives the reader a systematization of the types of proofs that can be used in public debates. The case studies that have been included are in the same time mandatory and important for the understanding of nowadays rhetoric of public speech and debate. First, we have the Sarkozy-Royal debate and then a classical debate, Kennedy-Nixon.

The strategies used in public debates are, again, systematized using a logical criterion. What is also useful is the distinction between *strategies of direct argumentation*, *strategies of inverse argumentation*, *strategies of alternative argumentation* and *strategies of counter-argumentation*. The language of public debates is another standpoint that clarifies a lot of details. Talking about the quality of discourse, the author discusses themes such as correctness (a theme that goes way back to Aristotle and Cicero), clarity and the use of rhetorical devices such as the figures of speech (here, the author re-visits some of the classical contributions in the theory of figures). The paraverbal communication is, of course, a subject that could not be left aside: Quintilian is cited with his still valuable pieces of advice on tonality, voice and pronunciation. Also, the nonverbal aspect of communication is discussed, including gestures, body movements and body expressivity. The pathology of public debates contains a classification of errors, created through the intersection of four criteria (arguments, techniques, language, thinking). The fifth chapter also includes a lot of examples of erroneous forms of argument taken from the practice of local debates.

This elimination of errors from public debates is intimately linked to the idea of a therapy of communication. Why would we need a therapy of communication? Is it mandatory for every form of human communication to be

submitted to this type of critique and to the elimination of errors? Of course, the answer is negative. There are a lot of forms of communication in which there is no need for such a therapeutic treatment. But, Constantin Sălăvăstru argues, public debates represents another type of domain. And he underlines these theses by a few essential final remarks, that, in a way, give us the deep meaning of the book and the highest intention of the author's effort in writing it. First, we have to see the debates as frames for the development of knowledge. In the same line as Richard Rorty, public debates are a decisive device for a democratic society to work. The truth – or a mere approximation of it – is established not by brute force, but by discussion of free people: “when we participate to critical discussions, we can have knowledge of ourselves [...] we can gain information about the others [...], we can have knowledge and also tell others the essence of certain theoretical or practical problems included in the motion which is the object of our confrontation [...]. The cultural history of mankind has, from this standpoint, a illustrious model: Socrates” (p. 271). Second, the public debates represent a frame for the confrontation between different sets of values and also for the development of new rules and values. Third, the exercise of public debates opens socialization spaces for people. Taking part in such a process means that the individual gets the possibility of knowing others, of perceiving them as personalities, thus contributing to a better relationship between social groups. Fourth, the art of debating is a paideutic activity. The education of the youngsters included, since ancient Greece, their implication in *agora* and their participation to the deliberative gatherings in the city; also, this meant that their formation as citizens was done in accordance with the principles of virtue and wisdom and with the principle of the continuous search for truth.

Moreover, the author underlines a few themes that require further examination in the years to come: the standardization of public debates, the (growing) spectacular dimension of public debates and the pathological obsession for a favorable image, the tendency of augmenting the public sphere through the use of different media. On the one hand, the extension of the public sphere was made possible by the development of media types (radio, than television, and now the forms of New Media), by the development of media structures (digitality) and by the democratization of media use in the Western world. On the other hand, as a business, media needs more public space, so it is directly interested in augmenting it: the presidential debates in USA are watched by millions of people nowadays, and it is so partially because the media owners and management try to make them appealing enough! It is one thing to “sell” your show to 120000 people and something totally different to sell it to 55000000 people. The debates are now tools for public service, and this is the reason why we, as media consumers, are protesting in cases of unsubstantial debates or in cases in which the authorities skip the debate part. The enlargement of the concept of public sphere and the possibilities brought by new media will certainly challenge the ways that we see the debates and the process of debating right now.

In conclusion, *Argumentation et débats publics* is not only a useful work, but also a very elegant form of advocating the culture of deliberation. In a Western world that is dominated by the multiplicity of stimuli and the increasing speed of information exchange, we need to remember that individual and social progress is possible only when information becomes knowledge. This alchemical process requires logical reasoning, careful examination of proofs, a good understanding of science and, perhaps the decisive aspect, an open attitude towards criticism and refutation. The culture of deliberation and debate represents one of our main tools to accomplish that goal. Moreover, an informed and knowledgeable citizen would not only take part, passively, to a public debate; on the contrary, the community of knowledgeable citizens would create their own debates, would make sure that their own interests are represented in the agenda of the media, and would dare protest and say no. Looking at the solid arguments, the well-chosen examples and the perfectly balanced structure of the book, I imagine that Constantin Sălăvăștru is an optimist.

## Sur le *Logos* et la *Vie*. Entre « les intuitions spontanées » et l'impersonnalisme

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *La plénitude du logos dans le registre de la vie:  
La métaphysique dans les nouvelles lumières*  
(L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011)

Florin CRÎȘMĂREANU

Inconnue dans notre espace culturel, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka est considérée dans d'autres milieux culturels comme une pionnière. Née en 1923, à Marianowo, Pologne, A.-T. Tymieniecka commence à étudier la philosophie sous la direction de Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) à l'Université Jagellonne de Cracovie, en obtenant la consécration dans le domaine de la philosophie plus tard, dans l'espace américain, où elle émigre. L'auteure d'origine polonaise est souvent associée avec ce qu'on a appelé « la phénoménologie de la vie ». De même, son nom est indissociablement lié à deux importantes publications : *Analecta Husserliana*, dont elle est fondatrice et éditeur en chef, et *Phenomenological Inquiry*, où elle détenait la fonction d'éditeur en chef. Les volumes représentatifs publiés par A.-T. Tymieniecka sont: *Essence et existence: Etude à propos de la philosophie de Roman Ingarden et Nicolai Hartmann*, Paris, Montaigne, 1957; *For Roman Ingarden; nine essays in phenomenology*, 'S-Gravenhage, M. Nijhoff, 1959; *Phenomenology and science in contemporary European thought*, New York, Straus and Cudahy, 1962; *Leibniz' cosmological synthesis*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1964; *Why is there something rather than nothing? Prolegomena to the phenomenology of cosmic creation*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1966; *Eros et Logos*, Paris, Beatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1972; *Logos and Life* (4 vols.), Dordrecht; Boston, Kluwer Academic, 1987-2000.

En ce qui suit, nous allons présenter brièvement quelques notes résultées de la lecture de l'ouvrage signé par A.-T. Tymieniecka, *La plénitude du logos dans le registre de la vie: La métaphysique dans les nouvelles lumières*, traduit par C.M. Hill, avec la collaboration de L.M. Weber, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011, 268 p.

