Citizenship and the Politics of Common Sense

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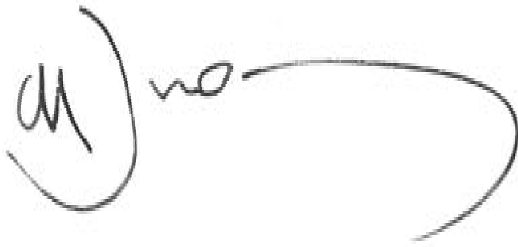
July 2003

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. The work is my own, except where otherwise acknowledged.



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Abstract

In this work, I examine the notion of the common sense of ordinary people as a resource in socio-political struggle. More specifically, I consider the link between ordinary people's common sense and their capacity to express and defend their moral autonomy. I do so by firstly identifying and discussing perceived deficiencies in the way that common sense is typically conceptualised in social and political thought. Secondly, I employ as a means to illustrate the political nature and qualities of ordinary people's common sense a case study of a group of ordinary people's understandings of and political response to a particular government policy.

In social and political thought, common sense tends to be treated as simply a universal faculty and a residual form of thought. As such it is frequently regarded with benign indifference - it is ignored as being of little or no consequence to people's political thought or action. Alternatively, it is regarded as a problem in need of remedy by the social sciences, due to the limits it is held to impose upon people's moral autonomy, political thought and action. These approaches are, I show, for the most part informed by problematic epistemological, methodological and ontological assumptions. The effect of these assumptions is typically to abstract common sense from its particular socio-political context, and denude it of its political and critical characteristics.

By treating ordinary people's common sense as a struggle, I show that it may serve as a socio-political resource in both a material and idealist sense. It may be critical not only of government policy itself, for example, along with its implications, but also its affiliated logic and structures and relations of power. Ordinary people's common sense is, where critical, attentive to certain forms and instances of governmentality, and conscious of the threats posed by these to people's moral autonomy, both now and in the future. But their common sense is not critical in a rational-systematic or theoretical manner, such as that privileged in social and political thought. Rather, it is critical in a cultural-hermeneutic sense. This, I show, serves to limit, to some degree, ordinary people's conceptions of moral autonomy, and the scope and character of their political action. However, this study ultimately demonstrates that a cultural-hermeneutic understanding of ordinary people's common sense provides an alternative, and potentially fruitful, means of conceptualising what is and is not critical thought and political competence. It furnishes, at the same time, a realistic basis for understanding the limits and possibilities of individual autonomy and socio-political transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Western nation states are held by many social and political thinkers to be increasingly threatened by external economic, social and political forces and their effects. In such a context, democratic governments' abilities to realise policy objectives on behalf of their citizens are, to varying degrees, challenged. This state of affairs necessarily focuses attention on the relationship between citizens and their states. It highlights issues to do with the meaning and quality of the institution and practice of citizenship. In particular, it calls into question the ordinary citizen's capacity to fulfil the duty central to membership of a political community and its on-going well being; that is, to defend her or his moral autonomy. The ordinary Australian and her or his political competence has been the subject of much interest and scrutiny in recent years. The average Australian citizen has been assessed by a bevy of social and political thinkers and researchers and, for the most part, found wanting.

But the majority of these assessments, and their resultant prescriptions, are premised on a number of largely unstated and unexamined assumptions. The effect of these preconceptions is to limit the ways in which moral autonomy and political competence more generally are thought about and researched. This, in turn, results in a failure to consider alternative forms of political thought and action, along with their potential possibilities. The questionable assumptions evident in recent citizenship debates and research, along with the bodies of theory that inform - and challenge - them, share one thing in common: they are all, to varying degrees, premised upon and have as their consequence the explicit or implicit censure of the common sense of ordinary people.

The problem of Australian citizenship and Australian citizens

With the Centenary of Federation in Australia in 2001 and the effects of globalisation causing uncertainty regarding the nation's ability to cope with global market forces and technological change, Australia's political institutions have recently come under increased scrutiny.[1] Perhaps one of the institutions of most concern to politicians, political and social theorists, and researchers at the moment is that of citizenship. This anxiety may be attributed, in part, to the recent Australian Republic referendum and various proposals for constitutional reform that require an 'informed' decision from

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[1] The 'Reshaping Australian Institutions' programme, sponsored by The Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences, is but one example. This initiative aimed to fundamentally rethink Australia's key institutions before the centenary of Federation in 2001.

Australia's political community. But contemporary concerns about the state of citizenship in Australia can (also) be traced to earlier origins.

In the years following the 1975 dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government, the realisation that popular sovereignty "is not guaranteed by the existing mechanisms of the Australian Constitution" (A. Davidson 1997: 244) sparked much debate and soul-searching in academic and political circles. This was especially so within the Australian Labor Party (ALP). In 1988, based on its findings that the common law had not provided sufficient protection for rights in Australia, a Commission on the Reform of the Constitution instituted by the ALP recommended that the rights of Australian citizenship be spelt out constitutionally through the inclusion of a Bill of Rights, thereby ensuring political equality (Emy 1996). These proposed changes, when put to referendum in 1988, were supported by a mere 30.79% of Australian voters (A. Davidson 1997: 126).

This rejection of the proposal elevated the suspicions and the concerns of the Hawke Labor Government that contemporary Australians lack a clear concept of citizenship, thus leading to governmental efforts aimed at achieving the goal of 'the active citizen'. To this end, a series of studies was commissioned by the ALP, the results and recommendations of which are detailed in a series of reports. These include the 1994 report of the Civics Expert Group,[2] *Whereas The People*, the 1994 report of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *Australians All: Enhancing Australian Citizenship,* the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's 1994 *Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights,* and a 1995 discussion paper produced by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, entitled *A System of National Citizenship Indicators*.[3]

The findings of these reports were, on the whole, negative. Evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Enhancing the Meaning of Australian Citizenship, for example, concluded that "many Australians do not have a very defined idea of what citizenship means.... they do not have a good grasp of it. We talk about loyalty, onus and social contract, but at the end of the day I do not

[2] This group's chair, Professor Stuart MacIntyre, recognised the "somewhat provocative" (1996: 227) nature of this title, and it was subsequently changed. In the absence of further elaboration, I assume that the group's initial nomenclature was considered 'provocative' by MacIntyre because it implied the group was made up of 'the authorities' in what is a widely researched field.

[3] The Howard Coalition Government, guided by the Australian Council on Citizenship, aimed to develop a new Citizenship Act to replace the Australian Citizenship Act of 1948. The release of the Act was intended to coincide with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Australian citizenship in 1999. Instead, the *Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment Act 2002* was assented to on 4 April 2002.

think the majority of Australians really understand these concepts" (McKiernan 1994: 44). In presenting its results, the Civics Expert Group was every bit as pessimistic:

> There is a high level of community ignorance about Australia's system of government and its origins. While there are pockets of reasonably informed people, knowledge about governmental, constitutional, citizenship and civics issues is very low. The community readily admits scant knowledge about these issues, and actual understanding is often considerably lower than claimed knowledge. In some cases, there are significant misconceptions. (1994: 132)

Not only are many Australians ignorant about 'citizenship issues', but they are also said to be, in something of a 'vicious circle', alienated from the political system as a whole (Civics Expert Group 1994; A. Davidson 1997; Emy 1996). The concern of many of Australia's political thinkers, then, is that (other) Australian citizens are incapable of either recognising or acting upon their own interests in sovereignty. A large proportion of Australians cannot, on this account, enact the principle and ideal of moral autonomy that is fundamental to the very concept of citizenship. Moreover, they are unable to do so in the context of what is held by the likes of Alastair Davidson (1997) to be a particularly inopportune set of circumstances. Davidson argues that whilst in the face of a generally decreased standard of living[4] - and one that is likely to continue to deteriorate with Australia's insertion in the global economy and a largely non-liberal democratic regional polity - Australian citizens may wish to have more say about how the cake should be divided; they will be faced by parliaments and a state that they do not have the right to control. Davidson's unease is exacerbated by his assessment of Australian citizens as being, on the whole, passive, apathetic, and politically ignorant. Compulsory voting, he maintains, merely masks this apathy (1997: 245).

In the following section, I employ Davidson's arguments as emblematic of the orthodoxy on the state of Australian citizenship, and citizens, a view that I contest throughout this thesis. Alastair Davidson has been a prominent participant in Australia's contemporary citizenship debates through his involvement with the 'Ideas for Australia' project, the 'Social Benchmarks for Citizenship' project, and the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights. In 1997, he extended his contribution to the citizenship debates with the publication of *From Subject to Citizen: Australian Citizenship in the Twentieth Century*. This work exemplifies, in most respects, the dominant discourse of citizenship in Australia, and displays many of this discourse's preconceptions.

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[4] Davidson bases this assessment on Henderson report findings.

Davidson attributes the political passivity of Australians to a number of factors, chief of which is the historical dominance of the Australian state. The construction of the Australian state was, according to Davidson, an exercise in hegemonic modern state-building that effectively created a passive population of subjects. It was these subjects who supposedly developed the Federal Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia that still, Davidson claims, governs all our activities as citizens. The Constitution was hardly conducive to the understanding and practice of active citizenship. Firstly, it did not enshrine the basic rule of democracy, the principle of a vote of equal value. Further, it did not contain any definition of what it is to be an Australian citizen, or describe the role an Australian citizen is expected to play in the Australian state. Neither did it contain a Bill of Rights and the rights which *are* included are severely limited in scope. Davidson ascribes the limited defence of rights in the Australian Constitution to the belief of the founding fathers that British traditions of common law and responsible government would be sufficient to protect individual liberties. This ill-founded complacency, he argues, permeates the Australian popular consciousness to this day.[5]

Davidson's negative assessment of the practice of citizenship in Australia derives from his specific definition of, and theoretical approach to, the concept of citizenship. He insists upon a formal legal-political definition of citizenship, "with a view to adopting a less ideological view than most of the new literature" (A. Davidson 1997: 3). To this end, he describes citizenship as a realm of political activity with particular rules, but one that presumes a wider context of the social. From this perspective, Davidson sees as problematic the British-influenced Australian tradition of procedures for ensuring active citizenship, preferring, instead, the Continental practice. The British (Marshallian) tradition, which draws upon a sociological definition of citizenship, has, Davidson argues, promoted a passive notion of citizens as consumers and not as creators of rights.[6] The Continental model, on the other hand, stresses that social rights are only

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[5] In *Defining Australian Citizenship: Selected Documents* (1998), John Chesterman and Brian Galligan criticise Davidson's constitutional focus both on empirical grounds, arguing that Australian citizenship is "institutionally diffuse, federal in character ... developmental over time [and] must be studied accordingly" (1998: 4), and in a normative sense, rejecting the notion that Australian citizenship did not exist in substantive form due to the absence of a core definition of citizenship or statement of citizen's rights and duties in Australia's constitution (1998: 5). Like Davidson, however, they, too, tend to portray institutions as determining.

