

After Empire – Melancholia or Convivial Culture? by Paul Gilroy

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A Critique by: **Tony Shell****Introduction**

Paul Gilroy is the holder of the Anthony Giddens Professorship in Social Theory at the London School of Economics, and was formally Charlotte Marian Saden Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at Yale University. He is an author of numerous books and articles that examine aspects of our contemporary society, including: *'There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack'* [2002]; *'Small Acts'* [1994]; and *'The Black Atlantic'* [1993].

He is widely perceived as the 'intellectual voice of multiculturalism', and is often cited as a reference within published work in the field of cultural theory and sociology. Professor Gilroy's views and opinions are highly sought after, and frequently deferred to in conferences, academic panel discussions and debate, as well as by political groups and fomenters of social policy. For example, he is described in these highly complementary terms: "Paul Gilroy is one of the most incisive thinkers of his generation." [**Brian Cheyette**, *The Independent* newspaper]; that his work is seen to have been "at the forefront of public debate on questions of race, politics and social theory for many years." [**Howard Davies**, director of the London School of Economics]; and especially that Professor Gilroy is of "outstanding intellect", and is regarded "with some awe" [**Trevor Phillips**, Chairman of The Commission for Racial Equality].

The book, *'After Empire'*, is written as a defence of multiculturalism. Professor Paul Gilroy is responding to criticisms from, in part, political commentators, academics, journalists and writers – and also as a particular response to public alarm following the riots by ethnic minority groups in northern English towns of Oldham, Bradford, and Burnley (in the summer of 2001). This book also addresses growing public unease regarding large-scale immigration into the UK and the government's policy towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Professor Gilroy's obvious tactic is that aggressive advocacy is the best form of defence. He denies that multiculturalism is 'in retreat' – but on the contrary that, within "cosmopolitan urban centres" at least, it is a thriving and growing social reality. The importance of this book is therefore as a contribution to the debate regarding the justifications for multiculturalism, and of the political promotion of cultural diversity (the political ideology of *diversifism*) within the British Isles.

Professor Gilroy's basic proposition can be summarised as follows: that (1) there must be a universal acceptance that it was racism that underpinned European imperial colonialism, and it is this legacy of world history that has determined many of the planetary-wide social and cultural problems that we face today; that (2) the emergence of a new world-order of non-racist, multicultural conviviality (of "*planetary humanism*") requires that the West (meaning those of white, European descent, the descendents of the former colonial powers) admit responsibility for this history and its consequences; that (3) a convivial, vibrant multicultural society is spontaneously emerging within our cities; and (4) that there is a danger of a reactionary retreat from these encouraging trends into "*melancholic*" right-wing nationalism and extreme "*ethnic absolutism*".

In the following sections of this review I propose to do the following things: firstly to examine the use of psycho-sociology to present a characterisation of the British people; secondly, to examine the way in which a combination of psycho-sociology and political correctness is used to produce a historical narrative to describe recent world history – and especially a 'historicism' for the British people; and thirdly, to examine the way in which the theory of postmodern popular culture is being used as the basis for a utopian vision of a new multicultural Britain.

The penultimate section of this book contains a critical examination of the ideology of cultural theory itself – the methodology employed extensively by Professor Gilroy throughout this book. The final, concluding section provides an overall assessment of Professor Gilroy's book as well as some general comments regarding the politics of multiculturalism.

An Ideological *Idée Fixe*

Professor Gilroy's ringing endorsement of multiculturalism, and his eager anticipation of a new "*planetary humanism*", is founded on a triplet of ideologies: psycho-sociology; political correctness; and postmodern popular culture. It is this rationale for multiculturalism that I propose to examine, on the basis that it is upon this position that Professor Paul Gilroy presents his arguments within '*After Empire*'. These three philosophical concepts have origins that can be traced back to the beginning of the last century and came to maturity in the decades following the Second World War.

The theory of psycho-sociology that underpins Professor Gilroy's argument is based upon the early 20th Century developments of Marxist thinking, an amalgam of sociology and Freudian Analysis, of (so called) Critical theory. This has led to the contemporary academic discipline, within the 'cultural studies' curriculum of some of our most important academic institutions, of psychoanalytical social research.

Political correctness is a doctrine of dualism that perceives the social world in terms of villains and victims, of oppressors and oppressed. Its ideological origins are substantially from the 1960s and 1970s when the analysis of text, or of 'narratives', became highly politicised as a singular examination (only) of the 'struggles' of minority or oppressed groups. It drew, in particular, on the American civil rights movement (of Black Americans, homosexuals and feminist organisations).

The disciplines of psycho-sociology and political correctness are brought together to produce a particular 'historicism'.

The theory of postmodern popular culture is used to present a particular and exclusionary view of the vital characterisation of groups (other ways of characterizing group culture and identity are not thought worthy of consideration). Culture is seen as a commodity – as something that, in the act of discriminatory consumption, provides for cultural identity. Again, it is essentially a Marxist concept, but with a change of emphasis such that it is the power of ownership of consumption (rather than of production) that is of primary interest.

It is upon this conflation of beliefs that Professor Gilroy provides his ideological view – *his* interpretation of the past, explanations for our present circumstances, and hopeful expectations for a utopian future. This is provided in the form of a 'narrative', as a postmodern means of expressing a world-view without the rigor required of a formal scientific approach. This allows un-falsifiable subjective narrative to be used instead of falsifiable fact-based theory. Opinion is unapologetically and aggressively used as the substance of debate.

Mad, Bad Britons

The highly politicised psycho-sociological pseudo-theory (Critical theory) provides the basis of a pejorative form of 'identity politics' used throughout Professor Gilroy's book.

Thus the interest in 'groups' can be expressed in terms of a targeted pathology of a 'diseased' culture; Professor Gilroy comments: "*He [Freud] is calling, in other words, for a particular form of inquiry directed at the psychological poverty and pathological character of groups that understand their collective life and fate in specifically cultural terms.*" [page 73]. There is therefore an obsessive interest in 'groups' (such as a particular, dominant *ethnie*) in terms not of cultural attributes and behaviour in the positive sense (as a means to enrich the communities 'collective life' and secure their long-term fate), but in terms of supposed forms of group psychosis. For *some* groups Professor Gilroy is keen to dish out particular opprobrium by such means. Therefore, for the native English people, we find no recognition of the emergence of such beneficial cultural attributes such as mutuality, altruism, pragmatism or volunteerism (to name but a few) and, especially, no mention of a cultured moral belief (of shared responsibilities, of a common virtue and justice) – instead there are only attributions of disturbing psychological disorder.

Unfortunately the utter negativity and paucity of this approach leads inevitably to its inadequacy as a serious form of inquiry (into identity). Instead it merely cheapens the argument regarding group behaviour. Nothing *positive* can, it would seem, be said (in these psycho-sociological terms) of those communities perceived by political correctness to be the 'dominant' (majority) group. Instead, psychological condemnation can be liberally heaped upon them as both 'oppressors' and mentally crippled people. It can therefore lead to a particularly nasty form of group vilification, clothed in 'scientific' respectability.

Professor Gilroy is therefore inviting the British 'body-politic' to enter into unnecessary states of self-loathing and self-flagellation – this is the foundation upon which he apparently believes his new vision of "*inclusivity*", "*convivial multiculturalism*" and "*planetary humanism*" must be realised. Unfortunately this lengthy discourse on the need for the English to accept post-colonial guilt, and to encourage a feeling of victimhood by the minority communities, is based upon a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the English

propensity for self-deprecation and critical reflection – and, it would seem, an assumption by the author of English people's ignorance of both their own identity, and of national and world history.

Therefore in one short paragraph [page 21] Professor Gilroy manages to label Western people, the people of "Christendom", with the attributes of: "anxiety"; "tormented"; "neurotic"; and "insecure". And similarly in describing the British "body politic", also in a relatively short paragraph [page 98], he sees the attributes of: "melancholic"; "pathological"; "guilt-ridden"; "depressed"; and "xenophobic" behaviour. Unfortunately, at times, Professor Gilroy's sheer exuberance for indulging in this pseudo-Freudian characterisation of the British becomes excessively jarring – for example: "As one might anticipate, postimperial and postcolonial melancholia characteristically intercut this violence and the shamefaced tides of self-scrutiny and self-loathing that follow among decent folk, with outbursts of manic euphoria." [page 111]. The inference being, of course, that being "decent folk" requires, from the British people, "shamefaced tides of self-scrutiny and self-loathing" – whilst others are invited to observe a British propensity for a collective form of mania and violence.