Après une « Préface », un « Prologue » et une « Introduction », le présent volume est structuré en cinq parties : 1. « Le Logos de la vie comme le porteur de l'être » (pp. 23-70); 2. « L'ontopoïésis, l'auto-individualisation proto-ontique d'être dans la vie au sein de la nouvelle critique de la raison » (pp. 71-140); 3. « Les horizons positionnels vitaux de l'être » (pp. 141-188); 4. « L'âme humaine dans le cosmos et le cosmos dans l'âme humaine » (pp. 189-220); 5. « Le logos sacré à l'horizon de la vie » (pp. 221-256). Parties structurées, à leur tour, par chapitres, 20 en tout. Le volume ne contient que 67 notes en bas de page, dont la plupart des autocitations.

L'auteure nous avertit d'emblée que, « dans cette présentation de notre nouvelle vision, nous ne pouvons pas suivre les modèles de discours philosophique proposés par les systèmes traditionnels de conceptualisation. Nous sommes obligés, au contraire, de suivre nos intuitions spontanées... » (p. 11), pour qu'à la fin de l'ouvrage, elle réaffirme ces aspects : « cette esquisse zigzagante de nos intuitions kaléidoscopiques » (p. 189). Si on les ajoute à une lecture assez difficile, par ailleurs inintelligible pour nous, ce genre d'affirmations interdisent, pratiquement, l'évaluation et les commentaires des textes pareils. Qui est-ce qui a jamais pu évaluer d'une façon ou d'une autre « les intuitions spontanées » de quelqu'un ? Dans une pareille situation, ce n'est que la poésie qui peut offrir une solution, ce qui explique en quelque sorte la terminologie que l'auteure utilise dans ce volume, comme par exemple le fréquent « ontopoïésis ». Au fond, toute la démarche proposée par A.-T. Tymieniecka veut s'encadrer dans une « phénoménologie-ontopoïésis de la vie » (p. 21), qui n'est, en fin de compte, autre chose qu'« une nouvelle critique de la raison » (p. 12) ; « ma nouvelle critique de la raison » (p. 83).

Des affirmations audacieuses, difficile à vérifier et même à comprendre en l'absence d'une clarification sur le sens des notions : « intuitions », « raison », « critique ». Tout comme ces notions qui se veulent resémantisées – dans une perspective phénoménologique probablement, plus précisément celle de la « phénoménologie-ontopoïésis de la vie » – on trouve dans les pages de l'ouvrage analysé d'autres termes qui ont déjà dans la culture occidentale une tradition de deux millénaires au moins. Par exemple, la notion tellement polysémique de « Logos ». Il faut préciser avant tout que l'auteure n'identifie pas le *Logos*, qui apparaît si souvent, sous de formes diverses, dans les pages du livre, avec la deuxième Personne de la Trinité, le Verbe de Dieu, Jésus Christ. D'un certain point de vue, phénoménologique, cette démarche pourrait avoir une justification. Quand même, sans Christ, comment se réalise-t-elle « la relation entre l'humanité et le divin », invoquée par l'auteure à la p. 228 du présent volume ?

D'autre part, il est vrai qu'en ce qui concerne la tradition de la notion de « Logos » on trouve dans le texte une référence à la doctrine des Stoïciens qui distinguaient entre le logos « non-dit », *logos endiathetos*, et le logos « dit », *logos prophoricos* (p. 116). Nul doute que le rôle des Stoïciens en ce qui concerne la notion de « Logos » est important, mais, on le sait bien, la doctrine chrétienne consacre et confère un nouveau sens au terme, en l'identifiant avec la deuxième Personne de la Trinité, « le Verbe s'est fait chair » (*Jean* 1, 14). De manière paradoxale par rapport à l'approche générale du volume, le texte de Saint Jean est cité par l'auteure même : « le Fils du Dieu s'est fait chair » (p. 238), mais pas dans le contexte de l'association avec le « Logos » dont elle parle dans son livre. En tout cas, en l'absence de toute précision supplémentaire, des formules du genre « le logos différenciateur-compositionnel » (p. 25) ou « la différenciation et de l'unité de tout ce qui est » (p. 85), nous semblent être construites, de façon consciente ou non, sur une structure chalcédonienne.

Dans un autre ordre d'idées, des affirmations telle : « Nous découvrons le logos, la raison de tout, dans ses opérations et ses manifestations dans la vie concrète » (p. 53) peuvent être interprétées aussi du point de vue de la distinction classique dans le christianisme de la période patristique, entre l'essence de Dieu et Ses énergies, Ses manifestations. De plus, il nous semble que l'auteure recourt ici, probablement sans se rendre compte, à un langage emprunté de Maxime (Maxime le Confesseur (580-662)) lorsqu'elle parle des « logoi ontopoïétiques » (p. 60). En définitive, les formules antérieurement mentionnées – quelque innovatrices qu'elles se veuillent – ne sont que des lieux classiques dans la théologie chrétienne, investis par l'auteure d'un sens nouveau, dont nous n'avons pas pu identifier le référent.

Indissolublement lié au « Logos », dans les pages de l'ouvrage en question, c'est le terme de « vie ». Donc, « la science du logos de la vie, la science de tout être, est enracinée dans l'Être lui-même » (p. 18). La vie est entendue par l'auteure dans son sens le plus large, y compris la vie des bactéries, des cellules, des plantes (« la plante a une âme » (p. 101)), des coraux et, évidemment, des animaux bien plus complexes (p. 210), cas où la vision de l'auteure sur l'incarnation (« l'incarnation de la vie » (p. 60)), renvoie plutôt au bouddhisme qu'au christianisme, dont on invoque parfois les préceptes.

Dans ce registre de la « vie », l'auteure parle largement dans son ouvrage d'une philosophie de la biologie, plus précisément de « la théorie post-néodarwinienne de l'évolution » (p. 74) qu'on pourrait à peine assimiler, ou du moins associer, avec la diversité des paradigmes invoqués à des moments différents dans la structuration du volume.

Le livre conclut par une perspective sur le religieux ; aspect quand même difficile à encadrer dans un schéma précis, car on nous le livre dans un mélange d'éléments appartenant aux domaines biologie, phénoménologie, rudiments de théologie chrétienne, exprimés tous dans un langage poétique, ontopoïétique, difficile à évaluer selon un certain critère.