[6] See, in relation to this point, Bryan Turner's (1990) critical evaluation of Michael Mann's (1988) comparative framework for charting the development of various forms of citizenship. Turner argues that, although Mann's thesis exposes and expands upon the ethnocentric specificity and evolutionism of Marshall's theory of citizenship by demonstrating the systematic variation of citizenship between societies, this framework is too limited and restrictive to provide an adequate basis for the identification of various forms of modern social citizenship. Specifically, Mann's thesis, as a result of its concentration upon citizenship as a class-based strategy imposed from above, fails to account for forms of citizenship developed from below, and the expansion of social rights through the influence of social forces other than class-based movements. Turner aims to address these omissions through an inclusive heuristic typology

valid insofar as they allow individuals to exercise an autonomous political decision, placing active political rights and an agonistic relationship with the state at the centre of citizenship.

Several aspects of Davidson's work trouble me, each of which stems from his resolutely objectivist approach. Davidson's objectivist definition of citizenship, for example, effectively circumscribes, and thus marginalises, other potential, alternative understandings and practices of citizenship. Indeed, his definition implies that citizenship is only truly meaningful when conceptualised in a legal-political sense. Davidson's assumption that his particular perspective on citizenship is 'less ideological' because it focuses on "the structured categories which combine as citizenship" (1997: 3) and the public's 'objective' knowledge of their purposes and functions, reflects the (mistaken) notion that political thought is clear, hard, rational and affectless - in effect, value-free - and its procedures transparent and objective, belonging to no-one. This bias serves to reinforce a fundamental antinomy between expert and common sense knowledges, and thus legitimises assessments of Australians as politically passive and apathetic, with their relationship to the state one of dominance and submission. According to this reading, if Australians do not hold an 'objective' understanding of political institutions and processes, participate in political decision-making in a formal legal-political sense, and along rational-choice lines, these people are deemed to be a problem.

My concern is that Davidson may, due to his disproportionately objectivist stance and associated rational-choice model of the human and social, misread the nature and dimensions of Australia's 'citizenship problem'. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced in his 'emancipatory' prescription for increased political and civics education according to 'best practice' benchmarks, and more opportunities for *formal* political participation.[7] As a result, Davidson may, in fact, misinterpret and misrepresent the 'political behaviour', and interactions with political institutions, of many Australians. Moreover, it could also be argued that he neglects the potentially political character of these people's everyday, common sense understandings of political institutions and, indeed, of

that combines the private/public distinction and above/below dimension that may be said to characterise citizenship. By means of these four political contexts for the institutionalisation or creation of citizenship rights, Turner argues, it is possible to identify and contrast various forms and traditions of citizenship in a more critical, sociological manner.

[7] The assumption is that objective knowledge and formal participation will breed an increased desire for further knowledge, participation, and 'fairer' political structures amongst Australia's citizenry, and more informed, rational political choices and decisions in the future. On this perspective, see J. S. Mill's (1998) "Considerations on representative government". More generally, this stance appears to be based upon an endemic assumption of administrative rationalists. This assumption has it that if the educated see a problem and the uneducated do not, then the problem can be 'fixed' simply by educating the uneducated.

common sense itself. Certainly, if one subscribes to the substance of Hal Colebatch's 1995 critique of the work of the Civics Expert Group, then this is indeed likely to be the case. As I have noted, Davidson is not alone in harbouring the above assumptions. Similar presuppositions are evident in the research of the Civics Expert Group and its attempt to determine the level of civic and political knowledge in Australia. Colebatch's analysis is particularly useful for our purposes here. Not only does Colebatch identify and critique the Civics Expert Group's objectivist assumptions, but he also alludes to the notion of ordinary people's common sense as an alternative form of political thought.

In his analysis of the Civics Expert Group's research, Colebatch is concerned to evaluate the Group's diagnosis of a political knowledge deficit in Australia. He also aims to assess the appropriateness of the group's resultant prescription for increased civics education in order to address this shortfall. Both assessment and prescription are, he maintains, flawed, due to the implicit and mistaken assumptions that underpin the research. The first of these assumptions is that the Civics Expert Group's unstated model of Australian political institutions and processes is an empirical description of these (and one that is furnished in the Constitution), rather than "particular rationalisations of it" (1995: 19). Following logically from this explanation of Australian politics is the related, a priori assumption that political knowledge may be defined, in the group's own terms, as information.

Armed with this partial map of Australia's system of government, and confidence in its integrity, the Civics Expert Group was in a position to construct indices of political knowledge, and to assess the state of political knowledge in Australia according to these. Where the political knowledge of respondents coalesced with the Group's own, it was deemed 'correct'. When at variance, responses were either labeled as 'misapprehensions' or 'attitudes', rather than 'knowledge'.

The problem, as Colebatch sees it, is that the Civics Expert Group imposes an order on Australian political activity to which political practice simply does not conform. The group represents government as a "sphere of life defined by fixed rules, where institutions have clearly demarcated spheres of action, with the rules and demarcation lines set out in the Constitution" (1995: 16). On this view, the Constitution is "the rule book", and "people must understand the rule book if they are to participate effectively in the game" (1995: 16). But the Constitution does not provide an accurate description of the political system. Nor, Colebatch argues, can it be understood as something prior to, and independent of, political practice. Political practice effectively eludes the neat

categorisation and modelling attempts of political scientists, as much of this practice is diffuse and does not take place in the public arena allocated to it by such experts.

Labouring under the assumptions of a purist's theoretical model of political practice, and the notion of knowledge as information, the Civics Expert Group defines 'good citizenship' and political competence as consisting primarily of knowledge of the Australian political process, and a concomitant ability and desire to participate in political activity. However, this definition bears little resemblance to respondents' own understandings of what constitutes 'good citizenship' (Colebatch 1995: 20). It is also premised upon a representation of the political process that makes no sense to them, based on their own, empirically grounded, political experience and knowledge (Colebatch 1995: 23). Colebatch concludes, as a result, that any attempt to inculcate Australians with more partial and alien 'political knowledge' is unlikely to add to their understanding of the political process. Any *truly* serious attempt to improve citizens' knowledge, and to enhance 'political participation', would, he argues, require political experts to 'grasp the nettle'. Rather than bulwarking or myth-making through institutional explanations of politics, they would need to focus on political *practice*; they would have to locate political institutions in the experiential realities of citizens.

Colebatch's critique leaves begging two main questions, questions that provide both impetus to, and rationale for, this enquiry. If, as he argues, respondents' political thought and knowledge is, for the most part, experientially grounded, and should not, as a result, be simply labelled and dismissed as being made up of 'misapprehensions' and 'attitudes', then why is this, their common sense, not treated as a form of 'political' thought and knowledge in its own right? And if we *are* able to treat as a form of political thought and knowledge people's common sense, and must, as Colebatch argues, consider political practice in a wider (realist) sense, is it not incumbent upon us to assess the efficacy of people's common sense as a means of realising moral autonomy? Arguably, this is especially so in a context in which experts appear to be attempting to define people's moral autonomy, along with the means by which it is to be realised, for them, in what are, for them, alien terms. Colebatch has hinted at an answer to the first of these questions, and this provides, in turn, something of a solution to the second.

The objectivist approach of political experts to political practice demands, as Mary Douglas would have it in her analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo, "hard lines and clear concepts" (1966: 162). Political experts are, or can be, little interested in political practice, and the thought and knowledge that goes with it, that occurs outside the reified and "Sacred" (Colebatch 1995: 23) domain of parliamentary politics. Not

only is the "Profane" (1995: 23) of little or no interest, but also, as Colebatch sees it, a 'symbolic' threat to political experts and their "machinery of government approach" (1995: 23). As I have intimated, common sense is a mode of thought and body of knowledge that is related to people's perceptions of their experience. But this should be understood as including "the totality of possible sensory evidence, past, present and future" (D. Davidson 1984: 193), and not just that which is immediately available. This constitutes a lot of evidence, much of which is distant, conflictual and contradictory. Common sense is thus inescapably, and to a greater or lesser degree, messy and 'polluting'. It is certainly likely to defy political experts' best attempts to order it.

But to be fair, or, perhaps, more charitable, to the political experts mentioned above, it might be argued that 'common sense' lacks the conceptual clarity and 'bite' sufficient to treat it as a distinct form of thought and knowledge, 'political' or otherwise. This is the position defended by analytical philosopher, Donald Davidson (1984), in his essay, "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme". Davidson argues that it is not possible to sustain the idea of a conceptual scheme, or a means of organising sense data, and therefore, he would insist, we cannot speak of a distinct thing that is 'common sense'.