Even perfectly normal cultural behaviour, such as the maintenance of the group's 'historical journey' as a part of identity recognition, is subject to this strange and ridiculous interpretation. For example, Professor Gilroy observes: "I think that there is something neurotic about Britain's continued citation of the anti-Nazi war." [page 97]. Quite why the Professor sees this interest by the British (and pride in their involvement) in their war against fascism as "neurotic", whilst his own particular interest in Black-African slavery and the British Empire is not, is not explained.

So, what can we make of this use of psycho-sociological ideology – is this 'Critical theory' any good, is it 'fit for purpose', and is it actually being put to good use or simply being used for disingenuous political purpose?

The ideology is founded on the unsubstantiated premise that the identity of 'groups' can be expressed as an extrapolative form of the psychotic disorders that affects unfortunate individual people. This could be seen is convenient way of proposing, by means of such extrapolations, negative behavioural stereotypes for particular ethnic groups – whilst still claiming a 'proper' scientific justification. There is something rather dark and disturbing in Professor Gilroy's line of reasoning. Some may wonder whether we have been here before.

In fact it is a relatively simple matter to demonstrate the possibility of group behaviour being exhibited that is unrepresentative of the behaviour of *any* member of that group. Indeed, not only can this can be proven formally (by means of theoretic method that deals with complexity – that the group resultant of behaviour may *not* be a homomorphic image of any member of the group, or subset of the group). The problem is that Professor Gilroy mixes, according to the needs of his narrative: individual (of military personnel, police officers), stereotypically collective (of "the British"); and resultant (of "Britain's") behaviour. The Professor does this in a rather arbitrary and non-discriminatory manner – and seems not to have a particularly firm grasp on the important and necessary distinctions.

We would therefore be entitled to ask the Professor to respond to the following notion: that it is entirely conceivable for a group to exhibit a particular cultural propensity, whilst *none* of the individual people within that group being able to exhibit (as individuals) that nature. This is a representation of irreducible emergent behaviour that must be included as a necessary part of any sensible psycho-sociological theory – or *any* model of attributable characteristics of group behaviour. If Professor Gilroy's particular theoretic model (this is, of early 20th Century 'Critical theory') cannot actually model this form of emergent behaviour then psycho-sociological analysis, as a useable model of the reality of complex group behaviour, should be set aside.

Good People, Bad People

Political correctness is the philosophy of moral relativism applied with a political purpose – to promote and implement a particular ideological vision. When used within the context of multiculturalism it provides for a 'rights' culture, in terms of oppressors and oppressed, to become the dominant form of political discourse.

A particular moral perspective, based upon this principle of political correctness, seems to run through much of Professor Gilroy's writing – that the world can be divide into good and bad people. This ideological assumption can become especially worrying when these attributes are assigned to 'groups' identified in terms of ethnic (or racial) origin.

Professor Gilroy's book is substantially concerned with portraying 'Westerners' (his surprisingly coy description for people of white, European descent) as oppressors and villains, whilst other 'non-Western' people (principally people of black-African descent, as well as other non-European people) as oppressed victims. This is an ideological view very much in accordance with the demands for political correctness. This assumption is that those with power are villainous oppressors, whilst those without are the oppressed victims, is an ideological position currently under much scrutiny. For example, **Anthony Browne**, in his perceptive study of political

correctness¹, observes an ideology that: "... classifies groups of people as victims in need of protection from criticism, and which makes believers feel that no dissent should be tolerated.". Dissenters draw the knee-jerk response of accusations of being 'racist', of 'being in denial' or of 'equivocation'.

The most prominent aspect of Professor Gilroy's view of world history is its racialisation in terms of a focus on European imperialism. There is much use of psycho-sociological theory – to explain the 'guilt' to be felt by descendents of the colonial European states, and the persisting sense of 'oppression' and 'victim-hood' amongst ethnic minority immigrants (the descendents of the colonised peoples). Unfortunately we increasingly see the bullying aspects of this racialisation in the political demands for English (and British) self-flagellation – to encourage self-loathing amongst white people.

I suspect a large part of this partisan attitude is due to a rather romanticised view of the immigrant; as **Terry Eagleton** notes²: "*The postmodern cult of the migrant, which sometimes succeeds in making migrants sound even more enviable than rock stars, is a good deal too supercilious in this respect. It is a hangover from the modernist cult of the exile, the Satanic artist who scorns the suburban masses and plucks an elitist virtue out of his enforced dispossession.*". In this case, however, it is the migrant who is portrayed as being scorned by the "masses" – the "masses" being the dominant ethnic group (and predominantly, it is assumed, the white working class). The circumstances of the migrant become (regardless of the actual situation) a romanticized mythic narrative, fabricated to suit the politically correct ideal. It is also a backhanded way of denigrating the ideals of the rooted (white, indigenous) culture.

It is perhaps rather telling that Professor Gilroy's rejection of "dualistic pairings" such as "*black/white, settler/native, colonizer/colonized*" [page 45] as an "*urgent political and moral task*" does not extend to '*victimizer/victim*'. And sometimes the politically-correct use of words becomes embarrassingly clumsy as, for example, poor countries becoming uncritically awarded victim status with the epithet: "*developmentally arrested worlds*" [page 3].

Professor Gilroy simply sums up his perception of the British people's response to a new multicultural society in the following terms: "*Instead [of accommodating a postcolonial reality] racist violence provides an easy means to 'purify' and re-homogenize the nation.*" [page 111] – with the "*melancholic island race*" clearly identified as the villains, and the new "*citizen settlers*" as the victims. So what, we may well ask, is the *actuality* of racist violence?

Unfortunately for the Professor the truth is that an English person, or Briton, is much *less* likely to commit a racist crime, and *more* likely than expected to be a victim, than a person from the minority ethnic community (as shown by Home Office, Police, CPS, and British Crime Survey data). Furthermore these same official sources show that there is an thirty-fold greater than expected number of white victims of both racist murder and of racist violence, when compared to the number of victims from the minority ethnic community. It would therefore be interesting to know why Professor Gilroy finds it difficult to understand why the white majority are having such problems in accommodating to the 'reality' of postcolonial multiculturalism (see also the later comments on the work of historians Michael Collins and Robert Colls).

It is the absurdly simplistic political correctness, within the context of multicultural advocacy, that encourages the falsehood of minority-group 'victim-hood' – and which has such immense appeal to minority support-groups and the vast 'human rights' industry. Of course it is necessary to 'anchor' this relativistic ideology to some absolute reference, and for this purpose the English are portrayed as the loathsome 'dominant group' that make life such hell for the minority communities. For example, from **Dr. Eric Kaufmann**, we have³: "*Multiculturalism as a left-wing movement is problematic without a dominant ethnic group against which to define itself*" – the "*dominant ethnic group*" being, of course, the native English people. Perhaps of even more concern must be the fear that Professor Gilroy's portrayal of the English people, as being responsible for the evils both within Britain and throughout the world, may itself incite (or reinforce) a hatred of white people.

So, what of the use of political correctness itself? Can it be put to good use, and is it being used well by Professor Gilroy? Most importantly, what is the rationale behind this insistence on 'correct' thinking – or of accusations of being in 'denial' if the correctness of the narrative is questioned?

Of course the underlying principal of political correctness is good – that of upholding the moral position of supporting the weak and vulnerable against injustice and exploitation. Unfortunately it is when this moral and ethical position becomes politicised – when the 'moral good' becomes *political* correctness that the problems begin to arise. Morality becomes the property of the political state instead of that of the common people. We therefore see society being partitioned into groups on the basis that there are those that can be persuaded to see themselves as oppressed or exploited victims, whilst the 'Other' can be identified as the oppressor, exploiter or victimizer. A moral position ceases to be a part of each and every group's own cultural identity, but a virtuous

commodity owned by the political State and beneficently dispensed to supposedly victimised minorities. It is a cynical route to political manipulation and power.

Historicism

The ideas and arguments of those thinkers or writers upon which Professor Gilroy bases his analytical methodology are portrayed (unsurprisingly) as "*towering figures*" (**W E B Dubois, C L R James, Eric Voegelin, Emmanuel Levinas, Hanah Arendt**) producing "*great books*" by means of "*great scholarship*".

Those whose opinions (or analysis) he disagrees with are subject to a rather perfunctory and dismissive response. The obviously unwelcome "*smooth arguments*" of **Michael Ignatieff** [page 14] are listed, but clearly not thought worthy of a considered response. Rather than dealing with the criticisms, Professor Gilroy simply restates his own opinions whilst making *ad hominem* attacks on the character of these 'dissenters' – with implied accusations of them being "*in denial*", or of revealing "*hostility*", or (perhaps somewhat oddly) of showing "*indifference*". Therefore we see the insightful examination of contemporary British society by **David Goodhart** (editor of the left-wing Prospect magazine, and author of the article '*Too Diverse?*') being contemptuously denigrated as "*Powellite folk analysis*" [page 134], whilst the views on the British Empire by historian **Linda Colley** are dismissed as "*squeamish equivocation*" [page 103]. Obviously Professor Gilroy believes that such comments are sufficient to discredit those of contrary opinion, if not the actual opinions. Therefore central to Professor Gilroy's basic thesis is that the problem is not with multiculturalism (which is "*incontrovertibly*" a good thing) but the fact that there are still people willing to oppose it. It is the argument of the committed ideologue. Sadly it is also a sign of profound intellectual laziness and arrogant conceit.