En fin de ces notes de lecture, nous osons formuler une observation de fond sur le livre en question : malgré la prétention, annoncée, de mettre en valeur les expériences affectives, les intuitions personnelles, la démarche proposée par A.-T. Tymieniecka, a, à cause de la charge sémantique des termes employés, un profond caractère impersonnel. De quel « logos », quelle « vie », quel « être », quelle « incarnation » parle-t-on si on ne peut pas les associer à une personne concrète ?

## **We All Live in the Language Tree**

**John Searle, *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization***  
(Oxford University Press, New York, 2010)

Ioana GRANCEA

This book is part of John Searle's project to develop a „philosophy of society”, a line of research which he sees as logically prior to the philosophy of social sciences and political philosophy. Searle is convinced that a conceptual analysis of the entities studied by the social sciences would improve inquiry in these areas by creating the premises of a richer and a more accurate dialogue between different branches of the social sciences. The following words summarize his position:

„I believe it will deepen our understanding of social phenomena generally and help our research in the social sciences if we get a clearer understanding of the nature and mode of existence of social reality. We need not so much a philosophy of the social sciences *of* the present and the past as we need a philosophy *for* the social sciences of the future.” (p. 5)

„A consequence of the investigation is that all of human social-institutional reality has a common underlying structure. Now if this is right, it is a mistake to treat different branches of the social sciences, such as sociology and economics, for example, as if they dealt with fundamentally different subject matters. The different social sciences ought to be completely transparent to each other” (p. 202)

To understand the nature and scope of Searle's approach to the ontology of society, I will first make clear what he means by „the social world”. Governmental structures, money, private property, trade unions, banks, baseball games, cocktail parties, families are recurrent examples of „social entities” in the book. A feature they share is that they need human collective recognition in order to come into existence in the first place, and they need further human collective recognition to keep existing. If we all stop believing in the institution of police or private property, for example, these institutions will simply cease to be „out there”, because in a sense, they are only „in there” – in our minds, as collectively built representations. Although their power seems to be exerted from above, in fact it comes from below, from a collective act of imagination which is constrained in several ways by the physical features of human beings and of the material environment.

In other words, „social entities” are those parts of reality which only exist to the extent that (particular groups of) humans collectively think of them as existing. Basically, Searle distinguishes between „mind-independent” entities such as tectonic plates, mountains or molecules, on the one hand, and other entities which depend on the human mind for their existence, on the other.



Among the latter, some of them, such as emotions, exist independently of external observers: it is not a matter of anybody's opinion whether somebody else is hungry or not, happy or sad, enthusiastic or depressed. Yet, among the mind-dependent entities, there is a special class which depends on our *collective* belief in their existence. Among them, social institutions figure prominently, because they only exist to the extent that a group of people recognizes their existence. From this point of view, they are ontologically subjective, unlike mountains and tectonic plates. Yet, they are epistemically objective, just like mountains and tectonic plates, in the sense that it is not a mere matter of individual opinion whether a piece of paper is money or whether the powers of the Parliament are still in function. From Searle's point of view, these entities are worth studying precisely because of this interesting feature they have: although one can make a set of epistemically objective claims about them once they are settled, they are in fact ontologically subjective, they only exist because a group of individuals represents them as existing.

The scope of Searle's explanatory project goes beyond stating key differences between the categories of facts which make up reality. He wants to give a precise description of the relations which are established between these broad classes of facts as they coexist in one and only one world (p. 3, p. 26). Apart from having a different ontological status from the mind-independent facts of the physical reality, social entities are dependent in various ways on some of these „basic facts". Searle wants to analyze primarily their dependence on neurobiological processes happening in individual minds. Collective agreement is dependent on the biological conditions of human minds, because the content of the thoughts which are subjected to collective agreement only exists in individual minds. This way of looking at social entities may seem quite removed from commonsense intuitions. For example, when asked about the *physical* components of a bank, most people would mention the building itself and not the neurobiological processes of its stakeholders' minds. Yet, on a certain level of description, some thoughts of particular key publics of the bank are constitutive elements of the bank in a way that the physical building is not.

In developing his main argument that the social world is dependent and in various ways derived from the primary biological features of the human mind, Searle takes the reader on a fascinating philosophical journey, starting from basic features of the mind such as its capacity to envisage external states of affairs and culminating with an original account of language as both „natural" (from Searle' point of view, language is a natural extension of prelinguistic capacities of the mind) and „social" (on Searle's account, language is fundamentally deontic, because there are implicit commitments involved in communicating). Searle's declared purpose is not to engage in evolutionary biology of any sort, nor to make empirical generalizations about the social world, but to perform a *conceptual* analysis of the way our higher-order mental and social world are rooted in our biology (p. 66).

Searle argues that the collective actions which lead to the creation and maintenance of institutions would be impossible in the absence of the biologically-backed property called „intentionality”, the capacity of the mind to be directed at (present, absent or imaginary) objects and (actual or potential) states of affairs in the world. Intentionality, the „aboutness” of our mental representations, is treated as a „biologically basic” feature of our minds. It is „natural” in the sense that it is a built-in feature of our mental processes. While occurring *physically* in the biological structures of our brain, all intentional states also have *semantical* content. By their very *nature* they contain *representations* of real and projected states of affairs in the world.

Our collective pursuit of goals is made possible by our capacity to represent, each in our own mind, that state of affairs that we collectively intend to bring into existence. In this context, it is important to notice that on Searle’s account our actions themselves have a semantical component: the intentional content of the thoughts which cause and constitute ongoing actions (p. 51, p. 125). Some collective actions such as playing in an orchestra require that each participant perform a distinct action, case in which the big-picture representation shared by all the participants is further divided into several distinct representations which cause individual actions. But if cooperation occurs, it is only because each participant performs his own act as part of their collective performance of a higher-order act. Therefore, each participant must have adequate mental representations of both acts, his own and the higher-order one, and must proceed on the assumption that everybody else does their own job, while one’s own intentional states can only cause one’s own actions. Within Searle’s conceptual framework, collective intentional states can move individual bodies because they are constituted by neurobiological processes occurring *in* individual minds (pp. 42-61).