The concept of common sense

Donald Davidson makes this argument on the basis that there is and can be no neutral ground or common co-ordinate system (that is, language) to form the basis for conceptual relativism and, hence, the idea of *a* conceptual scheme (for the assumption of one conceptual scheme necessarily implies the assumption of other, rival, schemes). Firstly, Davidson contends that conceptual schemes must be identified with languages. To argue otherwise is, he maintains, to posit the fallacious notion of 'pure mind' capable of grappling with reality free from the 'distorting' categories and concepts of language. This then raises the possibility that languages themselves differ with conceptual schemes, and which, in turn, suggests that speakers of different languages *may* share a conceptual scheme, so long as it is possible to translate one language into another. Davidson argues that although distinct conceptual schemes *may* be generated where speakers of a language come to accept as true new sentences previously taken to be false - with the truth of a proposition changing because it is part of a new language - changes in language do not necessarily entail alterations in the basic conceptual apparatus (and, thus, the creation of a new conceptual scheme). Users of the 'new' language may, in doing so, be referring still to the 'old' mental concepts. We are thus, Davidson argues, no further advanced. That truth is relative to a conceptual scheme means that truth is relative to the language to which the conceptual scheme belongs.

Davidson then considers the (empiricist) proposition that conceptual relativism is a result of the inability of conceptual schemes to translate 'objective' empirical content. This position demands that there be something neutral and common lying outside all conceptual schemes; that is, the common relation to experience or the evidence (that is, reality). But Davidson rejects this proposition on the grounds that language entails translatability into a familiar idiom and, thus, the organisation of *an* object (reality). But the notion of organisation, he argues, applies only to pluralities - one cannot organise a single reality, only a reality composed of other objects. A similar difficulty applies to the idea of a language organising *experience*. Plurality of experience must be "individuate[d] according to familiar principles" (1984: 192), and in a language like our own.

Davidson then turns to the notion that sensory evidence could provide "all the evidence for the acceptance of 'sentences' (where sentences may include whole theories)" (1984: 193) and thus provide an 'entity' "against which to test conceptual schemes" (1984: 194). He rejects this notion, arguing that sentences can only be true in and of themselves: no *thing* external to the sentence itself can make it true. And, given that this is the case, Davidson argues, we have arrived at a position in which a conceptual scheme or theory is acceptable if it is largely true, and different from our own if it is "largely true but not translatable" (1984: 194). But this requires that the notion of truth be divorced from that of translation (1984: 195), a proposition that does not hold water, according to Davidson. The concept of truth demands that we translate into a language we know. And, where the concept of truth is tied to that of translation, we have no independent grounds for testing the difference of conceptual schemes.

Given, then, that we cannot "make sense of the metaphor of a single space within which each scheme has a position and provides a point of view" (1984: 195), Davidson suggests that the more modest approach of partial, rather than total, failure of translation might be achieved. This position would employ the common part of a conceptual scheme (that of sentences held to be true) as a basis for translation and comparison. But the crucial point is that it must allow us to do so, to interpret speech and ascribe beliefs and attitudes, without *assuming* these. This, Davidson argues, is not possible. Without assuming a shared language of interpretation, we *must* know or assume the beliefs of a given speaker if we are to interpret their words and, thus, to go any way towards interpretation (1984: 196).

Having arrived at this point, one in which speakers are obliged to assume some "foundation in agreement" (1984: 197) - a general agreement on beliefs - Davidson

defends it as a position of strength. Without grounds for determining a neutral and common basis for translation and comparison - absolute truth or truths - "charity is forced on us" (1984: 197). And if charity is "a condition of having a workable theory" (1984: 197), then it makes no sense, in Davidson's view, to excoriate the foundation in agreement that results from it as a source of error. Indeed, the larger the "basis of shared (translatable) language or of shared opinion" (1984: 197), the greater the possibility of meaningful disagreement and integrity of declarations of difference. This does not, however, lead to conceptual relativism, and with it the endorsement of the idea of a conceptual scheme. Instead, objective truth becomes relative to a language, which becomes, once again, part of reality.

Donald Davidson *may* well be right. And if this is the case, then we cannot ground 'common sense' in any definitive or absolute sense. What we *can* do is speak of common sense as something of a 'rhetorical' category, a sort of 'common place' that is comprised of beliefs that are generally assumed to be shared and agreed upon, with more or less success. But if, as Davidson concludes, language cannot be separated from reality, then, arguably, this position is all that we could *ever* hope to achieve. I have no quarrel with Davidson on this score. Both my task and ambitions in this enquiry are rather more modest. I do, however, take issue with the adoption of an extreme 'idealist' stance to common sense, one that treats this as though it were the end of the matter. For common sense is a phenomenon that has a 'materialist' base, and one that cannot, according to some thinkers, simply be argued away (see, for example, Clifford Geertz 1983, who argues that common sense should be understood as a cultural system). For example, Antonio Gramsci (1971) holds a similar view to that of Davidson regarding the limits of common sense, albeit one derived from a 'materialist' basis. He argues that it makes no sense to speak of common sense *as* truth or falsity. This is another way of saying that common sense cannot qualify in an absolute analytical sense as a conceptual scheme. Nevertheless, Gramsci's is a similar position with a difference, for he goes on to argue that it *does* make sense to speak of common sense as a struggle. In doing so, Gramsci both provides some indication of the socio-political importance of common sense (to some people, at least), and a means by which it might profitably be studied. And studied it may be. For whilst it is not possible (or particularly useful for social-scientific purposes) to catalogue common sense's *content*, given its variability across time and from place to place, it *is* possible to isolate what Geertz describes as its "stylistic features" (1975: 17). It is these features that enable it to be "trans-culturally characterised" (1975: 17), but also to be considered a form of political, and more or less critical, thought.

The study and its scope

This study examines the notion of the common sense of ordinary people as a resource in socio-political struggle. It does so through an analysis of the assumptions outlined above, and tackles these mostly through an examination of the various ways in which common sense is conceptualised in social and political thought. The thesis focuses in particular on the relationship that is drawn between common sense and peoples' facility for moral autonomy - along with the ways in which this is defined. I employ in the thesis an illustrative case study, both as a means to exemplify my arguments, and to sketch out the political and critical nature and qualities of ordinary people's common sense: to consider *how* ordinary people's common sense might be considered critical. Briefly, this case study is centred upon the residents of a small country town in south-east New South Wales (NSW), named Boorowa. The study examines Boorowa people's common sense understandings of and political response to the NSW state government's mid-1999 proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance and development services. This was a policy that held significant implications for Boorowa's roadworkers, and for the Boorowa community as a whole. Whilst Boorowa's roadworkers stood to lose their jobs, the policy also threatened the long-term survival and well-being of the town through the loss of income and participants in the community that it entailed. I also consider, in this context, the nature of Boorowa people's common sense understandings of their socio-political reality more generally, and the connection between this and their expression of moral autonomy.

Mine is clearly not an impartial stance towards the study of common sense. But then everybody, Mary Midgely argues, "is partial in the sense of starting somewhere, of selecting something for emphasis. The fatal thing is not this. It is being confused about one's reasons for doing so. Particular insights and principles of inquiry must be set in the context of other possible alternatives" (1978: 165). In this work, I treat ordinary people's common sense as a struggle, largely so as to highlight its political and critical qualities, and its potential as a socio-political resource. This approach was prompted in part by perceived limitations in the way that ordinary people's common sense is conceptualised in social and political theory. It was also motivated by a concern with the potential theoretical and practical implications of this neglect. Thus, in the terms of Midgely's observation, the other possible alternatives (which I identify and discuss in the following two chapters) have been all but exhausted.

My case study, furthermore, examines Boorowa people's common sense in what is, arguably, an ideal type situation (but see Chapter Two for discussion on this point). These people were more or less unified in their understandings of the NSW

government's proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance and development services, and resistance to it. Thus, their common sense 'struggle' was a relatively clear-cut and one-sided one. An 'alternative' case study, one of an issue that induced discord among Boorowa people, might - or might not - have revealed their common sense and its political and critical qualities in a different light. The point is that, in the absence of such a study, there is no way to tell. This, of course, limits the generalisability of the conclusions I can draw regarding Boorowa (and ordinary) people's common sense, on the strength of this particular case study.

But it was never my intention, in any case, to paint a definitive picture of ordinary people's common sense as a socio-political resource. Rather, I seek to tease out through a particular study those more subtle qualities of ordinary people's common sense that may have been obscured or overlooked due to various assumptions and biases in social and political theory. My objective in doing so is to point to and open up alternative, and potentially more productive (in both the theoretical and practical senses), ways of thinking about ordinary people's common sense. Without discounting the limitations of ordinary people's common sense, it is their common sense's *possibilities* that provide the focus for this thesis.

Outline of the work

The thesis is made up of two main parts, each of which is comprised of three chapters. The first part is mainly concerned with an analysis of the treatment of common sense in social and political theory and the relationship drawn between it and notions of moral autonomy. Part two of the thesis concentrates on the characteristics and qualities of Boorowa people's common sense in the context of their resistance to the NSW government's policy.

Chapter One analyses the ways in which ordinary people's common sense is dealt with in political thought. The first and most substantial part of the chapter traces the development of the notion of the politically incompetent ordinary citizen in the modern West, and discusses the various assumptions that underpin this. The second part considers a number of theoretical proposals to improve ordinary citizens' political competence. These attempts, along with the aforementioned assumptions, are shown to reveal the ambivalence towards ordinary people's common sense that is characteristic of much political thought.

Chapter Two discusses various theoretical perspectives on common sense in sociological thought and identifies perceived limitations in these. Out of this excursus,

the constituent premises of common sense as a struggle are identified. Criteria with which to examine how ordinary people's common sense might be considered critical, along with conditions and contexts in which this is likely to be the case, are also singled out. This chapter thus serves as something of a lead-in and adjunct to the following chapter that focuses on methods.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the types of methods and methodology suited to distinguishing and appraising the political and critical aspects of ordinary people's common sense. Considerable attention is devoted to the question of reflexivity, here, given the political character of social scientific research and its representations. The methods employed in the case study are briefly outlined, and Boorowa people themselves are briefly introduced.