Historicism conflates of the two ideologies of psycho-sociology and of political correctness, in which, in the context of Professor Gilroy's book, descriptions of English identity formation are based only on European colonialism (and the British Empire). This debate is *not* primarily concerned with the actual history of the British people, but to speculation on the psychological make-up and motives of those people.

Thus the historicism contained within this book is of extraordinarily limited context – of European colonialism only. By 'history' and 'historicism' Professor Gilroy refers to the European colonial and post-colonial period in terms of the "*formative experience of empire*" [page 2] – even though it is very evident that little of European culture and cultural identity, especially that of the ordinary European people, both of past and present times, is contingent upon this relatively brief period – as explored most thoroughly by historian **Bernard Porter**⁴. For example the identity of the English will have been most influenced by two thousand years of extraordinarily traumatic national events – most importantly of conquest, occupation, enslavement, plague, starvation, exploitation, land expropriation and eviction, and industrialism and urbanism. By comparison, the effects of empire on identity will have been negligible. Unfortunately those far more momentous events are not detectable on Professor Gilroy's 'racism radar' and therefore do not merit consideration. It should also be noted that British imperial expansion was primarily driven by the needs of industrial growth (for cheap and abundant raw materials and labour), but, most significantly, *not* motivated by a sense of religious or racial supremacism.

Professor Gilroy's view of the West's 'racialisation' of war is emblematic of his thesis: "*It is well known that in recognition of a certain racial reciprocity, only particular types of weaponry were judged acceptable among Europeans. There were no restrictions of killing technology in their different confrontations with the world's uncivilized hordes.*" [page 22]. This is just sneering, spiteful nonsense and can be easily challenged. We need only to reflect on the use of poison gas in the trenches of WW I (by both sides), of the carpet bombing of German towns in WW II by the allied air forces, or of the murder of captured British soldiers and POW escapees by the German SS, to see the maliciousness of this 'racist reciprocity theory'. The decision by the Americans to use the atom bomb on the Japanese was governed *not* by racism but by the cold military logic of confronting two very simple questions: will it bring the war to an early end, and do the Japanese have the military means to retaliate? And what, we may well ask, of the more recent involvement of the West (of NATO countries) in the Yugoslavian civil war, and in particular of the hideously lethal use of anti-personnel cluster bombs against Serbian civilian targets? Does Professor Gilroy also believe this to be indicative of some sort of European racist conspiracy?

Professor Gilroy's 'conspiracy theory' (of the racist use of weaponry) therefore falls apart by the simple process of identifying, in *actual fact*, significant contrary evidence. It is very difficult not to come to any other conclusion than that the Professor's comments are cynically mischievous and very misleading.

It is even more surprising that the professor's book makes no mention of the fact that for a time (in 1940) Britain was the only effective bulwark against global fascism and was prepared to sacrifice everything to eliminate this particular evil. Nor is there any mention of the fact that Nazism was subsequently defeated by a coalition of Europeans, of whom approximately 15 million fought and died for this cause (with a further 32

million civilian deaths). Clearly he is uncomfortable with the role (and sacrifices) of the British people in this bitter and costly struggle – a conflict that resulted in the death of approximately a third of a million Britons, many times that number horrifically injured, and the loss by Britain of more than a quarter of its national wealth (as well as hastening the loss of the Empire). With regard to what he describes as this “*mythology*” of the Second World War, the Professor can only mockingly observe: “*This is the point at which the comforting rumble of Spitfires and Hurricanes can be heard approaching in the distance.*” [page 127].

Likewise he seems peculiarly reticent in acknowledging the role of Britain in ending slavery in North America – of, especially, the popular emergence of abolition groups within 19th Century Britain, and of the use of its imperial power (of The Royal Navy) to help put an end to the global slave trade. There is no mention that British support for the Union in the battle against slavery (in the American civil war) resulted in the ‘Cotton Famine’ in the north of England in the 1860s – and the extreme poverty and deaths from disease and starvation that followed. And, of course, we find no mention of the primary British role in putting to an end the three centuries of enslavement (of more than one million men, women and children from Britain and other maritime European countries) by the Islamic empires of North Africa. The moral initiative of Sir Sidney Smith, and the courage and sacrifice of the British forces under Sir Edward Pellow (at the siege of Algiers in 1816, in particular) are not, it seems, worthy of a mention.

Much is made by Professor Gilroy of the use of concentration camps by the colonial Europeans in the Caribbean (in Cuba, in particular). There is no discussion of the use of Gulags by the Soviet communists, or the ‘re-education’ camps by Communist China’s Red Guard, or of Pol Pot’s death camps in Kampuchea. It is worth remembering that previous political attempts to impose a new ‘global order’, and to stamp out the possibility of alternative paths (of revisionism), have been responsible, in the past century, for the slaughter of some 140 million people throughout the world – principally through Marxism and Nazism (an estimate given in a **Swedish Government report** to the Council of Europe in January 2006). We might have thought that these ‘collateral casualties’ of past political adventures in social engineering would have been of great relevance to the subject matter of this book. But it seems not.

If Professor Gilroy really wishes to “*move beyond racialised mentalities*” and to “*reject the exclusionary force of racism*” in the context of “*a whole, complex, planetary history of suffering*” [page 39], then why the extraordinary focus on European colonialism with gratuitously detailed accounts of atrocities committed by the British (and other Europeans) during the Indian Mutiny, the north American ‘Indian Wars’, and in central Africa? Why no reference to the long history of Islamic conquest and colonialism (the consequences of which are still very much in evidence in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia)? Why no reference to the Ottoman Empire or of the savage treatment of the Armenians and Kurds by the Turks? Why no reference to Japanese Imperialism at the beginning of the 20th Century with its brutality and racism, especially with regard to the subjugation of Korea and China – and which still creates tensions and hostilities in this region to this day? Why no reference to the brutal empires of Soviet Russia or Communist China? And, especially, why no reference to the recent genocidal inter-tribal conflicts in Central Africa? Perhaps this “*whole complex, planetary history*” is all a bit too much for the Professor.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of this book is the lack of any accurate reflection on the actual lives of the white working class – as can be found in the work of such notable historians (and first-hand witnesses) as **Robert Colls**⁵. And, given Professor Gilroy’s highly selective reference to particular incidences of intolerance by British people, it is astonishing that there is no reference to the fact that it was the characteristic tolerance and social conviviality of the white working class that accommodated post-war mass immigration. The actual history of these particular times, based on first-hand experience, and devoid of political axe-grinding, can be found in the observations of such notable authors as **Michael Collins**⁶, and **Gilda O’Neill**⁷.

It is useful to reflect on the origins of this use of political correctness in terms of social class and politics. In the early 20th Century the intelligentsia were preoccupied with a rejection of the fascistic forms of nationalism (of Hitler and Franco) and were keen to embrace Soviet-style international socialism. One of the consequences of this was a loathing of British conservative patriotism which was often confused with political nationalism (which, in any case, was overwhelmingly rejected by all social classes within Britain). However the writer and thinker, **George Orwell** observed⁸ (in 1945) that: “*Within the intelligentsia, a derisive and hostile attitude towards Britain is more or less compulsory, but it is an unfaked emotion in many cases.*”. Which, perhaps, reflects the inability of the intelligentsia to distinguish patriotism from political nationalism (a distinction that George Orwell makes clear in his essays).

Most notably there are no references to forms of fascistic ideologies to be found in other communities and in other parts of the world (of racist, religious, or political form). Professor Gilroy is not, it seems, much interested in these ‘non-Western’ forms of thinking. Islamic extremism, for example, is mentioned only very briefly as

something that appeals to “vulnerable” people, or which “embraces” unfortunate ex-members of the Salvation Army [pages 138, 143] – not people with wicked intent (allegedly), but only “lost, damaged, disorientated young men”. The spectacles through which Professor Gilroy envisages his “planetary humanism” have a distinctly (and disturbingly naïve) rosy tint.