But how do people manage to arrive at the point of *sharing* representations of complex states of affairs such as institutional facts? To do this, they need a shared system of symbolic representations. This system can come under the form of words, pictures, marks or other symbolic devices which might perform meaningful transfer of semantical content from one member of the group to another. It might be counterargued that there are certain forms of collective intentionality such as wolves hunting or dogs playing which occur outside a linguistic framework to enable public expression and understanding among members of the group. Yet, their level of complexity is quite reduced and highly dependent on the possibility of actual sensory stimulation. In order to have a world of institutions with their complex web of relations and their deontology, one needs a more elaborate system of conceptualization and representation. Such a system is the human language. Searle performs an extended analysis of the relationship between language and the social world and builds a powerful case for his thesis that we should look at language as *fundamental* to the very *existence* of the social world.

Searle argues that all of social reality has a single formal linguistic mechanism at its core, a mechanism which we apply over and over with different contents. This thesis contains the main innovation brought by this book in relation to Searle's previous theory developed in „The Construction of Social Reality” (1995). Language is equally essential to the constitution of society in both works, but in the current book Searle takes a step further and identifies the logical form of the linguistic representation which creates social entities. He coins it a „Status Function Declaration”. In what follows, I will explain briefly what „status functions” are and then show what is meant by the technical term „Declaration” in the Searlian philosophical system.

Status functions are functions assigned to an object(s), person(s) or other sort of entities which can only be performed in virtue of the collective recognition of the entity in question as having a certain status (p. 94). The status of „being money” or „being president” are recurrent examples of „status functions” in Searle's book. By assigning status functions to people and objects, we distribute rights, duties, obligations, authorizations – what Searle calls „deontic powers”. According to Searle, institutions are fundamentally constituted by webs of deontic powers, and the assignment of these deontic powers is always done by a „Declaration”. The notion of a „Declaration” is a technical term imported from the author's work in the philosophy of language which describes a special class of speech-acts, namely those speech-acts that create a state of affairs merely by representing it as existing. Classic examples include „I pronounce you husband and wife”, „The meeting is adjourned”, „War is declared”, „I name this ship Elizabeth” – utterances which, if made under proper circumstances by the authorized people, have the power to bring a state of affairs into existence only by representing it as existing (pp. 12-15, p. 69). It is important to emphasize here that the notion of a „speech-act” covers a wide spectrum of meaningful acts of communication, not just the spoken ones. Therefore, „Declarations” may just as well be written or conveyed in some other symbolic form<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, they can work even when they are implicit, in those cases where a group of people simply recognize an object or a person as having a specific function and behave accordingly, by accepting a set of rights, duties as well as interdictions with regard to the entity in question, even though there was no foregoing explicit declarational act to ascribe that function to the entity in question (pp. 94-96).

Searle says that status functions with their corresponding deontic powers are the distinctive binding force of human civilization. By creating reasons for

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid any further misunderstanding of Searle's position in this respect, I quote Searle's reply to Colin McGuinn's review of his work: „*Speech act* is a quasi-technical term that means roughly, a meaningful linguistic act that is intended to communicate propositional content with an illocutionary force from speaker to hearer, which may be spoken, written, or conveyed in some other symbolic form.[...] You do not understand the first thing about speech act theory if you think that all speech acts have to be spoken explicitly” (from „Language and Society: Reply to McGuinn”, available on John Searle's personal website at <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~jsearle/articles.html>).

action which go beyond people's momentary inclinations, they ensure to some extent predictability and stability in cooperative behaviour. Without commitments which motivate them to perform an action whether they are momentarily inclined to do that or not, people would seldom be able to complete an activity together. But in order to undertake long-term commitments and act on them systematically, one must be able to conceptualize notions such as „obligation” and to internalize them in the form of intentional content of actions (p. 128). In other words, in respecting our institutional commitments, we act in virtue of some higher-order representations in our minds, which have the special status of an „obligation”. From Searle's point of view, this type of representation would be impossible outside the conceptual framework provided by our language (or by another system of representation of similar complexity).

Searle goes even further in exploring the connection between deontology and language: he believes that once a group of people got in the state of speaking a language, they already master a primary form of deontic behaviour, and therefore they already have a basic form of society (p. 62, p. 122). This idea can be supported by looking closely at the *commitments* entailed in communicating intentional states, among which is the implicit commitment to truth. When an individual makes a statement, he is by default committed to its truth. This means that if his statement turned out to be false, other members of the community would have a legitimate complaint against him, he could be held responsible for not telling the truth. The mere possibility of such complaints and sanctions shows that the commitment to truth is not some external condition imposed on statement-making. It is built-in feature without which a statement would not be a statement (p. 83). If somebody says to us „It is sunny” and we go out and see that it is raining heavily, we can say „You said that, but it wasn't so”. He cannot say in his defense „I just said that, I didn't mention whether I was telling the truth or not”. The requirement that an uttered statement be true is an essential *constitutive* rule of the social game we play when communicating. Similar commitments are entailed in the public performance of other speech-acts (p. 82, p. 88). For example, promises commit the speaker to a subsequent course of action. This does not necessarily mean that in practice all people who make a promise end up acting on it. What it means is that other people would have a legitimate complaint (and, in some cases, a legitimate sanction) against those who break a promise. The legitimacy of these expectations probes the existence of a set of deontic structures which define this type of social interaction. It is what makes Searle claim that „language is inevitably deontic” and „it is this feature that enables language to form the foundation of human society in general” (p. 86). In other words, people learn the essential features of deontic behaviour in learning to communicate with each other by means of language and they further use the devices of language to create more complex forms of deontic structures such as social institutions.

Searle's analysis of the way linguistic acts create a complex web of deontic powers is the most powerful part of the book, from my point of view. Even if his