Chapter Four is the first in the second part of the thesis. It presents an introduction of sorts to the remaining two chapters, in that it describes, in brief, the NSW government policy that lies at the heart of the case study. The chapter also provides an indication of the character of Boorowa people's wider socio-political milieu, along with some of the 'external' forces that threaten to compromise their moral autonomy.

Chapter Five details the nature of Boorowa people's common sense understandings of the NSW government's proposal and its implications, and the political action to which these understandings gave rise. Boorowa people's perceptions of their experience of community are shown to be central to their common sense conception of moral autonomy. This, in turn, is demonstrated to have been influential in determining the character and scope of their political action.

Chapter Six, the final chapter of the thesis, focuses on the limitations of Boorowa people's common sense-informed moral autonomy and political action, on a critical theory reading. Through a discussion of the critical theory critique in the context of the case study, this chapter shows that Boorowa people's common sense is critical to some degree in critical theory's own terms, but mostly in a cultural-hermeneutic sense. This 'alternative' form of critical thought is shown to impose certain restraints on Boorowa people's thinking and action, but also to carry some theoretical and practical promise.

CHAPTER ONE
POLITICAL THOUGHT AND COMMON SENSE

There has been something of a consensus evident among citizenship theorists in recent years. Despite their particular political orientations and allegiances, these theorists agree that the Western conception of citizenship has itself contributed to the development of what may be described as 'problem citizens'. As a result, many citizenship thinkers are also united in the belief that this 'problem' may be ameliorated through the reconstruction of citizenship along what are considered to be more appropriate lines.

This chapter deals with the notion of the ordinary citizen as a problem. More specifically, it is concerned with suggestions that the typical citizen poses a dilemma due to her or his political incompetence and resultant inability to adequately fulfil the duties and responsibilities of democratic citizenship, chief of which is the expression and defence of individual moral autonomy. It is my argument that political theorists' reflections upon the need for some form and degree of political competence in the general populus tend to privilege a limited conception of what this is and should be. At the same time, they marginalise and/or dismiss relatively unreflexively other forms of 'political' knowledge and reasoning. In particular, I argue that the common sense of ordinary people is simply treated as a residual; as such, it serves as the largely assumed target for implicit or explicit political critique. Further, I suggest that the treatment of ordinary people's common sense (and, by implication, these people themselves) in this manner may be to seriously - and paradoxically - miss the point. For it is these people's common sense that might serve as a defence against just such representations and the logic that underpins them, along with the potentially oppressive and disempowering nature of expert discourses more generally. If this is indeed the case, then, arguably, the common sense of ordinary people needs to be considered as a form of political thought in its own right and one that is, in another ironic twist, to some degree 'created' by political theorists. In short, I argue that if the qualities of ordinary citizens' political thought are to be truly apprehended, then their common sense needs to be treated as a struggle.

The main aims of this chapter are to demonstrate how political competence is conceptualised in Western political thought, and to highlight those characteristics of thought that are either explicitly or by implication excluded from this notion. However, because common sense is, for reasons I outline, typically treated as a residual in

political thought, rather than as a "frame for thought, and ... species of it" (Geertz 1983: 84), it is the task of the next chapter to examine common sense in detail.

I begin, here, by outlining the development in Western political thought of the notion of the problem citizen, and especially in terms of the question of political competence. I argue that there is an almost uniform and unquestioned agreement among political theorists regarding the characteristics that make for political competence. Through an examination of various debates in political theory concerning the issue of political competence, its relationship to individual moral autonomy and the health and stability of democracy, I then identify these 'qualities'. At the same time, I draw a composite picture of the characteristics that are held by a majority of political theorists to be antithetical to political competence. As I briefly show, combined, these amount to the common sense of ordinary people. I then examine various political theorists' proposals for the enhancement of ordinary citizens' political competence. Although these theorists are obliged, to some degree, to reflect upon the implications of their proposals, most, I argue, do so on the basis of similar assumptions and incomplete understandings regarding the nature of ordinary citizens' political thought. They may recognise elements of 'quality' in ordinary people's common sense, but the above theorists' appreciation of this form of knowledge is nevertheless limited by their failure to treat it as a struggle.

Citizenship in the modern West and the development of problem citizens

In part, it seems that development of the notion of problem citizens may be traced to a tension between competing ideals that lie at the heart of citizenship in the West, and its accompanying social ontology. Adrian Oldfield (1990) delineates what he sees as the two dominant conceptions of citizenship embedded in the Western political tradition, both of which are generally drawn upon in recent debates concerning the reconstruction and reinvigoration of citizenship.[1] These are 'liberal-individualist' (or 'liberal'), and 'civic-republican' (or 'classical'), conceptions. Both have different conceptions of the nature of the individual, and of the character of the social bonds existing between individuals as citizens. Thus, while liberal-individualists and civic-republicans share the ideal of citizenship as self-government and consider themselves to be morally

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[1] Bryan Turner identifies the paradox inherent to the very notion of citizenship in a differentiated society: "[citizenship] is the principal basis of social solidarity in a secular political system, but, in institutionalising a 'sense of justice', it creates the normative standards by which and through which groups and individuals mobilise for change" (1992: 228). Citizenship provides one solution to the contradiction between the dream of a society free and equal. Indeed, Ralph Dahrendorf (1994) sees the significance of the ideal of citizenship as deriving from its effective combination of humans' need for equality and desire for liberty. In effect, citizenship promises to reconcile - when the correct balance of rights and responsibilities is arrived at - humans' competing desires for freedom and belonging.

autonomous agents (albeit threatened ones), they speak "different languages with untranslatable central concepts" (1990: 186).

The liberal-individualist conception is one of citizenship as status. Individuals, as sovereign and morally autonomous agents, may choose whether or not to exercise the rights of the status of citizen in the public, and more narrowly political, arena. Citizens acquire the status of citizen as a fundamental right and need not undertake duties beyond the minimally civic, the least of which is respecting others as sovereign and autonomous. In this essentially private view, citizenship takes the form of a social contract. According to Oldfield (1990), liberal-individualist citizenship, in and of itself, neither creates nor sustains any solidarity or cohesion or sense of common purpose. The civic-republican conception on the other hand, sees citizenship not as status, but a practice or activity. Individuals are obliged to demonstrate that they are, indeed, citizens through public participation in defining, establishing and sustaining a political community of fellow citizens. The practice of citizenship is not, and cannot be, a matter of choice, for it is through learning and exercising shared responsibilities for the identity and continuity of a particular community that individuals become and remain citizens. The liberal-individualist conception of freedom and moral autonomy inheres in the private areas of life where individuals are left alone by state and society. In civic-republican thinking, on the other hand, individuals are free only when their duty and interest coincide. For them this is what is meant by moral autonomy.

In the Western political tradition, Oldfield argues, "less vigilance, thought and struggle has been expended on the ideal of citizenship as practice than the ideal of citizenship as status" (1990: 182). Oldfield, along with many other political theorists and politicians, regrets this imbalance.[2] Whilst he concedes that liberal-individualism has helped to free the individual from the constricting influences of society and state, he feels that this has been at some cost. An over-emphasis on liberal-individualism in the development of citizenship in the West, as he sees it, has produced a restricted form of moral agency and social life. Without the practice of citizenship, individuals are unable to realise either an enhanced level of moral agency, or a similarly enhanced form of human consciousness, being and living (1990: 185). They lack a degree of freedom and control and a hard-won, and thus, worthwhile, sense of belonging. The individual is, in effect, *sans* active citizenship, a partial and stunted being. Although the practice of citizenship is 'unnatural' in that it requires an apprenticeship and on-going training, which runs

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[2] See, for example, Derek Heater (1990). Heater laments the socio-political developments that have, he maintains, undermined the very idea of citizenship in the United Kingdom during recent years. His 'progressivist' reading of history and perception of citizenship as a means to collective human dignity leads him to propose a return to, and expanded application of, the classical ideal.

against the nature of human beings, he argues that this is a small price to pay for the potential benefits to be accrued. However, Oldfield feels that few liberal-individualists - failing to recognise, or denying that violation of individual autonomy is inevitable - would agree.

Anthony Day and Anthony Milner (1993), like Oldfield, also identify a dichotomous understanding of the individual-as-citizen as having developed in the Western tradition of political thought. However, where Oldfield focuses on the differences between liberal-individualist and civic-republican conceptions of the individual (perhaps in order to further emphasise the benefits to be realised by the individual through redressing the imbalance between the two), Day and Milner stress the indivisible relationship of these conceptions in and to the ideal of citizenship as self-government, and highlight more clearly the democratic requirement for responsible, self-governing citizens. The person of the citizen, they argue, is conceived of as a rational autonomous agent, capable of granting and withholding consent to be governed and thereby limiting communal action. At the same time, he or she is considered a product of social conditions, and therefore is considered to be beholden to the community. Furthermore, these coexisting and seemingly oppositional liberal-individualist and communitarian conceptions of the individual are essential to the citizenship ideal. They provide substance, respectively, to the notion of governmental legitimacy, and to the very idea of a community of citizens. Thus, the notion of self-government central to the ideal of citizenship demands of the collective and individual a certain degree of independence, but also self-control and restraint. It requires the subordination of both individual interests and (at times) needs to those of the collective, superior power.[3] Despite Oldfield's suspicions to the contrary, many liberal theorists appear to share this view of self-government and of the need for 'balanced' citizens.