Professor Gilroy therefore provides a strangely exclusionary account of contemporary world affairs – there is no mention of the events in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bolivia, Kosova, the South Sudan (Darfur), sub-Saharan Africa (in Nigeria, especially), South East Asia (Thailand, Burma, Malaya), or the Philippines. Professor Gilroy’s account of Blair’s ‘global moral crusade’ [page 67] makes no mention of the fact that it was the West’s (NATO and the US) intervention in the Yugoslavian civil war (and in particular of the murderous and illegal aerial blitz on Serbia during the Kosovan crisis) that launched the Prime Minister’s new moral crusade as global policeman. Does the Professor also consider this an example of anti-black or anti-Muslim racist colonialism?

Professor Gilroy uses the brutal killing of Tom Hurndall and Rachel Corrie by the Israeli military [pages 90-92] to persuade us of the actual emergence of a new cosmopolitan (planetary) activism. But, once again, the issue is fudged. Why, in particular, are the root causes of the Palestinian intifada not properly examined? Could it be that admitting to the problems engendered by mass settler immigration (of economic migrants and refugees) into a land already occupied by an indigenous ethnic population, and the resulting loss to those people of effective control of their homeland, is something that Professor Gilroy wishes not to be examined too closely (as an issue of ‘planetary’ relevance). The relevance with respect to the contemporary situation in Britain should, surely, be worthy of comment. But clearly it isn’t. Perhaps the Professor believes that the Palestinians are also suffering from a xenophobic identity crisis and will also benefit from (in his words) “a good dose of economic immigration”. But I doubt it.

Professor Gilroy’s vision on a new “planetary humanism” is founded on a form of humanism of the most extreme kind. It is a belief in ‘ultimate purpose’ where the dividing line between political commitment and religious conviction becomes vanishingly small. The belief, therefore, is that the ‘end of history’ can be achieved by religious devotion, or the triumph of technology, or (in this case) by the application of political or social science. At the heart of a political view of history is the absolute conviction that humanity must aspire to a particular (pre-ordained or prophesised) utopian destiny.

This extreme form of humanism is very different from the more modest liberal humanism of the 19th Century, and **John Gray**, in his most astute analysis⁹, directly associates this extremist tendency with both the beliefs of the principal theistic religions and with Marxist philosophy: “*The role of hollowed-out versions of Christian myth in humanist thought is particularly clear in the case of Marxism. Marx’s absurd idea of ‘the end of history’, in which communism triumphs and destructive conflict then vanishes from the world, is transparently a secular mutation of Christian apocalyptic beliefs.*”. Likewise, **Anthony Browne** observes¹⁰: “... a belief system that echoes religion in providing ready, emotionally satisfying answers for a world too complex to understand fully ...”.

It is therefore the mission of the political elite to ‘reveal’ the ultimate nature of human destiny, and to guide people along the true path. Professor Gilroy’s pursuit of his vision of a future “planetary humanism” has all the hallmarks of religious fundamentalism: the devotion to ancient (early 20th Century) scripture; the need for a heretical ‘other’ to legitimise the belief; and the placement of belief before experience. Dissent cannot of course be tolerated. All people must abandon any thoughts of non-conformance or of alternative paths – or of other destinations.

This singular vision for humanity’s future is one in which universalism will replace pluralistic diversity – identity will be atomised, individualised, self-subjective and de-based to become an arbitrary, contingent life-style preference. This is the ideology of the new Enlightenment, and it comes at a price. Collective dissent, disengagement or action cannot, by definition, be allowed. Difference must be ‘accommodated’, but any real degree of autonomy cannot be permitted. Revisionism (apostasy) will be severely punished. Self-determination for community groups, especially based on ancestral rights, is effectively prohibited. The new world order is to be an urban, industrialized, normative world of consumer capitalism, market democracy and neo-Marxist ‘popular culture’

Pop Culture Englishness

The latter part of the book – on the popular culture of the mass entertainments industry – gives a disturbing insight into Professor Gilroy’s intellectual attachment to the orthodoxy of contemporary cultural theory. This presumably explains his rather strange views on the future of English culture, and of ‘Englishness’. And, again, it is most disappointing to find that these views only accommodate multiculturalism and postmodern populism.

The ideals that the Professor celebrates in black political culture: “*tolerant, humane, pluralistic and cosmopolitan*” [page 61] have been recognised as a part of English culture from at least the time of liberal establishment of the 19th Century (and have existed, in various forms, for many hundreds of years before that). However it would seem that Professor Gilroy is only interested in projecting a negative view of traditional European (and British) qualities – of ‘racism’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘white supremacism’, and similar derogatory terms. Professor Gilroy immodestly boasts: “*I would like to bring about a new appreciation of this unheralded multicultural, which is distinguished by some notable demands for hospitality, conviviality, tolerance, justice, and mutual care.*” [page 108]. He fails to note that this is also the characteristics of *indigenous* English culture. Therefore, even though he claims familiarity with **Roger Scruton**’s work¹¹ he appears unaware that Roger Scruton identifies *precisely* these qualities in the traditional culture and social institutions of the native English.

Instead Professor Gilroy makes much of **Roger Scruton**’s *one* reference to immigration¹², and attempts to associate it with racist xenophobia [pages 125-126]. Unfortunately he seems not to have noticed that a central theme of Roger Scruton’s analysis is the extraordinary ability of the English people to create a convivial “*society of strangers*” – by such institutions as common law, the church and government. Presumably Professor Gilroy has actually read beyond page 7 of Roger Scruton’s book (in which the one reference to immigration occurs) – in which case why is he so reluctant to discuss the essential subject matter concerning the emergent qualities of English morality, justice and social governance?

Perhaps an answer might be found in noting that **George Orwell**, writing during the Second World War, observed³⁰: “*In left-wing circles it is always felt that there is something slightly disgraceful in being an Englishman and that it is a duty to snigger at every English institution ...*”. Perhaps Professor Gilroy is determined to uphold that tradition. For example there is the strangely caustic opinion that the English view “*war as a type of sport*” [page 118]. Actually the English view is that “*sport is a substitute for war*” – an entirely different proposition, a cultural custom that substitutes (usually) for violent conflict. Therefore, once again, we have a piece of insightful analysis by Professor Gilroy – that completely misses the point. The English peoples’ reflection on the Second World War is of a time of great loss, sacrifice and hardship; and for many it is a tragically personal, and deeply moving, part of their own family history. War is not, and never has been considered “*sport*” by the common English people. Perhaps the Professor is too busy to notice the thousands of war memorials in villages and towns throughout Britain – or the posies of flowers placed upon them by ordinary English people, at particular (and very personal) times of the year. Or perhaps he believes this to be another example of a “*melancholic island race*”, and to be dismissed as an anachronistic irrelevance.

Professor Gilroy’s comments on English literature also indicate a basic lack of comprehension. Sadly he again lets rhetoric get the better of him and proceeds to denigrate the English mythic tradition with observations on works such as Harry Potter (by **J K Rowling**) by seeing only “*an anachronistic class-bound world*” – which he petulantly declares to be in need of “*a good dose of mass economic immigration*” [see page 144]. However the last thing such traditional storey telling can be called is “*anachronistic*” (the quality of a mythic tradition being that the stories must always be *applicable*). It is the use of power (for both good and evil), not class, that is the issue in the Harry Potter stories (and other stories in the traditional form). He is clearly unconcerned that this type of storytelling is in the English tradition of exploring the nature of evil – of, to be precise, the Manichaeian and Boethian forms of evil to be found, in particular, in the stories of **J R R Tolkien**¹³. Given that Professor Gilroy makes liberal use of the term ‘Manichaeian’, it is extraordinary that he appears not to have noticed. It is equally strange that pre-teenage children have no problems understanding the essential truth of these stories, but not (it would seem) middle-aged professors of sociology.

This lack of any depth of understanding, or even of emotional empathy, for the human qualities at the heart of the traditions of the Faerie world and of the epic quest, is both disappointing and sad. Professor Gilroy seemingly prefers the shallow, selfish posturing of contemporary popular entertainment – with, presumably, its use of the postmodern ironic sneer, as the true path to cultural fulfilment.

To promote his perception of a ‘subversive’ and ‘dissenting’ popular culture, Professor Gilroy therefore uses examples from the entertainments industry – in particular of the work of the comedian Ali G and the comic actor David Brent. Obviously it is necessary for Professor Gilroy to emphasise, through social analysis, the extraordinary and immense cultural importance of these pop-entertainers. Comedians such as Ali G play the traditional part of the court jester – a role that deflates pomposity and limits authority. Contrary to what Professor Gilroy appears to think, they are not external to the host culture but very much a part of it. The portrayal of humour portrayed by such comedians as Ali G, as something extraordinarily subversive of conventional notions of identity (according to Professor Gilroy), could be seen as a critical comment on the phoniness of multiculturalism. In particular it could be seen as a comment on its superficiality – the cultural populism, the use of cultural pastiche (such as the Chav culture of ‘gangsta wannabees’), the obsession with skin

colour, the vilification of the 'white' working class, the self-conscious and clumsy use of street-patois, the radical pretence, and cringing deference to political correctness.