diagnoses are sometimes rendered in an exaggerated form which might make his own „discoveries” seem more spectacular than they really are („the limits on institutional power are the limits on deontology itself”, p.88), his explanations manage to open an exciting avenue for further research into the domain of „extra-semantical semantics”, consisting of the extralinguistic social facts created by use of semantical powers (p. 114). One cannot avoid wondering whether this avenue will be more appealing to current philosophers of language than to social scientists. Searle’s declared purpose, as stated at the beginning of this review, is to build a „philosophy of society” which would help clarify and enrich research in the realm of the social sciences. Yet, the emphasis of the book is strongly placed on a conceptual analysis of the human mind-language-society route, while a social scientist would probably be rather eager to know which assumptions currently held in the social sciences are proven to be wrong or incomplete by Searle’s account. The book does not give a clear answer to this pressing question. Yet, the reader can get an idea of how Searle’s logical analysis can be further applied by reading closely the last two chapters, one of which is dedicated to the concept of „power” and the other to the notion of „human rights”. Although none of them brings any startling novelty for the social theories which are in place today, they manage to show how notions such as „status functions” and „deontic powers” can help us get a more accurate view of other big-picture issues in the social sciences. For example, Searle uses his notion of „status functions” to address the problem of universal human rights. The ontological status of universal human rights is quite peculiar, because unlike most other rights, they do not derive from the membership in an institution. They are thought to be possessed by humans only because they have a set of „natural” features which make them human beings. This particular ontological status has made philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and Alasdair MacIntyre to argue that „natural” rights, rights that exist apart from legal recognition, do not exist. Searle uses his conceptual apparatus to show that universal human rights do in fact exist, but to understand their mode of existence correctly one must look at these rights as „status functions” assigned to people. Human rights are not mere results of biology, but results of our collective decisions regarding the type of relations we need to have with one another in order to live a civilized life together (pp. 176-181). An interesting observation is that the assignment of these status functions is not axiologically neutral, but it involves a wide set of beliefs regarding what it means to be human, what the basic necessities of a healthy society are, and, a more painful point, who qualifies for the status of a „human being”.

As an overall assessment of the book, I tend to say that it is more illuminating in what concerns our understanding of language, its roots and its (sometimes invisible) branches, than it is informing for research in the social sciences. Searle does make a clarifying remark in this respect, saying that an understanding of the basic ontology of each discipline is always recommended, even if it not clear from the beginning what new pieces of information arise from

it. Yet, there is a certain looseness in Searle's terminology which might cover over distinctions which are crucial to make in the domain of the social sciences. Throughout the book Searle tends to render equivalent „social entities”, „social facts”, „social institutions”, „institutional facts”, which might be rather confusing for someone with a background in the social sciences. Having said that, I must admit that this interchangeability of terms makes sense within the framework of his logico-conceptual analysis aimed at revealing the common logical spine of many different instances of formal and informal institutional structures. Yet, if Searle's ambition is that his project be informing for future research into the social sciences, some of these issues need to be adequately parsed. A usable conceptual framework should make explicit the several different levels at which Status Function Declarations operate and the type of constraint they exercise in their complex process of constituting society.

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## La problématisation du *Questionnement et historicité*

*Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 3-2011/volume 65/no.257

Dana DAIA

Résultat d'une journée d'études qui a eu lieu à l'Université de Nantes, le 5 novembre 2010, le numéro 3/2011 de la *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* est consacré à l'œuvre de Michel Meyer, *Questionnement et historicité* et comprend les articles portant sur ce sujet dont les auteurs sont Michel Fabre, Arnaud Macé, Jean-Marie Lardic, Jean Bessièrre, Didier Moreau et, bien sûr, l'auteur dont l'ouvrage a suscité ces réactions – Michel Meyer – ainsi qu'un compte-rendu d'un autre ouvrage du même auteur, *La problématologie*, signé par Constantin Sălăvăștru.

Qu'est-ce que le questionnement ? Comment peut-on le redéfinir, compte tenu des approches antérieures, mais aussi de la réalité sociale et culturelle actuelle et de l'évolution de la pensée philosophique ? En quoi consiste la relation entre le questionnement et l'historicité ? Qu'est-ce que le processus fondamental que Meyer appelle « l'effectivité » ? Qu'est-ce que la problématologie et le refoulement problématologique aujourd'hui ? Voilà seulement une partie des questions qui trouvent leurs réponses dans le livre de Meyer, qui, selon Michel Fabre, se présente comme « un traité de philosophie » et « obéit à une ambition de systémativité, très rare dans la philosophie contemporaine ».

Arnaud Macé, de l'Université de Franche-Comté, questionne sur *L'origine du questionnement. A propos de la lecture de Platon et Aristote par Michel Meyer*, tout en structurant sa démarche en six phrases-clés, analysées, chacune, d'une manière aussi détaillée que possible, vu le contexte et les contraintes temporelles de sa démarche. Selon Arnaud Macé, Michel Meyer « lit, dans l'œuvre platonicienne, une évolution qui mime le mouvement de l'histoire, du questionnement au refoulement de celui-ci ». Mais Platon ouvre et ferme, en même temps, l'accès au questionnement, ce qui pourra expliquer la nécessité ressentie par certains auteurs, tels Richard Robinson ou David Ross, de proposer la lecture des dialogues platoniciens tout en les séparant en trois catégories : « early », « middle » et « late ». Le but de l'auteur est de montrer qu'une lecture de Platon et d'Aristote et l'influence de celle-ci sur la problématologie de Michel Meyer peuvent conduire à réinterroger les rapports de la problématologie à l'histoire de la pensée. L'auteur se pose le problème de l'origine du questionnement : y a-t-il une origine qui explique son apparition ou bien le questionnement est absolument originaire ? Pour proposer, à la fin de son article, une réponse, selon laquelle l'origine du questionnement serait « l'étonnement infini que nous procurera toujours les choses qui nous ressemblent et que nous

pouvons en effet connaître telles qu'elles sont en partant de ce que nous sommes ».

Dans *Logique interrogative et dialectique de l'action*, Jean-Marie Lardic, de l'Université de Nantes, se propose d'approfondir le sens problématique de la pensée hégélienne. En relation directe avec l'œuvre *Questionnement et historicité* par Michel Meyer, il fait comprendre, ensuite, comment le sujet qui s'indique dans la dialectique répond dans son action à un questionnement. Permettant ainsi d'envisager les liens entre le *logos*, le *pathos* et l'*ethos* dans l'organisation de l'effectivité dans laquelle se convertit la réalité. L'auteur structure sa démarche en deux thèmes, l'un reposant sur *le sens problématologie de la pensée hégélienne* et l'autre sur *le sujet pratique : questionnement et médiation*. Pour Jean-Marie Lardic, la raison dialectique est, en fait, une raison herméneutique dans la mesure où la déduction hégélienne réalise un travail d'interprétation des concepts. En même temps, il faut comprendre l'herméneutique plutôt comme la remontée de la réponse à la question qui la fonde. C'est dans cette perspective-là que réside le sens problématologie de la pensée hégélienne « déagée clairement d'une absolutisation ontologique qui en inverserait la portée ». L'auteur souligne l'importance de l'Histoire, qui réussit à remettre en cause la conception de la liberté dans ses réalisations mêmes : « la liberté s'incarne dans son temps ». La réponse à la question que l'on peut se poser, est de savoir, si être moral ne réside pas dans la description des manières dans lesquelles on peut prouver notre statut moral, mais dans l'apprentissage des raisons pour lesquelles on doit l'être, or, comme le dit l'auteur-même, la réponse « ne se trouve pas dans une formulation logique, mais dans une pratique qui sensibilise à l'Histoire et développe le dialogue ».