Indeed, Oldfield's critique of liberal-individualists seems to refer to a strict, unqualified libertarian tradition, for a number of liberal thinkers defends the need for a greater degree of individual commitment to political participation and the practice of civic virtues. These theorists would also endorse his understanding of the Western tradition of citizenship, and his assessment of it as having created problem citizens. Many such liberals, Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (1995) suggest, may have been chastened by arguments that it has been their influence and exclusive focus on rights at the

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[3] Day and Milner's point regarding the indissociability of these conceptions of the citizen is an important one. It points to the need for a capacity to negotiate and reconcile the tensions between the two on an on-going basis. Arguably, this is the most crucial element of a truly rigorous conception of political competence: the capacity to live with this ambivalence and to achieve something of a balance in the process.

expense of the responsibilities of citizenship that have led to a civic virtue deficit in modern Western societies. Alternatively, they argue, these same theorists may have recognised that liberalism does not negate the need for cooperation and self-restraint in the exercise of private power, which, in turn, demands some degree of civility and public-spiritedness of citizens. This general acknowledgment has produced what Kymlicka and Norman (1995) see as some of the most appealing work on civic virtue. Although some critics (like Oldfield) see liberal theorists as incapable of righting the imbalance between rights and responsibilities due to liberalism's commitment to liberty, neutrality or individualism which "render the concept of civic virtue unintelligible" (1995: 297), Kymlicka and Norman argue that the emphasis on political virtues in liberal virtue theory marks this work as distinctive and promising. The ability to question authority and willingness to engage in public discourse are seen as crucial to the expression and protection of self-government, and the development and sustenance of what Michael Macedo (1990) terms the virtue of 'public reasonableness'. Liberal citizens should be able to participate in public discourse, provide reasons for their preferences, and defend these in an intelligent and candid manner. They should also be willing to listen to, and take seriously, a range of other views and preferences, and accord to these a measure of respect regardless of their seeming strangeness. Claus Offe (1997) argues left-libertarians also attempt to develop arguments that respect individual freedom of preference, whilst legitimating government intervention in this process in the interests of collective values and welfare.[4]

Whether or not they share a strict, civic-republican view about the virtues of political participation and the degree of commitment owed the political community by the individual, citizenship theorists of all philosophical persuasions seem united in their perception of Western citizens as generally lacking in civic virtues, and in the belief that this is partly due to the predominance of a liberal-individualist conception of the individual and citizenship.[5] They agree that we need to curb some of the worst excesses

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[4] Perhaps the earliest example of a similar such doctrine was Rousseau's social contract theory in which, from a state of natural liberty, the people constitute themselves as a collective moral person "through which they endow themselves with a constitution or code of laws designed to regulate both their mutual relations and their relations with other men" (1968: 12). Because the people create this form of association, they are able to subject themselves to the general will and yet still retain their earlier freedom, for each individual in giving her- or himself to all, gives her- or himself to nobody - yielding no rights to others not gained her- or himself.

[5] Michael Walzer (1995) suggests that civic-republican calls for a renewal of civic virtue, which typically prescribe 'active' citizenship as an antidote to the fragmentation of contemporary society, must recognise that this version of 'the good life' does not coalesce with the reality and expectations of many people in the modern world. These people - whether 'engaged' citizens or not - are less able to exercise power over the state and, increasingly, those smaller associations which were once subject to their hands-on control but whose operations and activities now often fall under the auspices of the state. The rule of the *demos* is, Walzer maintains, "in significant ways illusory; the participation of ordinary men and women in the activities of the state (unless they are state employees) ... largely vicarious" (1995: 156). Moreover,

of liberal-individualism, placing a greater emphasis on the responsibilities and duties of citizenship in order to restore some balance to the Western conception of citizenship.[6] Furthermore, we must do so *now*. Recent calls for an increase in civic virtues and the strengthening of citizenship have been endowed with an almost palpable sense of urgency. These concerns are typically galvanised, or exacerbated, by a number of structural and ideological changes, normally associated with globalisation, which are seen to threaten nation states' economic and cultural sovereignty and resultant ability to govern their internal affairs.[7] If many citizenship theorists are to be believed, the requirement for civic virtues and 'good', active citizenship has never been greater. Structural and associated ideological changes such as the world-wide increase in ethnic and national conflicts, debates over welfare entitlements, global migration to developed industrial states, and stresses created by immigration have, Kymlicka and Norman argue,

> made clear that the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its 'basic structure' but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens, for example, their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise

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politics rarely engages the full attention of most citizens who are predominantly concerned with other commitments, chief of which is the necessity to earn a living. Citizens are, on the whole, more engaged in the economy than the political community. Where republican theorists see this engagement as a threat to civic virtue, arguing that economic activity belongs to the realm of necessity and politics to the realm of freedom, in reality, market involvement, if not economic activity in its entirety, is seen more and more as the realm of freedom, and politics as the domain of necessity. The assumption that politics is a means to private life is shared by many theorists of all political points of view.

[6] Perhaps the most strident of these calls are those emanating from the communitarian quarter, and theorists such as Amatai Etzioni (1991; 1993). Etzioni abhors the silences surrounding the obligations of citizenship, arguing that despite their clamour for rights, citizens are unwilling to participate in or endorse those obligations that would serve to ensure their realisation. Neither are such claims confined to political scientists and politicians. In an at times scathing polemic, celebrated expatriate art and cultural critic, Robert Hughes, castigates the development in the US polity of what he describes as an "infantilized culture of complaint". In the terms of this culture, "Big Daddy is always to blame and the expansion of rights goes on without the other half of citizenship - attachment to duties and obligations" (Hughes 1993: 10).

[7] One dissenting voice is that of Barry Hindess (2000). In the latest and most damning chapter of what seems to be an on-going project of de-bunking the mythology and reification that appears to have arisen around citizenship, Hindess proffers an alternative account of the reason for enhanced interest in citizenship in contemporary Western societies. He argues that whilst the socio-political conditions of contemporary Western societies have indeed changed in recent years, it is not so much the changed conditions themselves as their *perception* in relation to a nostalgic view of the past - in which Western societies were held to be self-governing communities of citizens - that has driven the recent upsurge of interest in citizenship. Now that perceptions of changed conditions have rendered the previously comforting discourse of citizenship less relevant to the work of government than was recently held to be the case, citizenship itself is seen by many politicians and academics as in need of reconstruction (Hindess 2000: 69). Talk of citizenship might best, Hindess argues elsewhere, be regarded as one of the central organising features of Western political discourse (1993).

> personal responsibility in their economic demands and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment. Without citizens who possess these qualities, democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable. (1995: 284)

Claus Offe (1997) shares Kymlicka's and Norman's understanding of the importance of the individual citizen and her or his civic attributes to the democratic political process, its effective operation and ultimate survival. Although modern politics is now largely a matter of collective representative actors involved in processes of interest group pluralism, Offe argues that this does not diminish the role of individual citizens who, as members, voters, and supporters constitute these parties and associations.

However, having reviewed a body of (then) recent work on citizenship theory which focusses on the "identity and conduct of individual citizens, including their responsiblities, loyalties and roles" (1995: 284), Kymlicka and Norman conclude, after Macedo (1990) and William Galston (1991), that the decline of civic virtue in Western societies, so prevalent in the literature on citizenship, remains equivocal. On the basis of his 1997 study of the reconstruction of modern welfare states, and of the implicit assumptions regarding the motivations and behaviours of actors entailed in the welfare state's operations which sustained this reconstruction, Julian Le Grand (1997) reaches a similar conclusion about the qualities and attitudes of citizens in the West. In "Knights, knaves or pawns? Human behaviour and social policy", LeGrand traces what he believes to be a fundamental shift in welfare policy-makers' beliefs concerning human motivation and behaviour. The post-war system of social security in Western countries was built on assumptions that the operators and financiers of the welfare state were predominantly composed of public-spirited, altruistic individuals or, as Le Grand describes them, 'Knights'. Recipients of benefits of the welfare state, on the other hand, were not considered active altruists, or knights, but rather essentially passive 'pawns'. Under the influence of changes which called into question these implicit assumptions of human motivation, Le Grand argues the knight-and-pawn strategies of welfare provision were replaced with 'knavish' ones - strategies that assume that self-interest rather than altruism and public-spiritedness are the fundamental motivation of all welfare service actors. These welfare developments, then, are held to be partly a reaction to a general loss of faith in the benevolence of human nature. In the absence of unequivocal empirical evidence to suggest whether or not this belief is well-founded, however, Le Grand argues against the development of strategies that appeal only to knaves or knights, instead defending robust policies for the design of welfare strategies or institutions which may accommodate appeals to both the knight and the knave.

Political competence and moral autonomy in the modern socio-political landscape
Although there is clearly some conjecture as to the relative presence or absence of civic virtues in modern Western societies, ample empirical evidence suggests that the typical Western democratic citizen is lacking in political competence (a body of literature which I review and discuss momentarily). This particular problem has exercised political scientists for decades, and political philosophers for considerably longer. Somewhat surprisingly, though, it does not figure explicitly - and then only in a partial sense - in many citizenship theorists' deliberations about what constitutes, or should constitute, 'good citizenship'.

Where citizenship theorists *do* discuss political virtues as a component of 'good citizenship', they invariably emphasise the citizen's desire and willingness to participate in political processes, and to exercise civility and self-restraint in the course of this participation, for 'the common good'. Rather less attention is devoted to the likely need for some standards of individual political competence to ensure the individual's ability to express and defend her or his own moral autonomy (if necessary *against* 'the common good', and democratic structures and processes).[8] From this partial perspective, it is indeed possible and valid for Kymlicka and Norman (1995) to conclude that it is unclear how urgent is the need to promote 'good citizenship'. However, if one stresses the typical citizen's (perhaps) limited ability to exercise the rights of the status of citizen - to express and protect their individual autonomy - and if one envisions these as potentially or increasingly threatened, then the picture is changed somewhat. In this scenario, calls for 'good', active citizenship - where these portray as political virtues the enhancement of people's capacities for meaningful political participation - may, indeed, be legitimately imbued with a sense of urgency. The 'urgency' of the need for good citizenship, on this view, depends on how seriously one takes the perceived threat to individual citizens' moral autonomy. It also hinges on the extent to which one considers citizens' political competence as a prerequisite, or even as necessary, for the protection of moral autonomy.