Similarly, Professor Gilroy's view on the BBC comedy 'The Office' (and, in particular of David Brent's management persona) also misses the point [see pages 150-151]. This is essentially another example of traditional English humour – of the dislike of pomposity, the use of transferred self-deprecation (as understood between the writers and audience) to deflate the self-regarding egoist. It seems that the Professor, with all his wordy analysis, does not understand this form of humour. He assumes that David Brent is a failed multiculturalist and that the joke is about "*England and Englishness*" [page 151]. The joke is actually that of someone (who should know better) being embarrassingly inept within a ritualised social environment. David Brent, Professor Gilroy should note, is just a vain, insensitive, pompous prat (just like Basil Fawlty, ARP-Warden Hodges, Alf Garnet's son-in-law – or Professor Howard Kirk).

And again, it is disappointing to see the dry wit of Sir John Betjeman's poem on 'Slough' (penned in 1937) being buried under Professor Gilroy's lofty, but clumsy, analysis [page 151]. Betjeman's poetry is simply a joke (or a lament) that ridicules the phoniness of *industrialised, urbanised* pseudo-Englishness – just as Ali G In Da House is a satire built upon the phoniness of multiculturalism and of popular culture. But given that the future of 'identity' is, according to Professor Gilroy, to be found in the cultural form being satirised, then perhaps this phoniness is not something the Professor would wish to explore.

Sadly this is all rather predictable nonsense. It is this puffed-up view of popular culture that is central to Professor Gilroy's thesis. Similarly we find social theorists such as **John Fisk** and **Paul Willis** insisting that people are empowered by consumerism – that they can implement their preferences for cultural development by exercising their 'choice'. It is the 'democracy of the marketplace' – that ordinary people can subvert the ideology of corporate capitalism by selectively exploiting the products of industry. The acquisition of culture is thus seen to be little more than a shopping exercise – that by the selection (and use) of particular items of mass production the consumers are able to both define and achieve their preferred cultural identity. It is particularly important for postmodernism to be able to characterize modern cultural development as being beyond economic determinism or external ideological control – to be able to portray popular culture as an expression of the people's will. Culture is therefore commodified. And it is in this manner that consumption is said to define a (singular) person's cultural aspirations and attributes. This is little more than superficial self-identity by means of acquisitive shopping and selfish social positioning.

Therefore we find Professor Gilroy attempting to use the most inane forms of popular entertainment (such as the TV programmes *Changing Rooms* and *Ground Force*) as examples of the vitality of multiculturalism. He enthuses that such products of the culture industry are: "... *showing that taste and lifestyle preferences are much more important elements of identity than ethnicity, class, or regional ties could ever be.*" [pages 130-131]. Total nonsense, as anybody in the real world will know.

There are therefore many grounds upon which this modernistic (and naive) perception of the processes of cultural development can be criticized. These criticisms include: the limited context and reliance on the agency of a manipulative 'culture' industry (entertainments and media); the fanciful and unrealistic view being portrayed of the lives as actually lived by 'the common people'; the poverty of its content; and its superficial description of the nature of cultural identity.

We might therefore be concerned with the extent that the postmodern conceptualization of popular culture influences the way in which culture is actually characterized – it is very personalized, arbitrary and ephemeral. Culture is reduced to the way people consume. It is in this way that popular culture is claimed to be the satisfaction of a desire for a particular materialistic 'life-style'. Culture is thus portrayed as a 'dissident' mode of behaviour – it is a description of what people want and what they do, but without any deep interest in why people are inclined to act in a particular way. There is no place within the ideology of popular culture for an acceptance of culture as an emergent and evolving property of an enduring community.

The notion of culture as embodying non-contradictory beliefs (of moral and ethical principles) and values (of communal meaning and relevance) is corrupted such that 'belief' is only expressed in terms of the sanctity of selfish choice and 'value' is expressed in the shallowest utilitarian terms of providing personal gratification. Culture becomes a life-style decision and a fashion statement and identity becomes consumer identity – subject only to immediate peer approval and social-group acceptability. Cultural hyper-diversity provides the basis for cultural 'consumer choice'. It is because of the rigidity and superficiality of contemporary political thinking that we see culture reduced to the act of consumption – as vacuous, dreary and a wearily crass, 'market populism'. The multiculturalists, such as Professor Gilroy, can offer us little more than a "*cosmopolitan*" future of "*chaotic pleasures*" – a disparate, hedonistic world of ever more 'reality' TV, gangsta-rap music, bling, celebratory makeovers and 'Chav' teenage pseudo-culture. We can hardly wait!

Those that take issue with the postmodernists' theorizing with regard to popular culture (such as critically expressed by political theorists such as **Jim McGuigan**, **Theodor Adorno** or **Frederic Jameson**, with their observations on the drift towards 'uncritical populism') are often charged with elitism. These critics (myself included) see the contemporary, postmodernist concept of popular culture as the product of an authoritarian ideology – as the mass culture of a culture industry. However the critics' call for a more authentic form of culture – a culture that is less naïve and more critically inclined – is arrogantly dismissed. The criticism is not addressed, instead these critics are accused of patronising and denigrating the ordinary people, of labelling the consuming public as dupes. As **John Storey** petulantly complains¹⁴: “*These are not matters that can be decided once and for all (outside of the contingencies of history and politics) with an elitist glance and a condescending sneer*”. However, given such prickly responses of the multiculturalists to criticism, we might reasonably ask who is actually being “*elitist and condescending*”.

It has to be of interest that the postmodernists frame their responses in such limited and combative terms – of a world of “*dupes*” and “*condescending sneers*”. There is no place in their politicised and nihilistic view of human society for other conditions of communal life – such as trust, and selfless virtue. Their concerns are defensive and transparently obvious – to be able to convince us that we are *not* (perish the thought!) being manipulated by an alliance of ideological forces as, for example, global capitalism and cultural Marxism.

In the United States this postmodern representation of popular culture can be observed in the phenomenon of market populism - as comprehensively described by **Thomas Frank**¹⁵. And in the British Isles it is this consumeristic view of popular culture that has driven the contemporary political agenda for cultural diversity (as ‘consumer choice’), for ‘free-market’ liberalization, of the expansion of ‘choice’ of public services and public utilities, and therefore of seeing social development being aided and sustained by unregulated industrial expansion and unrestrained mass consumption. No alternative to this regime is to be considered (least of all the concept of ‘cultural authenticity’ as proposed by the critics). There is, instead, a neo-Marxist fantasy of a world of subversive, dissident consumers.

Therefore we find there can be no reflective interest in comparative pre-industrial or pre-Empire cultural development, and no contemplative concern with regard to a post-industrial (and post-consumerism) future. There is no interest in alternative socio-economic forms of cultural organization, and most especially there is no interest in the process of evolutionary cultural development. The denizens of this postmodern popular culture are, as **Terry Eagleton** accurately observes¹⁶ are required to be “... *centreless, hedonistic, self-inventing, ceaselessly adaptive*”; who “*fares splendidly in the disco or supermarket, though not quite so well in the school, courtroom or chapel*.”. And, of course, fares not at all well in the manipulative world of political deceit, or in the real world of work, family commitment and community.

The ‘cultural industry’ thus becomes a political tool. This is a political agenda that must always seek to promote its own indispensability and infallibility. It endeavours to destroy the (so called) dominant group’s sense of self-worth; to belittle and demean – and to portray the native Britons (in TV advertisements, soap operas, ‘reality TV’, life-style and celebratory magazines, and the glossy newspaper supplements) as acquisitive, shallow, vulgar and stupid. These are the loathsome indigenous inhabitants, the working class ‘white trash’ and rural ‘toffs’, to be arrogantly patronised and cruelly mocked by the new elitists – to be laughed at by the corporatist media in their “*hilarious exploration of the British Isles and its curious inhabitants*” (as opined by the BBC in their ‘*Little Britain*’). The dispensers of this manipulative mass culture distance themselves from the whole grubby business by ridiculing those who are denied the means, or have not had the opportunity (educationally, economically) to be able to live a more fulfilled existence.

This, it would seem, is the future form of cultural identity that so excites Professor Gilroy.

‘Talking The Talk’

Professor Gilroy employs a narrative style throughout his book that is very much in accordance with postmodern philosophy. He includes many subjective judgments, the narrative style is highly emotive, the historicism is very selective, and criticisms of the narration tend to be summarily dismissed as evidence of “*denial*” (or similar).