L'article suivant essaie d'élucider les conséquences de la problématologie dans la théorie littéraire. Dans l'opinion de Jean Bessière, de l'Université Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, la théorie littéraire, soit-elle européenne ou américaine, procure des définitions paradoxales du littéraire, qui demandent une élucidation problématologie. Dans ce contexte, il construit sa démarche en tenant-compte, d'une part, des grandes thématisations des théories littéraires : écriture, littérale et figurée, histoire et temps, représentation et anti-représentation et, d'autre part, les éléments qui caractérisent les objets de ces thèses : représentation et réel, récit et temps, littérature et discours communs.

Didier Moreau, de l'Université Paris 8, voit dans la question éthique un problème central du livre de Michel Meyer, *Questionnement et historicité*, malgré une fausse impression d'un développement réduit qu'y rencontre ce que Meyer appelle le « problème de la morale ». L'auteur essaie dans son article de se questionner sur le statut de l'éthique relativement à la morale, sur le problème des passions, sur le sens de la question originare et la discussion qu'elle implique avec Heidegger. Afin de chercher à comprendre comment la pensée étiq de l'auteur du *Questionnement et historicité* participe à des problématisations contemporaines, Moreau se concentre dans son article sur le problème central de l'identité et de la différence. Même si *Questionnement et*



*historicité* reste tout à fait discret quant au vocabulaire étique, Moreau observe pourtant qu'il y revient décisivement d'un un autre ouvrage, *Petite métaphysique de la différence*, où l'auteur s'attaque non pas à donner une définition, mais plutôt « à faire une différenciation qui s'oriente d'elle-même et articule ses distinctions à partir des classes de problèmes qu'elle rencontre : „Soi, autrui, les choses. Les trois problèmes ultimes que se pose l'homme”». Mais ici, indique Moreau, pour interdire la tendance vers une interprétation qui aurait pu être susceptible de soutenir un intuitionnisme moral, Michel Meyer appuie aussitôt une orientation perspectiviste : ces trois problèmes sont trois points de vue, construits dans les processus langagiers du questionnement. Meyer poursuit son analyse, observe Didier Moreau, en examinant les questions ouvertes par chacun des points de vue et nomme ainsi les disciplines traditionnelles qui en procèdent : l'éthique réagit le soi, la justice règle les rapports avec autrui, la morale norme les façons d'agir dans le monde et son domaine semble plus proche ainsi de ce que l'on nomme la justice distributive. Didier Moreau considère que Michel Meyer reste fidèle à une philosophie pratique où l'action morale est pensée comme un questionnement.

Quel sens peut avoir l'éducation dans un monde problématique ? Comment les fonctions de protection de l'enfance, de structuration, d'émancipation et de transmission peuvent-elles se réguler aujourd'hui ? C'est en essayant de répondre à ces questions que Michel Fabre, de l'Université de Nantes, commence dans son article « Est-il possible d'éduquer dans un monde problématique ? » l'évaluation des incidences éducatives en suivant la pensée de quelques théoriciens, dont Dewey, Bachelard et Deleuze, et l'incitation de Paul Ricœur qui voyait dans la préparation des gens d'entrer dans ce monde problématique la tâche de l'éducateur moderne.

La question que se pose Fabre est de savoir si l'on peut concevoir l'éducation comme problématisation, tout en essayant de tisser un certain nombre des fils entre la pensée de Michel Meyer et les autres philosophies portant sur ce problème, notamment celles des trois penseurs qu'on vient de mentionner, et observe qu'interroger la possibilité même de l'éducation dans un monde problématique, c'est questionner les idées de repère, de certitude et de progrès. En s'appuyant sur l'œuvre de Michel Meyer, *Questionnement et historicité*, l'auteur de l'article observe que l'histoire des mentalités peut être appréhendée comme une tension entre deux processus de refoulement : celui *problématologique*, se caractérisant par la forclusion des problèmes, et celui *apocritique*, qui vise à maintenir ou à restaurer la différence problématologique menacée, en distinguant les questions et les réponses. Quand le premier s'avère fort, dans le cas des sociétés traditionnelles, il n'y a aucune possibilité pour que les réponses se voient à leur tour questionnées. Généralement, observe l'auteur, à l'affaiblissement du premier correspond un accroissement du second.

Le devenir problématique du monde et celui de l'homme dessinent très précisément le lieu de la question éducative. Et, dans un monde problématique, les relations référentielles sont elles-mêmes sujettes à caution. Mais, quels

repères pour un monde problématique, se demande l'auteur ? Vu que nous vivons simultanément dans plusieurs mondes dont nous avons bien du mal à évaluer les degrés respectifs de réalité ? Et, en même temps, quelle normativité ? Le premier constat est celui d'un brouillage des divers registres de normativité, où l'on distingue les règles sociales, les méthodes et les lois naturelles. Le deuxième constat est celui d'une psychologisation des normes et de l'autorité, qui rend problématique la question des limites. En troisième ligne, l'auteur observe comme la psychologisation de la loi et l'éthique faible qui s'inscrivent dans un processus de démocratisation qui atteint la sphère éducative.

L'éducation ne peut plus tracer la route avec ses sens obligatoires et interdits, suggère l'auteur. Cela veut dire qu'il faut mettre en question les schémas du repérage. Sortir du schéma de la copie, c'est transformer l'idée platonicienne en problème. Fabre saisit que la plus grande difficulté éducative de notre temps est de fournir des repères pour que le sujet s'oriente lui-même et trace sa propre route. Fabre observe également dans son article le mouvement de réification des réponses et la tendance de l'école d'enseigner des savoirs sans problèmes. La pente de la transposition didactique est de capturer le savoir entre deux contextes problématiques (celui d'origine et celui de l'application), étant toujours tentée de valoriser ce que Fabre appelle « état de survol », l'état « neutre » du savoir. A ce point, Fabre s'approche de la pensée de Jean-Pierre Astofli, qui critique cet état dans son livre *La saveur des savoirs*.