'New' citizenship theorists[9] and the question of moral autonomy

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[8] Thomas Janoski (1998) rejects Bryan Turner's (1990) proposal to include 'competence' in his definition of citizenship, on the grounds that while 'active' (civil) citizenship rights may require competence, 'passive' (legal and social) rights do not (Janoski 1998: 10). In defending his argument, Janoski cites the example of mentally disabled citizens or those in a coma who may be incompetent for some political and participation rights, but to whom legal and social rights still accrue.
[9] Maurice Roche (1992) considers the branch of sociology dealing with 'the problem of citizenship' since the mid-1980s to be sufficiently distinct from previous sociological considerations to warrant the moniker: "the new sociology of citizenship" (1992: 188). Indeed, he argues that 'the new sociology of citizenship' itself constitutes part of a more general attempt on the part of mainstream sociology to "reorient itself to the realities of social life, politics and history in the late twentieth century" (Roche

Welfare recipients' moral autonomy, in particular, has always been envisioned as vulnerable. Arguably, this is especially so now, given the changing nature of the modern welfare state and the development of citizenship along increasingly contractualist lines. 'New' citizenship theorists, such as Paul Higgs, chart the emergence of what they see as a new status of the citizen, and requirement for novel forms of citizenship practice which effectively demand 'the return of the citizen' in a more active (though still defensive) role. In recent years, Higgs (1998) argues that the principles of universalism and collectivism as protection from the negative consequences of a market society (championed in a post-war Marshallian conception of citizenship) have come to be seen as anachronistic. A combination of the general rise in real incomes and increased cost of welfare have contributed to an emphasis on privatised consumption, and a shift of focus in social policy from the collective to the individual. This shift, Higgs asserts, may be seen as part of a more general social and cultural change in which "the construction of self-identity and lifestyle have become paramount influences" (1998: 186).[10]

1992: 188), which sociology's traditional theoretical paradigms and empirical concerns leave it ill-equipped to understand and/or explain. Specifically, the new sociology of citizenship is animated by the need to conceptualise the new politics of citizens' duties and rights in the context of citizenship's changing meaning. The meaning of 'social' citizenship, in particular, is being transformed with the reconstruction of the welfare state in most Western societies under the twin social forces of structural and ideological change. As Roche sees it, the structural changes of most import to the transformation of social citizenship are globalisation and technological transformation in the capitalist economy, together with the global and sub-national political dynamics associated with these economic changes (1992: 186). In terms of ideological changes, Roche stresses the need for a new sociology of citizenship to consider the relevance of those ideologies associated not just with (progressive) new social movements, such as the ecology and feminist movements, but also more traditional, neo-conservative movements, as well as pro-market liberalism.

[10] Writers like Bryan Turner (1987) and Maurice Roche (1992) stress the influence of new social movements that protested the general exclusion of certain social categories on the grounds of paternalistic principles of protection in this general socio-cultural change, and in the reconstruction of welfare states. They hold that new social movements expand the experience of citizenship in new and encouraging directions. In one of his more recent writings on citizenship, Jack Barbalet (1996) is concerned to qualify such claims.

Although he concurs with assertions that Marshall's account of citizenship is outdated due to the many problematic or simply redundant assumptions on which it was based, Barbalet sees little merit or promise in an alternative, new social movement-based, or informed, conception of citizenship. Indeed, he perceives new social movements to be positively antithetical to the grounding and expansion of citizenship, and the unitary spirit of Marshallian citizenship. In support of this claim he argues, firstly, that where citizenship rights are by their nature universal, new social movements are particularistic, struggling for the rights of their members rather than those of all members of a common political community. Secondly, where new social movements frequently champion human rights as a more adequate and morally defensible basis for citizenship rights, Barbalet sees this notion as problematic. Due to their frequent lack of an institutional basis in the domestic practices of national societies, human rights are both open to abuse as a means of sanction by one state against another, and, as Marshall himself recognised, less realisable than citizenship rights. Thirdly, new social movements stress the primacy of citizen obligations and duties and the dependent standing of rights in relation to obligations. In this way, they align themselves - philosophically at least - with right-wing and anti-state authoritarian conceptions of citizenship.

Barbalet is perhaps a little too dismissive of the role and influence of new social movements in socio-historical change and, thereby, the expansion of conceptions of citizenship. Barbalet tends to privilege 'structure' in his reading of the historical developments that have led to the Marshallian account of citizenship being 'out of date', and, in doing so, neglects the instrumental role played by new social

Through welfare states' promotion of privatised consumption, individual agency and choice, 'freedom' is increasingly forcibly associated with the private domestic sphere of consumption. In contradistinction, the realm of public welfare is represented as one of danger and risk (or, 'unfreedom'), due to the individual(ised) failings of its denizens to choose wisely, and the resultant threat posed by these individuals to the public purse. In Higgs' account, by means of the aforementioned processes of individuation and consumerism, citizenship has been recast in terms of the free exercise of personal choice, with government programmes to be evaluated in relation to the extent to which they enhance that choice. Whilst this notion of contract (rather than entitlement) is applied positively to those dealing with risk 'creatively', it is also administered negatively to recipients of welfare benefits who are expected to comply with the 'technology of the self' deemed appropriate by experts in the service of welfare institutions, or else be punished accordingly.

In effect, Higgs argues, a new relationship based on systems of governmentality has formed between state and citizen in which the citizen learns to engage with risks constructively because there is "no collective security net waiting to make good the damage" (1998: 193). Furthermore, through the utilisation of 'risk' and processes of governmentality, this communitarian reconceptualisation of citizenship provides triggers and justification for the 'risk management' activities of the 'minimalist' state, and thereby serves to underpin normative values in the context of a general decline in social consensus.

The freedom associated with the private domestic sphere of consumption is, Higgs wishes to emphasise, illusory. Whilst Higgs, after Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991a; 1991b; 1992), recognises the potential benefits associated with the

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movements in bringing about a re-examination of this conception of citizenship through questioning its background assumptions. For example, Barbalet attributes the undermining of the 'traditional' family, which served to support Marshall's account of citizenship, to post-world war two economic conditions of high structural unemployment, decline in real wages and the resultant necessity for married women with dependent children to participate in the workforce. What he fails to mention is the not necessarily attendant rise of the feminist movement and this movement's influence in changing social values, including many women's desire to participate in the workforce. Barbalet's criticism of new social movements as a basis of the foundation and expansion of citizenship on the grounds of the particularistic, rather than universal, nature of their struggle for rights, may also be seen as somewhat partial. This position does not adequately acknowledge that whilst citizenship *rights* may, indeed, be universal, the means for their realisation are not. The question here appears to be one of intentionality. Do social movements' struggles for increased rights for their members intend to redress this imbalance and, in doing so, expand the realm of the political and citizenship as meaningful membership for all? I return to and take up this question in Chapter Six. (On the above point, see also David Held's (1989: 199-200) admonition of Anthony Giddens for his perceived failure to sufficiently account for the role of social movements in questioning the nature and dimensions of citizenship. Giddens does not, according to Held, adequately extend Marshall's class-based analysis of various struggles for control and autonomy).

"reflexive conduct of life, the planning of one's own biography and social relations" (1998: 179), he argues that a reworking of citizenship along communitarian lines utilises concepts of risk and governmentality to impose a hierarchy of identities, thereby circumscribing the choices individuals are 'allowed' to make. The 'good' choice is effectively that which does not undermine community values; it is the choice that is 'given'. Moreover, the 'freedom' endorsed by welfare states is exclusive. Although the individual responsibility for choice is equally distributed in a communitarian conception of citizenship, the individually owned means to act on that responsibility is not (1998: 181).

The first point to be made here concerns the relative nature of risk, alluded to by Higgs. Because the means to act on the responsibility to exercise freedom is unequal, this ensures that the requirement for some means of defending individual moral autonomy will always be a more pressing matter for 'vulnerable' citizens, particularly welfare recipients, who need to establish, define and defend their interests. However, few citizens are immune to the demand that they should exercise the freedom to choose wisely. Higgs adopts, here, an idealist perspective. The citizen may well have been liberated in the sense that he or she must now learn to engage with risks constructively through the exercise of personal responsibility and choice, thereby gaining a degree of autonomy previously wanting. But, for Higgs, what the citizen in fact largely learns in these processes is social conformity, as the choices on offer are both limited and constrained by social context. In Higg's (after Bauman's (1988)) conception of freedom, it seems the freedom to choose is only *really* liberating if choices are genuine and unrestricted.

Preferences, and the choices they influence, are always subject to society's normative code. All but the most trenchant liberal-individualist theorist acknowledge that preferences and choices are, and should be, shaped, and, on occasion, 'given'. For example, whilst the left-liberal tradition is premised on a social ontology that holds that "people not only want to act on their choices, they also want to get those choices right" (Kymlicka 1989: 19), this tradition recognises that it cannot be assumed that in the absence of any authority to tell them what the 'right' choices are, citizens will arrive at these through a process of reflexive examination (Offe 1997). Left-liberalism acknowledges the inevitability, legitimacy, and even the potential benefits (both for the individual and the collective) of external influences on individual's preference formation. To illustrate, where Higgs stresses the regulative component of governmentality, it is also the case that in the new modes of regulating health, individuals will want to be healthy, to an extent doing away with the need for

bureaucracies for regulation (Rose 1992: 27). My point, here, is that extreme partisan theoretical positions do not provide a useful basis for either the assessment or development of political competence.

When we admit the implausibility of the agnostic and exogenising strict libertarian perspective, as well as the potentiality associated with contractualist forms of citizenship, we are confronted with the questions: What standards of competence in preference formation are now demanded of citizens by social and political theorists? What standards are necessary for citizens to first recognise, then truly maximise their autonomy? and, How closely do these coincide? Put differently, according to social and political thinkers, do 'traditional' standards of political competence adequately prepare the contemporary citizen for various forms of political engagement and the realisation of individual moral autonomy, or are more critical standards (such as those proposed by critical citizenship theorists) necessary?