The philosophy of postmodernism provides for the dismissal of the reliability or universal relevance of factual truth, and the uncritical admittance of subjective narrative (of opinion or conjecture). Unfortunately we have seen, in the last few decades, how this form of narrative can be used by those of a political persuasion for dissimulation, misrepresentation, and deceit – that the truth has become a matter of political contingency and expedience. The writer and journalist **Peter Osborne** has explored this state of contemporary politics in some detail¹⁷. Postmodernism provides self-serving politicians and political activists with the ideological justification for habitual lying.

Unfortunately we also see, in the way that social theory is articulated, that postmodern narrative can be used to reinforce ideological belief. Therefore we find: “*racism*” is used to imply *only* white racism; the vacuous term “*race*” used to avoid discussion of actual ethnicity; “*planetary*” replaces the reality of normative orthodoxy; “*incontrovertible*” used to conceal a refusal to debate; and terms such as “*smooth arguments*” and the ridiculous “*rational irrationality*” used as a lazy denial of good counter-arguments. And given that language helps coordinate group behaviour, we see the manipulative value in this political use of narrative. Even more unfortunate is the *fact* that an insistence on the rejection of the universality of true fact makes the ideology of postmodernism self-refuting – a political ideology built upon illogical foundations.

Whilst global interpretations of the past are rejected as ‘metanarratives’, we find that metanarratives are casually reintroduced as an ideological agenda (as, for example, a future “*planetary humanism*” – a universalism predicated by means of engineered cultural and demographic “*hybridisation*”). The talk is of “*struggles and social movements*”, of “*contested aspects of identity formation*” – it is a vision of a society in aggravated turmoil, a world of manipulative power relationships between individuals and groups. And, as an adjunct to this particular ‘vision’, social theorists see people’s attachment to traditional community as an obstacle to achieving the end goal of universal, utopian humanism.

It would seem that, in place of fact-based theoretical development (and analysis), we are required to accept Professor Gilroy’s retreat into postmodern relativism together with the politically convenient subterfuge of using emotive ‘narrative’ as theory (or hypothesis). Inevitably the language therefore becomes dense; there is much obfuscation and a frequent confusion of terms – and an absence of rigorous definition (of meaning). Opinion is treated as the basic commodity of this form of inquiry – to be aggressively coveted, or to be enthusiastically trashed, as required. The book therefore provides us with a useful insight into the manner in which the social sciences can present speculative scenario-building as ‘cultural theory’ but without having to submit to the rigor required of scientific method. Pronouncements are made on social organisation and social behaviour without qualification or explanation.

For example, throughout this book there is a conflation of the terms “*nationalism*”, “*absolute ethnicity*” and “*racism*”, even though they have very different meanings, and associations between them, if and when they exist, must inevitably be subtle and complex. The implication appears to be that nationalism must be equated with absolute ethnicity, which must be equated with racism. Quite what Professor Gilroy makes of such realities as pan-Arab Nationalism, of Kurdish ethnic identity, or of the racialisation of British social institutions over the last half century – is therefore somewhat open to question.

The approach, such as we see being used by Professor Gilroy, is to combine a form of Marxist philosophy where cultural identity (rather than economic power) is contested, with a form of Freudian Analysis where dysfunctional social behaviour of ‘groups’ is given the characteristics of the psychotic states of individuals. The clear intention is to use this philosophy to promote ‘multiculturalism’ within the context of a particular postmodern narrative, such that the potential embarrassment of having to deal with awkward and unwelcome facts can be subtly avoided. Professor Gilroy readily admits to the extraordinarily privileged (and disconnected) academic environment from which much of this pseudo-scientific hubris emanates: “*the conference-going world elite*” [page 42].

Therefore we find that many of the most important concepts contained within this book are left undefined. The term ‘nationalism’ is used extensively throughout, although which form of nationalism Professor Gilroy is referring to remains un-stated. There are, of course, many forms (see, for example, the works of the social historians **Anthony Smith**, **Adrian Hastings**) and we must assume, from the content of his book, that Professor Gilroy is interested only in nationalism as a political construct. Quite how he squares this with his interest in English identity, which is based on the actuality of an ancient ‘dynastic’ nation (of the ethnic English people), and is *not* a political construct (and certainly not ‘British’), is rather difficult to understand. In his over-casual analysis Professor Gilroy even appears to believe Britain to be a “*nation*”. Possibly part of his difficulty is that he sees ethnicity only as form of contested (political) self-identity [page 70] – a purely symbolic form within the domain of identity-politics, which presumably explains his tiresome and irrelevant obsession with the essentially abstract notion of “*absolute*” ethnicity.

Professor Gilroy struggles with English (or British) identity because of his strong attachment to identity politics. He therefore implies (using thinly disguised irony) that, in reference to the growing reactionary forces of isolationism and nationalism, that the notion of actual national identity is bogus: “... *which* [nation states] *we are expected to believe were homogenous until the immigrants showed up after 1945.*” [page 27]. Sorry Professor, but England (a nation, *not* a state) was overwhelmingly a homogenous ethnic community up until approximately 1950, despite what the present political doctrine may have us believe (see, for example, the works of historians

Robert Colls¹⁸, Norman Davies¹⁹, Christopher Snyder²⁰, and historical anthropologists Dr. Bryan Sykes²¹, Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer²² – and many, many others).

This confusion regarding the actuality of ethnicity is confirmed by this Professor's bizarre idea that 'ethnicity' can be "*brought into being*" [page 45] – a rather sinister concept that also conveniently allows for ethnic groups to be 'disappeared' (or 'invented') by the exercise of collective, or elitist, political will (or by a commentator's arbitrary preference). Therefore it would seem that Professor Gilroy's conceptualisation of ethnicity is that it is only symbolic – that, as another sociologist **Anthony Giddens** grandly observes²³: "*Ethnic differences are wholly learned ...*" and "*In fact there is nothing innate about ethnicity; it is a purely social phenomena that is produced and reproduced over time*". Total rubbish, of course – as any observation of the real world will confirm.

The evidence is that the English are, in fact (and undoubtedly), a distinct and *authentic* ethnic group, occupying their homeland and therefore forming an *English Nation* within the British Isles. And this consensus has been vindicated, in no small part, by the immense efforts of many eminent and distinguished researchers: historians, field archaeologists, forensic archaeologists, genetic anthropologists, genealogists, linguists, and experts in law. The evidence is simply overwhelming – it shows that England is *not* a nation of immigration – despite what Trevor Phillips (Chairman, Commission for Racial Equality), the late Robin Cook MP, Professor Krishan Kumar (author of *The Making of English Identity*), or Professor Gilroy would like us to think.

The problem is that Professor Gilroy's historical narrative does not seriously address the issue of the English People's (and of other Britons) right to self-determination as an ancestral right (something that is accorded, in principle, to other ethnic groups throughout the world). Instead of which, we must witness the English being accorded the special privilege of being subjected to unrelenting condemnation and crude vilification. It is this particularly adversarial form of narrative, as exemplified by this Professor's writing, that (I believe) many will find personally offensive.

It is therefore the Professor's deployment of narrative, in its inconsistency and lack of insightful analysis, can (and unfortunately rather too frequently) leave the reader with the feeling of having entered an 'Alice in Wonderland' world. For example, when dealing with the Sir William MacPherson inquiry (which Professor Gilroy apparently believes was an "*inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence*") it is astonishing that he appears not to comprehend the true effect that the inquiry has had on the way that the UK Police Service now operates. In effect the inquiry report has been used to racialise the activities of the police – to make the police racially discriminative when dealing with various members of the public. It is a fact that one of the most forceful recommendations of MacPherson was to *outlaw* 'colour-blind policing' (as stipulated in paragraph 45.24 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report). Professor Gilroy's lack of comment on this major change in policing methods is therefore particularly interesting.

So, we have the strange situation that whilst Professor Gilroy strenuously advances the case for the 'de-racialisation' of society – for example: to oppose the racism of "*racialised difference*" [page 155]; to make racial difference "*insignificant*" [page 105]; to promote the "*denaturing*" of race [page 59 to 63] – he also provides support to MacPherson's "*epoch-making report*" of the "*good judge*" that has "*helped bring anti-racist goals closer to governmental process*" [pages 112 to 113], with its "*limited, but positive contribution*" [page 144]. Presumably he also supports the report's recommendation for the police to practice racial discrimination, even though it is contrary to his main argument so strenuously presented throughout his book. Or perhaps he doesn't – perhaps he doesn't understand this most important part of our recent social history. Or perhaps his narrative style simply gets in the way of his determining, or expressing, the *actual* conditions of our society. Take your choice.

Theory Lite

Given that this book is intended to be a scientific (psycho-sociological) treatise, published as an 'academic' volume, there is a remarkable absence of theoretical development – that is, of *theory* as a model of reality, based upon logically consistent axioms, such that consistent and reliable inferences can be made regarding past behaviours, present circumstances, and future possibilities.