En revenant à l'auteur du *Questionnement et historicité*, Fabre observe que la pensée de celui-ci n'est évidemment audible que dans la tradition pédagogique de Dewey ou de Bachelard pour laquelle l'apprentissage scolaire se conçoit comme un acte de pensée, de problématisation. Lutter contre le dogmatisme, observe Meyer dans l'ouvrage susmentionné, ne saurait donc d'effectuer que sur la base de cette triple inscription du savoir que Dewey avait déjà entrevue, mais qu'il reviendra à Bachelard d'explicitier.

La problématisation, comme Dewey ou Piaget l'ont montré, chacun à leur manière, est en réalité consubstantielle, remarque Fabre, à l'exercice de l'intelligence. Et, en revenant à la métaphore antérieure, l'auteur de l'article observe bien que le glissement de la normativité de l'impératif à la rhétorique du conditionnel requiert de l'éducateur qu'il dote l'éduqué d'une boussole et d'une carte pour se conduire lui-même.

Michel Meyer vient compléter les articles susmentionnés par un bref récapitulatif de ceux-ci, auquel s'ajoute des réponses généreuses aux problématiques suscitées, car, dit-il, « la philosophie est une réponse problématologique qui consiste à se pencher sur la différence question-réponse, à en étudier les modalisations [...] ». Généreux est, également, le but déclaré du livre, celui « de promouvoir et de développer un nouveau fondement pour la philosophie et pour la pensée en général ».

## The net delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom

Morozov, Evgeny. *The net delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom*  
(PublicAffairs, New York, 2011)

Liviu GAJORA

Last year's Arab Spring had a precursor in the 2009 "Twitter revolution" in Iran. Much to the disappointment of the Western world, the Twitter revolution faded and a much more traditional – and bloodier still – revolution took its place. Although this one was televised (Facebook-ed, Twitter-ed and YouTube-ed as well), the keyboard did not, in any way, prove to be mightier than the machineguns and guided missiles. What had happened in the mean time? Perhaps the dictators had become wiser to the ways of the Internet, or perhaps the Internet was not as strong as previously thought in the first place. Worse yet, perhaps both scenarios are true, if we are to trust Evgeny Morozov's writings.

Published in 2011, *The net delusion: The dark side of Internet freedom* is insofar Morozov's first and only published book, but it also represents the culmination of several years' work that has already been documented in articles for prestigious publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *New Scientist*, *The New Republic*, *Newsweek International*, *International Herald Tribune* and *The Economist*. Some of the same publications (such as *The Economist*, *The Guardian*, or *The New York Times*) subsequently reviewed the book to mostly positive appreciations.

As a 27 year old born in Belarus, Evgeny Morozov has first hand experience with both authoritarian regimes and exposure to the new communication technologies. As a fellow at the Open Society Institute, he can also attest to a thorough understanding of Western attempts at spreading democracy around the world. Yet the story he chooses to tell is not one of embracing technology and overcoming adversity and, but one of disillusionment with technology and overcoming the stage of idealists who still believe in changing the world.

*The net delusion* is aptly titled, as it deals with dispelling myths entertained by the cyber-utopian and Internet-centric discourse dominating the public sphere today, myths pertaining to conceptual framings (the Berlin Wall analogy), overarching tropes (Internet freedom) or fundamental distinctions (democratization vs. liberalization). The book, while nonfictional, fits the description of a sprawling epic. Examples and case studies cover everything from apparently benevolent and somewhat functional small-scale dictatorships like Azerbaijan to influential post-communist behemoths like China or Russia, addressing everything in between: rising socialist dictatorships like Bolivia, borderline-failed states like North Korea or Rwanda, Islamic fundamentalist republics like

Iran, or recently “freed” (and failed, one might add) experiments such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism are the focal points of the book, and Morozov takes his time in the first chapter of the book to explain what they are and why they should concern us. Cyber-utopianism represents a set of flawed assumptions according to which the virtual space has an enormous potential to free societies under oppression, while Internet-centrism represents a flawed methodology which puts forward Internet-related technologies as the primary tool to be used for freeing oppressed societies. When taken together we get “the Net Delusion”, i.e., the belief that the Internet is the best tool to use to help dissidents in authoritarian regimes and that it has overwhelmingly positive effects in helping said dissidents. As a consequence, Western governments and NGOs are investing heavily in making Internet access readily available to societies – and activists in particular – under oppressive regimes.

This strategy is framed by a Cold War analogy that is to be found almost everywhere in the rhetoric of cyber-utopians, from LA Times writers, to Google representatives and even United States secretary Hillary Clinton, and it amounts to this: if Radio Free Europe and samizdat helped the demise of the Soviet Empire during the Cold War, surely the Internet can contribute significantly to bringing down dictatorships around the world today. Morozov correctly points out that both premises of this analogy are false. The first premise is that information (about the wrong-doings of communist, about the brave new world of capitalism) had a powerful impact on people and gave rise to revolutions. Research and empirical data point, however, to a less idealistic scenario: the information influx from the West had little to do with the deep structural bankruptcy of the system, and if it did have an effect, it was more damaging than beneficial. More information does not mean more political information or even more desire to do something in accordance with the new knowledge. Television ratings of Western democracies are a good illustration of why more is not better. The second false premise is that Internet is like radio or television, only better. It may be, but it may also be worse. One could not easily talk back to an illegal print copy of a New York Times copy, but neither could their personal information or location be instantly known by the government by simply opening that printed copy.

This is, in fact, one of the central theses of *The net delusion*. It is not that the Internet lacks benefits in the fight against oppression. Rather, it is that the web can be an equally effective instrument in cracking down dissent in the hand of the oppressors. Subsequent chapters, such as *Orwell’s favorite Lolcat* or *Why the KGB wants you to join Facebook*, go into more in-depth descriptions of the dark uses of Internet. Most social networks nowadays can be used to track down personal information about users, and belonging to more than one social network only increases the risk. Belonging to a certain Facebook group can be rendered useless if the government decides to delete the entire group. Even worse, corporations seem to be more vigilant than governments and take down

“sensitive” issues on their own. This is when they do not willingly disclose personal data about users to authoritarian governments. Is it any wonder, though? Most of these corporations have already done all these things a decade ago, when the Patriot Act opened the door for such intrusive state intervention, in one of the oldest democracies in the World, no less. As technology innovations get more impressive, they also get more dangerous. Facebook and Google’s various face identification applications are entertaining distractions in democratic regimes, but they can put the lives of dissidents in serious danger in authoritarian countries. Or, as Morozov puts it, “American pundits go to talk shows; Iranian bloggers go to prison” (p. 14).