Other 'new' citizenship writers are less pessimistic regarding the liberatory potential of contractualist forms of citizenship - and/or defend less exacting standards of individual moral autonomy. Anna Yeatman (1996), for example, is pragmatic both in her assessment of what she terms 'new contractualism' and the critiques leveled against it. Because she recognises that contractualism can be made to serve and not undermine the value of equality, Yeatman is particularly wary of external critiques of the assumptions of contractualism that, typically, by conflating the broader ethos of contractualism with its liberal (free-market championing) versions, risk 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'.

Having argued that new contractualism draws its sustenance mostly from the theoretical discourse of rational choice theory and its individualising of the actor, Yeatman claims that until we have an adequate account of how individualised social relationships work, and what makes them possible, we will not be in a position to conduct a telling internal critique of theoretical contractualist discourse. For example, feminist critiques which take to task contractualism's assumption of an autonomous individual with a capacity for rational choice do not challenge liberal contractualism unduly. Ultimately, these accounts merely demonstrate that the individualised actor is not a natural category, but one formed through social processes, leaving liberal contractualism - which is concerned with ends, not means - untroubled. This sociological insight does, however, inform what Yeatman (1996) considers to be the most effective critique of contractualism developed thus far - that offered by theorists of governmentality, and employed above by Higgs (1998). This perspective, through its understanding of the

relational character of individualised action, sees contractualism as a technology of government which works "by means of the self-regulating capacities of citizens as these are informed by the normalising effects of professional expertise among other things" (Yeatman 1996: 50). Whilst theories of governmentality allow us to identify regulative regimes masquerading as de-regulative through their attention to the discursive practices by which 'individualised units of contractual capacity' (or, citizens) are formed, they do not enquire into the substance of what it means to be an individualised unit of agency. As a result, Yeatman argues, these theories fail to provide criterion by which we may distinguish those discursive practices that serve or undermine individual autonomy.[11] In the absence of this potential basis for a more fundamental internal critique of new contractualism, Yeatman proposes as an interim measure to tackle liberal contractualism on its own territory by insisting that it be made more adequately contractual. This entails ensuring that the capacities of all parties to a contractual relationship are rendered equal, both through their statutory recognition as contractual agents, and the provision of resources to facilitate their participation.

Even a cursory examination of Yeatman's assessment of contractualism brings to light the importance of political competence of some description as a resource for the typical actor. To guarantee equality through informed and negotiated consent, social processes, outcomes and relationships should now - theoretically, at least - be made accountable to rational, individualised enquiry and judgement. This assumes, at minimum, on the part of the citizen - especially in the absence of guaranteed and/or trusted forms of representation - the ability to assess whether or not the above requirements have indeed been fulfilled. It also imputes to the citizen the wherewithal to appraise critically the contractual capacities with which they have been furnished and/or endowed, to determine whether or not their constitution as an individualised person - equal in terms of contractual capacities, rights and obligations - is just.

Beyond this, Yeatman's review also accentuates the dichotomy between those immediate, practical capacities necessary to ensure some modicum of equality, and more abstract, critical capacities demanded by theorists such as Iris Young (1990; 1998), which would ideally enable citizens to defend their moral autonomy through

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[11] Barry Hindess and Mitchell Dean (1998) take issue with this assessment, arguing that Yeatman's critique of Foucauldian theories of governmentality is misplaced. Whereas Yeatman argues that Foucauldian theories of governmentality are limited through their commitment to the notion that the capacity for autonomy is socially determined, Hindess and Dean argue that this is not these theories' specific focus. Foucauldian theories of governmentality are, they maintain, less concerned with the capacities of the subject and the ways in which these are socially determined, and more with the processes through which certain versions of autonomy and freedom are mobilised "in the service of governmental objectives" (1998: 15).

constant critical attention to all social and political structures and processes that constrain and threaten this. A critical theory of citizenship, such as Young's, demands of actors the ability to recognise both the ways in which they are being constructed as individualised actors (as 'free'), and all instances of social oppression and domination perpetrated on and by themselves. From the perspective of this more radical standard of individual moral autonomy, Yeatman dismisses the feminist critique of contractualism too hastily; liberal contractualism *should* be concerned not only with ends, but also means. Both ends and means should be subjected to constant review and critique on the basis of their various assumptions and, in particular, their failure to accomodate difference or cultural diversity. 'Critical' citizens should determine every aspect of the democratic structures and processes by which they are governed. Yeatman is possibly too pragmatic, and this obscures her recognition of some theorists' demands for enhanced standards of individual moral autonomy. I will consider the critical theory position, along with its perceived failings, in relation to my case study in Chapter Six.

British sociologist Nick Ellison (1999) is similarly inclined to see possibilities in emerging forms of citizenship. According to him, the weakening of the bonds of the nation state and of traditional notions of citizenship as collective, solidaristic and cohesive, have enabled, and to a degree demanded, the development of a new and potentially liberating form of citizenship in the modern West, which he dubs 'defensive engagement'.

With the increasing fragmentation of traditional solidarities and reduced commitment and/or capacity of welfare states to maintain collectivist, solidaristic projects, many individuals are now obliged to defend themselves - seeking their own security and forms of belonging. Therefore, whilst citizenship retains its defensive element of old, the emphasis has now moved to the 'individualised strategies of social actors'. In the process of defending themselves from the "persistent and occasionally dramatic demands of economic, social, political and cultural change", social actors are also, Ellison maintains, increasingly likely to adopt active roles across a range of social and political spheres. This, in turn, will lead them to become creative and reflexive, more willing and able to resist "the rule of the state and of social power in all its forms" (1999: 8). Freed from enforced collectivism and permanent forms of belonging, and finding themselves in an increasingly contingent social world, individuals are also liable to form temporary solidarities, or as Ellison describes them, 'serial belongings', in the pursuit of their interests, and in search of security from risk.

Unfortunately, Ellison's account says little about the typical citizen's *capacity* to resist the rule of the state and other forms of social power, short of observing that economic and/or cultural capital is likely to improve her or his prospects in this enterprise. A rudimentary understanding of social and political institutions may be seen as the basis from which all forms of political engagement - whether these be 'formal' or 'informal', 'public' or 'private', derive. For example, the rule of the state or other forms of social power might 'legitimately' constrain social actors' preferences where these impinge upon the rights of others, or are deemed damaging to the individual's own interests. Furthermore, as Michel Foucault emphasises throughout much of his corpus, these powers may also be productive and enabling, promising to enhance actors' autonomy. Consequently, the social actor requires means with which to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate exercises of power, and when these are likely to prove beneficial or detrimental. Once again, we are returned to the need for some standards of political competence. However, political competence cannot be considered an assumed quantity. Nor can changed socio-political conditions necessarily be expected to enhance citizens' *abilities* to defend themselves from exercises of power, as Ellison seems to imply. Although changed circumstances may, indeed, promote - even demand - more active citizens and forms of citizenship, we still need to explicitly consider with what knowledge and/or 'ways of knowing' the individual learns to engage with risks constructively.

The above 'new' citizenship theorists recognise that with the progressive removal of collective security of all forms and accompanying individualisation processes, individuals are increasingly called upon to make their own choices and to accept responsibility for them. As a result, in processes of political engagement, individuals are obliged to a greater or lesser degree to become more self-regulating, creative and reflexive. Many citizens are forced out of their former passivity and largely upon their own resources by a general, individualised understanding of social policy. Theories of governmentality, upon which new citizenship theorists draw, help to provide us with an understanding of the context in which actors are now obliged to operate. At the same time, they hint at the importance of political competence. But as Hindess and Dean (1998) point out, these theories do not concern themselves with actors' capacities to discern instances and forms of governmentality and whether or not these contribute to, or detract from, their true freedom and autonomy. The question of primary interest to us here, then, is: of what *do* their 'political' resources consist, and are they, or are they not, adequate - according to various citizenship theorists - to the task? How do ordinary citizens *themselves* identify, understand and assess practices, processes and structures that serve or undermine individual autonomy?

Yeatman (1996) talks about contractualism's assumption of an autonomous individual with a capacity for rational choice. This indicates an assumed but rarely articulated standard of political competence on the part of the authors and administrators of contractualist processes in the modern welfare state.[12] It is to an identification and analysis of the implicit, general standard of political competence in the West that I must, therefore, now turn. In doing so, I seek to address the questions: How is political competence conceptualised; and, What qualities make for a citizen capable of enacting their political role in a considered adequate manner? Throughout the remainder of this chapter (and, indeed, the thesis as a whole), I question both the merits of this standard itself, and identify the forms of reasoning that it excludes. But before cataloguing the political demands of the *modern* democratic citizen, I first demonstrate the historical continuity of claims that the average citizen, due to his and, relatively recently, her, political incompetence, poses a threat to democracy and, thus, ultimately to her or his own sovereignty.

A history of problem citizens

The ordinary citizen has, it seems, been a thorn in the side of some political theorists since the birth of democracy and citizenship. This was especially so for Plato, whose idealistic (or, as many subsequent political theorists would argue, realistic) pure form of polity, outlined in *The Republic*, assigned to ordinary citizens a peripheral and subservient role - due to their perceived limited capacities and ensuing threat to democracy.

Plato saw the commitment to political equality and liberty both as the hallmark of democracy, and as the source of its most regrettable characteristics. A majority of citizens, he maintained, has neither the skill nor experience to exercise political judgement. These citizens conduct their affairs - with political dealings proving no exception - on the basis of impulse, sentiment and prejudice. Unable to discern the relative merits of politicians and buoyed by their political status, 'the people' respond favourably to those populist leaders who profess to be 'their friend' and acquiesce to their ill-considered, and increasingly unrestrained, demands. 'True' leaders who, by virtue of their superior skills and expertise, *should* exercise the greatest claim to rule legitimately, are marginalised, and, in the absence of their reason, decision-making is limited to safe, 'saleable' options, with "careful judgements, difficult decisions, uncomfortable options, unpleasant truths ... of necessity ... generally avoided" (Held

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[12] As a corollary, contractualism also assumes a need to treat 'incompetent' individuals differently (Hindess 2002).