In the context of organisationally complex phenomena (such as human society), any theory worthy of consideration is therefore required to describe the emergent formation and use of the 'extra-ordinal' rules (of behaviour). These must be consistent with the lower-level 'intra-ordinal' rules, to assure the principle of 'irreducible physicality'. True theory is formally defined, and expressed (usually, but not invariably, in the language of mathematics) such that it is verifiably correct and consistent, and that its limits of applicability are clearly understood.

Of course a major requirement of theory is that it needs to be testable (preferably falsifiable) to distinguish it from hypothesis, and to embody within its own statements its limits of context and applicability. Testing the

theories of sociology is, of course, somewhat problematic, but we would expect to see explicit descriptions of the theoretical form, the specific context, as well as the important limitations.

I would propose that not only is cultural theory not good theory, but that it is not theory at all, in any meaningful sense. The practicality of this (so called) cultural theory is therefore highly problematic. Therefore the essential difficulty with the form of cultural theory presented here is, as **Terry Eagleton**²⁴ points out, its lack of scope and depth – especially with regard to moral, ethical and spiritual aspects of our lives: “*Cultural theory as we have it promises to grapple with some fundamental problems, but on the whole fails to deliver. It has been ... dogmatic about essences, universals and foundations, and superficial about truth, objectivity and disinterestedness. This, on any estimate, is rather a large slice of human existence to fall down on.*”

Therefore with cultural theory we have something of a puzzle. There is no reference to recent work on organisational complexity (as a part of formal complexity theory), or on evolutionary adaptive behaviour (of groups). There is no reference to the important work being done into group identity (and authentic ethnicity in particular). There is no scope for expressing the emergent, co-evolutionary ‘niche’ development of an organisationally complex, self-adaptive community, within a complex environment. Most interestingly there is no mention of the exciting new developments in this field of work - in, for example, ‘cultural kinetics’. Presumably these important new developments are not being supported by the sociology community for the simple reason that they require a degree of objectivity and scientific rigour that the sociologists and cultural theorists are not prepared to countenance. Most importantly there is no mention by Professor Gilroy of how the various ‘narratives’ used to support the paradigms advanced by contemporary thinkers in cultural ‘theory’ and psycho-sociology can be proposed as true theory (falsifiable, or testable)– especially in the light of obvious and significant counter-examples. This is all very strange. But not especially surprising.

These new, exciting and radical approaches to group behaviour involves the use of recent developments in complex evolutionary systems theory (CES theory), in complexity theory, and in behavioural systems theory. The emphasis is on *organisational* complexity, and especially the following: the use of emergent context-dependent representation; the effects due to ‘global’ constraints, non-linearity, and on complex internal feedback; the process of convoluted co-evolutionary ‘niche’ adaptation; and the consequential production of observable and non-observable behaviour. In particular the results of this work have been applied to the emergent communal phenomena of cultural and ethnic development. One of the most important conclusions of this work (in complexity theory) is that highly complex problems (subject to real world constraints) are fundamentally intractable. There is no realistic way of determining a socio-economic agenda, a cultural programme, a political practice or doctrine, that will allow the path to a particular ideological goal (such as Professor Gilroy’s ‘*planetary humanism*’) to be achieved. This limitation on the power of political agency is indisputable – it is based on formal (mathematical) reasoning that is at the very heart of complexity theory.

In our quest for finding suitable emergent laws (regarding the communal acquisition of culture) we can address the same issues of ‘irreducible physicalism’ as for any other complex problem. In particular there is the necessary condition that acquired culture attributes cannot simply be described in terms of an *aggregation* of the behavioural characteristics of each member of the social group (such as each individual’s psychological make-up, and their particular knowledge, communication skills and artifice) – but obviously cultural development must be *dependent* on the behavioural characteristics of individual group members. However, given that individual behaviour will also be highly influenced by the particular cultural context, we then begin to see the truly complex and convoluted nature of social organization and of evolutionary cultural development.

Perhaps not surprisingly this work is largely being ignored by social scientist and cultural theorists for the simple reason that these new theories gives insights into the real world that is at odds with the prevailing ideology – one that promotes the effectiveness of a highly politicised and interventionist form of ‘social engineering’. Instead of the use of these interesting methods, we have from the sociologists a theory of the form “*I have a theory ...*” school of thinking. The pseudo-theories of cultural theory, and of the social sciences in general, cannot support the above forms of conceptualisation. They are simply opinionated narratives that subjectively select empirical data to support the particular ‘theoretical’ opinions. The evidence is selected to fit the political ‘theory’, rather than the theory being selected (that is, ‘discovered’) to fit actual observations and experiences.

With regard to psycho-sociological analysis – it is simply not good enough to model the cultural behaviour of a ‘group’ in terms of Freudian personality disorders (as dysfunctional behaviour of the group). For example, given this lack of a convincing (theoretical) explanation for the emergent nature of complex behaviour, it is entirely unsurprising that Professor Gilroy has problems explaining, and perhaps even understanding, how (alleged) racist dysfunctional behaviour of complex institutions (such as that of the Police Service) may be due to the “*unwitting*” actions of members of those institutions [see page 113]. This is particularly problematic given

that much of this “*unwitting*” behaviour is actually based on hearsay or arises from the prejudices of political correctness. As has been mentioned previously, the Professor’s attachment to psycho-sociological ‘theory’ substantially undermines his arguments. Forms of narrative based on such politically inspired thinking cannot be taken seriously.

In the *real* world, the cultural behaviour of a community will influence changes to its environment – and the environment will influence the cultural development of the community. This is a complex, convoluted process – both highly interactive and highly adaptive in character²⁵. The important dynamics of this process is the capacity of an indigenous community to learn from past experience. Most importantly the convoluted way in which social wisdom is acquired, within a cultural context, is perceptively described by economists **Friedrich Hayek** and **Victor Vanberg** as a learning process at both the individual level and at the collective (communal) level²⁶. The stability of the community will be dependent upon the degree to which the culture can incorporate appropriate learning – its ability to embody communal wisdom (as, for instance, a set of traditional values and beliefs) that are experientially acquired over significant periods of time. Culture is, in this sense, the emergent embodiment of group behaviour, the ‘social control laws’ that will adaptively evolve over (considerable) time.

Review Conclusions

They say you should never judge a book by its cover – and for ‘*After Empire*’ this is probably just as well, given that many will find the image needlessly offensive. Given my prior knowledge of Professor Gilroy’s high reputation my expectations were of a book of great scholarship and much insightful thinking. I feel greatly disappointed. This book is essentially an opinion piece. His characterisation of the British people is unremittingly crude and uncomplimentary. One might be forgiven for believing that the Professor does not much care for the native British people.

This book needs to be seen in the context of events that followed publication of this book (the London bombings, Birmingham’s inter-ethnic riots, the Muslim demonstrators incitement to murder in their ‘Danish cartoon’ protests, and growing levels of extreme urban violence). We need to ask ourselves whether Professor Gilroy’s idealistic vision of our urban centres as the “*vibrant, convivial*” communities of “*chaotic pleasures*” actually accords with reality. And given the recent census figures that show our society increasingly fragmenting into separate ethnic communities, perhaps Professor Gilroy’s perception of the growth of cosmopolitanism needs to be treated with immense scepticism.

The introduction of multiculturalism into British society has also introduced forms of extreme social dysfunction that were not previously there (or had been long eliminated) – namely:

The development of a gun culture • the social subordination and subjugation of women • the culture for violent feuding and for ‘honour killings’ • the trafficking of people, especially young women and children for use by the ‘sex industry’ • the practice of aborting of female foetuses • the use of sweat-shop and bonded (slave) labour • the increase in incidences of inter-ethnic and inter-faith violence • the growing influence of organised crime (in drug trafficking and prostitution) • the casualisation and deregulation of labour (especially of migrant workers in agriculture and construction) • the growth in extreme forms of violent cultism – of ‘faith-based crime’ • the formation of ghetto communities in the inner cities, and of ‘white-flight’ to the provincial regions and abroad • the organised use of extensive electoral fraud, and political violence • the increasing congestion and the strains on civic infrastructure and public services due to substantial population increases • the need for new laws for the maintenance of social order (public order offences and ‘hate’ crime) • the erosion of basic civil rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of association.

Therefore, from the evidence of this book it would seem that Professor Paul Gilroy does not wish to address matters of this sort (it appears that any evidence contrary to the perception of an emerging “*cosmopolitan*” society of “*tolerance and conviviality*” is best ignored). However the above problems will not go away by ignoring them, or by trying to lay the blame on bad white people. Perhaps even more alarming is the growing realization that multiculturalism and political correctness is actually killing people by ignoring or misrepresenting many of these problems – an increasingly alarming trend, as commented upon by **Patrick West** and many others²⁷.