Aside from surveillance, censorship and misinformation are practices that have also become heightened in today’s dictatorships. Censorship, for instance, has become more powerful while also being less visible. On the one hand, because the intermediaries, companies such as Facebook, Google or Twitter, are more than willing to comply with official requests or even preemptively censor content themselves in order to avoid any outcome that would be damaging to their profits. On the other hand, because governments rarely lack support, even authoritarian ones. As evidenced by Morozov’s analysis of the blogosphere in countries such as China or Iran, freedom of speech sometimes means freedom to disagree and other times means freedom to be even more extremist than your own ruling class. The case of “human flesh search engines” (p. 89) in China is an impressive product of 2.0 dictatorships, albeit not in a good way. Regime loyalists are volunteering to find out everything they can about various dissidents by tracking their online activity. What follows can be anything from distributed-denial-of-service attacks (which basically render a website inactive due to overstimulation) to disclosing personal information, such as names and addresses, to government officials.

Strong forms of censorship are rarely the case, however, especially since spreading misinformation is so much more effective, as revealed in the chapter *Hugo Chavez would like to welcome you to the Spinternet*. Not only have dictators become more proficient at inhabiting the World Wide Web, as evidenced by Bolivian president Hugo Chavez, but they have also become more adept at attracting the best and the brightest to work for them, as demonstrated by the Russian modern propaganda committee. Some authoritarian regimes have even become so comfortable with spinning the virtual public sphere, that they experiment with getting bloggers and online activists to play into their own misinformation campaigns, resulting in “digital public relations at its best” (p. 119). Just as liberalization of information does not equal democratization, decentralization does not mean lack of control. If anything, decentralized networks made possible by the Internet offer tyrannical states an opportunity to put on a more persuasive pretense of legitimacy, while at the same time concealing their control.

Surely the Internet is not all bad for dissidents of dictatorships, and Morozov admits there are advantages: there is encryption that helps preserve

anonymity, there is enough information overflow that it leads to “security by obscurity” (p. 163) and there is increased privacy with certain new technologies. But the surveillance-censorship-misinformation triad is equally real and just as powerful as the encryption-anonymity-privacy one, if not more so. The point is not to ignore one while extolling the other, but to understand how they can exist at the same time and to create policies accordingly. In the end, Mozorov’s book is not one that indicts a technology – the Internet –, but one that questions our understanding and use of that technology, as made plain in the last four chapters of the book.

The way we think about Internet informs our rhetoric, which in turn informs our policies. Only now each step of the way something has gone awry, according to Mozorov. Our thoughts on Internet-related issues are not informed by all the right people. We listen to Internet gurus but we have no input from foreign policy experts or historians and their views are as important in understanding what we need to do. Our rhetoric is tarred by the hypocrisy inherent in the Western politics-policies dichotomy. This matters because it often “results in rather surreal situations, in which an American company would cite the regulations of the U.S. government to stop providing Internet services to the entities and individuals that enjoy the moral or financial support of the U.S. government” (pp. 209-210). This forces officials to hide behind empty rhetorical notions such as “Internet freedom”, leaving Western governments unable to distinguish between freedom of Internet and freedom through Internet. As a result, our policies end up being one-size-fits-all solutions which are glossing over what societies need or what helps foster democracy. Western democracies end up providing poorly fit tools for problems that cannot be solved with those tools in the first place, and in the process might end up hurting the people who are supposed to benefit from using them.

Since the book was published a myriad of events has taken place worldwide that might make potential readers reluctant towards the relevance of the book, as Internet phenomena tend to multiply at an exponential rate (just in the time between the writing of the book and the writing of this review the rate of YouTube uploads has increased from twenty-four hours every minute to seventy-two hours every minute, meaning it has already tripled in just two years). The Arab Spring, the attempted passing of SOPA and ACTA, the viral spread of the Kony 2012 video, all of these took place after the book was written. They also have little – if anything – to add to Morozov’s critique.

The Arab Spring actually took place in the streets and forced the West to get involved with more than just virtual weapons. It is also the prime example of the argument that liberalization does not equal democratization and that the only thing worse than the danger of an authoritarian state is the danger of a failed one. The West’s attempt to protect its own economic and security-related interests by increasing online policing and reducing anonymity through bills such as SOPA – in the United States – or ACTA – in the European Union – perfectly fits the pattern identified in the second half of the book. The motives for both bills were

mostly commercial in nature and while they were defeated for now – or at least kept at bay –, future attempts might enjoy additional national security motivations, thus making resistance even more difficult.

The Kony 2012 debacle is perhaps one of the best examples of how timely Mozorov's book remains. Kony 2012 is a 30 minute video from charity NGO Invisible Children that went viral on YouTube and Vimeo at the beginning of March 2012. The video tackled the issue of Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and invited viewers to donate money in order to support a United States military intervention in the region to settle the matter. Merely days into its skyrocketing success (it attracted 86 million views on YouTube in less than a month), the video started receiving backlash from not only Western academics and publications but also from Ugandan activists and NGOs. The evolution of this campaign perfectly fits the narrative of slacktivism that is tackled in the seventh chapter of the book, while also setting up a cautionary tale in support of criticisms of modern-day emotion and speed-driven politics.

That Morozov's book not only allows for, but also contributes to the better understanding of such modern developments, is the mark of a truly well-written book. It is also an engrossing read, thanks to the author's ability to combine journalistic precision (the bibliography section is quite staggering, amounting to 70 pages) with rhetorical criticism, as well as international politics analysis and historical insights. His foray into epistemology and phenomenology in the last chapter may feel a bit forced or rushed (as may some of his puns), but it is done in good faith and without overstepping his boundaries. And while at times he seems to fall pray to the plight of technology predictions with gloom visions of the future, there is never a feeling that his speculations are entirely out of the realm of possibility. A certain bias is not only expected, but also necessary, in order to even out the existing excess of cyber-utopianism.

Ultimately, *The net delusion* is not a book about technology as the impending force of progress in society, but about our own progress in understanding the forces that shape society. Perhaps the most important takeaway is not that we have insofar given the wrong answers to the problems of democratizing oppressed societies, or that we have not found answers at all in some regards, but that we have been asking the wrong questions all along. Internet is a tool, but that does not mean it is neutral. It means, rather, that we should resist the temptation of technological determinism and assume responsibility for our actions, promoting Internet where it fits and not fitting the world into the mold set by the Internet.

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