Not surprisingly the highly dogmatic agenda, to impose multiculturalism onto British society, has led to our present circumstance of rapidly increasing social instability and the collapse of community – as observed so astutely by **Professor Anthony D Smith**²⁸, in which the new ‘counter-culture’ is increasingly seen as: “*eclectic, hybrid, fragmentary and presentist, forever being up-dated, forever in search of ‘relevance’*”.

Authentic culture, on the other hand, does at least have the *potential* to provide for long-term stability. It is an evolutionary adaptive, reflective, evolving and (organizationally) highly complex phenomenon. The people within a social group, acting communally, will cause specific cultural attributes to emerge - which affects

subsequent communal behaviour and which, in turn, has an affect on the people and on *their* subsequent behaviour. Cultural evolution is *not* about competition between cultural species (various candidates of social organization – the ‘multiple agents forged and engaged in a variety of struggles and social movements’ as favoured by the advocates of cultural hybridism) – or of changes in consumer fashion. At any one moment there can only be one culture for a particular social group, and any ‘competition’ is in reality (and can only be) a comparison of the current situation with previous cultural epochs. This traditional view of culture is, as philosopher **Mary Midgley** astutely points out²⁹, the antithesis of the “*chaotic pleasures*” preferred by the supporters of multiculturalism. The actual evidence is that *enduring* social change and *actual* cultural development is not the result of consumption, competition, the clash of ideas and of power-play (of Marxist, Darwinian or Spencerian content), but a single historical process of “*social evolution*”.

It is noted that **George Orwell** interestingly links this process with the notion of patriotism³⁰: “*It [Patriotism] is actually the opposite of Conservatism, since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same. It is the bridge between the future and the past. No real revolutionary has ever been an internationalist.*”. It is regrettable that Professor Gilroy should feel that such important insights should be “*excused as juvenilia*” [page 127]. True social radicalism generally emerges from social continuity (such as the Enlightenment, constitutional monarchy, common law, the trade union movement, women’s emancipation, and so on).

However, for present day British society, we see the ideologies of psycho-sociology, political correctness and postmodern popular culture being used to create, in effect, an ‘unwise’ society – to destroy the organic role of the community in the autonomous and evolutionary development of it’s own social custom and tradition, and to replace this consensual ‘social control’ with a laissez-faire world of social bargaining, opportunism and ‘life-style’ consumption. Meanwhile control is being surrendered to the political elite.

Unfortunately the cultural theorists and social scientists are, in reality, flying blind. Their efforts to promote conditions conducive for these massive social changes ignore the reality that not only are they certain to be ineffectual, but that there is no guarantee that their efforts might not result in some catastrophic social and economic failure – a most likely outcome given their inclination to ignore global limitations. The fundamental problem is *not* being addressed – that problems of this (organisationally complex) nature are *formally* intractable. The various ‘algorithms’ used to attempt to decide upon a better social order (a social contract, an economic criteria, a cultural normalisation criteria, a cultural diversity measure, Rule Utilitarianism felicific calculus, Pareto Efficiency, Bayesian Utilitarianism – or whatever) are simply decision-system techniques for applying a ‘brute force’ method of choice – an admission, in effect, of the intractable nature of complex social organisation.

Instead the sought-after utopian solutions (such as economic globalisation, universal hybridisation and planetary humanism) are pre-selected, and vigorously pursued as totalitarian ambitions for the perfection of society. These simple-minded solutions (often decided upon from a partisan viewpoint) are little more than subjective guesses of the way forward – and examples of the naivety of the social science approach to massive social engineering. It would seem that those branches of scientific enquiry that should be most relevant (and practically useful) in respect of social and cultural phenomena, and in particular theoretical constructs relating to organisational complexity and behavioural complication, are being ignored. Judging by the contents of his book, it seems that Professor Gilroy is either ignorant of, or has no interest in, these important and exciting new developments in the science of complexity.

Therefore we should not be too surprised to find that **Yasmin Alibhai-Brown**’s desire³¹ to “*remake the nation*”, or **David Blunkett**’s wish³² for a “*new England*”, or Professor Gilroy’s unbounded enthusiasm for a future “*planetary humanism*” will encounter all of the intrinsic problems of high organisational complexity – of solution intractability and of chaotic unpredictability. And, with the absence of the necessary emergent paradigm for the emergent, extra-ordinal laws of the ‘complex whole’, these supporters of a new world order (sinisterly referred to as “*the project*”) appear to have little grasp of the actual nature of the problem.

Professor Gilroy’s visionary zeal for multiculturalism, and his lack of a proper response to criticisms is quite extraordinary. He has, we are led to believe, the extraordinary gift to see the future, and it is “*the irreversible fact of multiculturalism*” [page 97]. His prophetic vision is of the emergence of a new world order of “*convivial*” multiculturalism and of a “*planetary humanism*”. But with no emergent paradigm to work with, the question is how can he be confident that this is an achievable, utopian future? Again, we have the insightful observations of **John Gray** on the subject of this form of normative (economic) globalisation³³: “*No matter how different their histories and values, however deep their differences or bitter their conflicts [of the entire world], all cultures everywhere were to be corralled into a universal civilization.*” – a particularly good description (some may conclude) of Professor Gilroy’s hopes and desires for a new “*planetary humanism*”.

Mary Midgley, in her brilliant analysis of our contemporary myth of an obtainable humanist utopia³⁴ compares the power-elite's vainglorious ambitions to remake the world with the more traditional form of emergent social change. In particular she lambastes the tendency towards over-ambition, the conceit, the obsessive pursuit of a "*single vision*" and the abandonment of caution in favour of rapid and reckless change. Although her particular comments are directed towards the excesses of genetic determinism and bio-engineering, they are also applicable to social determinism and naïve ambition of the kind we find so prevalent in cultural theory and social engineering – and in the book under review.

Professor Gilroy presents us with a very particular and personal account of contemporary (UK) domestic affairs. He has a very urban-centric view of contemporary UK culture and of (supposedly) the emergence of a 'vibrant' multicultural sub-culture; especially within the "*cosmopolitan*" urban centres. His view of the new, multicultural England is of its "*vibrancy*", whilst the views of those who oppose it are dismissed in sneering, emotive language as "*pathological*" [page 107]. Therefore there are long, rambling accounts of the "*confusion*" of the English regarding their identity – although Professor Gilroy still manages to confuse racial identity with that of ethnic identity [page 131]. There is the ludicrous proposition that a convivial, cosmopolitan society is emerging amongst the young, urban communities – a "*spontaneous and ordinary hybridity*", aided and sustained by "*recreational drug use on an extraordinary scale*" [page 132].

However, history cautions us that to abandon socio-economic and cultural development based on a localised organic approach (of conservative, step-wise, and self-adaptive evolutionary change) in favour of ill-conceived, dogmatically-driven and interventionist global (planetary) solutions is fundamentally naïve and misguided – and potentially calamitous. The fact of the matter is this – that even if we believe some end goal to be desirable and attainable, we do not know how to get there. This is not a matter of a lack of knowledge, too little effort, or even insufficient intellect – the path to the desired outcome (of some distant, utopian future) *cannot* be reliably determined. This cannot be emphasised too much – the problem is *actually and practicably* intractable.

To ensure long-term survival, a group (*ethnie*, community) has to develop a culture founded on reality. In direct contrast to this, the ideologies of modernism and multiculturalism are being used to create, in effect, a laboratory (or battleground) for highly politicised cultural experimentation. Not surprisingly (and as complexity theory would suggest) the signs are that the political implementation of multicultural social policy is leading to chaotic instability and social collapse. Fifty years ago we did not have the problems listed above. We had, by and large, a convivial community. This recollection is not "*melancholia*" as Professor Gilroy would have us believe, but rather the 'radical nostalgia' (of, for example, the writer Fraser Harrison) – a refusal to accept a crass political re-interpretation of our history, or of ourselves.

So what, then, of this particular book – what should we make of it? I would recommend to anyone interested in contemporary British society, and in the promotion of multiculturalism in particular, to have a good look at the book. It provides an illuminating insight into the thinking of those who advocate massive social change and who, it would seem, claim to know the path to a new utopian future (of a de-ethnicised, culturally hybridised world of "*chaotic pleasures*"). However you will need to ask yourself whether Professor Gilroy's observations accord with our actual circumstances, given the developments within Britain since his book was first published (in 2004). The question then is this: are Professor Gilroy's predictions of a multicultural society of "*hospitality, conviviality and tolerance*" actually coming true? And is this goal best achieved by writing in such a way that could, I believe, cultivate a feeling of loathing against the indigenous, native British people? I believe the answer to both questions is an emphatic 'no'.

END

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