1987: 30). Thus, through their ignorance, 'the people' impose multifarious limits to social and political innovation and advancement.

Although Plato accepted that the claims of liberty and political equality may enhance plurality in the polis, he held that by granting citizens license to indulge their desires, these claims also, invariably, promote "a permissiveness that erodes respect for political and moral authority" (1987: 30). Lacking self-restraint, respect for leaders, and for the very notion of leadership, the citizen becomes wholly devoted to the pursuit of short-term, individual interests, rather than those of the state as a whole. Without an over-arching commitment to the good of the community, social cohesion is threatened and political life degenerates into a series of unedifying disputes over sectional interests. Ultimately, the polis is fragmented, democracy unstable, and social inequality both rife and with no possibility of improvement due to the lack of a shared sense of social justice.

As a consequence, the characteristics that have come to be associated with the liberal-tradition-inspired model of democracy were an anathema to Plato. He prized instead a tradition of civic duty and a shared sense of responsibility to distinctive matters of the public realm. The claims of the state, in his view, should be given unique and privileged precedence over those of the individual citizen, who is only able to perform her or his functions, satisfy her or his needs and fulfil her- or himself as a participating member of an efficient, strong and secure state. The only viable means to ensure the well-being of the state and the necessary restraint of the people is, as Plato sees it, through the rule of 'The Philosopher King'. The philosophers, armed with a rigorously attained and objective knowledge of 'the good life' and how it may be attained, should co-ordinate the actions of the people under the 'rule of wisdom' and in pursuit of the just, common good.

We can trace here in Plato's thought the origins of the classical/civic-republican tradition and its long-standing grievance against the philosophy and practice of liberal-individualism. The supposed civic virtues deficit discussed earlier in this chapter is also evident. For Plato, political competence demands of the citizen a willingness to participate in democratic processes in pursuit of the common good. The citizen must be prepared to exercise restraint in political demands, and willing to cultivate and practice dispassionate, disciplined, rational and objective reason in political thought. Plato had a complete absence of faith in ordinary citizens' ability to exercise such self-restraint in political judgment, with the only possible solution, as he saw it, being their rule by more willing and capable elites.

Historically speaking, then, ordinary citizens have always posed a problem for some political theorists, and for largely the same reasons. The 'people's' political thought exhibits little or no discipline or rationality, rendering those people susceptible to populist persuasion and appeals to self-, rather than general- interest, thereby limiting the possibilities of democracy and, for some theorists, even threatening its survival. It is now necessary to consider in further detail the question of citizens' political competence and, specifically, of what this consists in modern Western societies. Following this, I then briefly assess the relationship between this competence, or lack thereof, and the perceived health of democracy, based on the assumed role of the citizen in political processes. I do so because, as noted earlier, the moral autonomy of the individual citizen is intimately linked to the health and welfare of democracy.

Problem citizens, political competence and the political sciences

The advent of the political sciences and the concomitant development of more sophisticated methods with which to test hypotheses regarding the political competences of mass publics have enabled researchers to quantify those observations, suspicions and fears harboured by classical political theorists. Perhaps the most influential research in this area is that conducted by American political scientist, Philip Converse, in the mid-1960s. I dwell on Converse's research in some detail here because this work furnishes us with a more-or-less universally agreed-upon (in the political science community) standard of, and set of criteria for, political competence. My primary task in this section is to identify these criteria and to demonstrate their general acceptance as 'basically legitimate', despite some critics' demands for qualification on various grounds. In the process, and in subsequent sections, I progressively isolate those criteria of thought that are assumed, dismissed and/or excoriated as making up political *in*competence. Later in the chapter, I demonstrate that Converse's critique, and the orthodox position of the political sciences, effectively amounts to the censure of the common sense of the ordinary citizen.

Philip Converse's (1964) study of belief systems in mass publics is considered something of a landmark in political research, and a comprehensive indictment of the average American citizen's political competence. In the mid-1960s, Converse examined American voters' political behaviours to see whether these peoples' political thinking could be described as either 'ideological' in the sense that it took the form of deductive reasoning from a cogent, well-thought-out 'belief system' or a "configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence" (1964: 207). For Converse, quality in political thinking

derives from the degree to which the composite idea-elements of people's belief systems exhibit constraint, or are bound together in such a manner as to ensure that the belief system itself may be seen as a logical whole. In other words, Converse maintains that quality in peoples' political thinking is determined by its internal consistency and predictability: "in the static case, 'constraint' may be taken to mean the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specified attitude, that he holds certain further ideas and attitudes" (1964: 207). As Converse sees it, the benefits of constraint in individuals' belief systems are multiple. Firstly, constraint serves the purpose of parsimony. Given a grasp of a particular idea-element from a standard political belief system and the constraints surrounding it, the actor may understand, and describe economically, political objects and political change. Such mastery also enables the actor to organise meaningfully large amounts of disparate information, or, in Converse's parlance, to systematise a "wide range of specific idea-elements into more tightly constrained wholes" (1964: 207). With this means of organisation, new political events may be translated and hold more meaning, retention of political information from the past is far more adequate, and political behaviour more closely approximates that of sophisticated 'rational' models, which assume relatively full information (1964: 227). The political sophistication achieved through constraint in belief systems allows the engaged citizen to draw connections between different policy areas and to describe these broader configurations in the basic abstractions of ideology, thereby developing a more effective global point of view about politics.

In order to empirically test respondents' grasp of the political system, and the degree of sophistication in their political thinking, Converse employed the liberal-conservative continuum as an analytic. Firstly, he structured respondents' 'levels of conceptualisation' according to the degree to which these actors demonstrated an ability to employ this "rather elegant high-order abstraction" as a "yardstick against which political objects and their shifting policy significance over time were evaluated" (1964: 215). Converse then tested the ideological dimensions of judgement in the population by identifying the proportions of a normal sample who showed some recognition of the terms 'liberal' and 'conservative', and of their meaning. Through this research, he found that a majority of American citizens lack a contextual grasp of the political system. Not only are they bereft of an awareness that two idea-elements go together, but they are also devoid of a more complex and abstract understanding of *why* idea-elements go together. American citizens, Converse discovered, did not possess sufficient understanding of the terms themselves to see the merit of the continuum as an analytic, or to be able to use this continuum in an evaluative sense. Upon further examination, Converse discovered that most of his respondents were also unable to relate statements of culturally familiar

principles to instances in which these principles are applied. Because these individuals lack the contextual grasp to comprehend that the specific case and general principle belong in the same belief system, they are able to entertain, untroubled by the inherent contradiction, psychologically independent beliefs about both (1964: 230). Moreover, Converse argues that the lack of constraint he found in the American mass public may not simply be dismissed as resulting from different forms of articulation or organisation of belief elements.

In response to the first of these counter-hypotheses, Converse points out that his respondents' confusion over ideological dimensions was matched by a decline in constraint among the specific belief elements that these ideological dimensions help to organise (1964: 231). Were these people simply unable to articulate in more arcane and educated terms the lines along which their political beliefs were organised, Converse would consider this of little import - so long as these beliefs were indeed ordered in some, logical, manner. However, this was not the case. Likewise, the argument that the politically unsophisticated share with the politically sophisticated an equally broad range of belief elements although these are idiosyncratic and put together in a great variety of ways because the unsophisticated are isolated from the cultural stream of information about which belief elements go together, cannot be sustained. When Converse measured the same belief elements for the same politically unsophisticated individual over time, he found that there was no stability or constraint in these beliefs. This instability provides evidence both of the mass public's general political disinterest, and the absence of any alternative forms of constraint in their political thinking - they either do not have beliefs, or they offer meaningless opinions on public issues. According to Converse such instability also imposes an upper limit to the degree of orderly constraint that could be expected in these individuals' belief systems, for instability characterising one belief element "limits the degree of orderly constraint that could be expected to emerge in static measurement between this unstable belief and another, even a perfectly stable one" (1964: 241). One bad apple spoils the whole barrel, so to speak.

Converse concludes that constraint among idea-elements visible at the level of political elites cannot be assumed at lower levels. Elites exhibit high degrees of constraint in their belief systems, and this is to be expected. Elites *experience* political belief systems as logically constrained clusters of ideas, and constantly think about the elements involved - a process that entails eliminating strictly logical inconsistencies, defined from an objective point of view. As one moves further down the levels from elite sources of standard political belief systems to the politically unsophisticated, though, the

contextual grasp of these belief systems declines dramatically, and the range of relevant, that is, coherent and constrained, belief systems, becomes narrower. Rather than belief systems *per se*, one encounters a widely dispersed proliferation of clusters of ideas, among which little constraint - even logical constraint - is felt. Objects that are central to political belief systems at the level of elites are transformed from abstract, ideological principles to more 'recognisable' and increasingly 'simple' concepts, such as general social groupings and charismatic leaders, and then to objects of immediate personal experience, such as jobs and families. Moreover, these 'pathological' changes in belief systems are not, Converse maintains, limited to a "thin and disoriented bottom layer of the lumpenproletariat", but rather, "they are immediately relevant in understanding the bulk of mass political behaviour" (1964: 213).

Plato could feel vindicated. Converse's empirical research confirms that ordinary citizens' political thinking lacks constraint - with no organisation, rationality or stability evident in their political beliefs. Unlike Plato, however, Converse makes no explicit normative judgements regarding the implications of his findings (further emphasising the dispassionate, objective and scientific nature of his work). For example, he does not propose that the politically unsophisticated should be ruled by more capable elites, or negate the prospect of citizens' 'political improvement'. On the contrary, Converse feels that with increased education, information and participation, mass publics may become elite publics, or more nearly approximate them in terms of belief constraint. (In the final section of this chapter, I discuss what the education of citizens necessitates for various political theorists. Effectively, I argue, this process amounts to taming the considered unruly nature of ordinary people's common sense.) Nor does Converse speculate in any depth upon the consequences of his findings for the functioning of democracies. We are left to assume that the predictability prized by many democratic theorists and secured through constraint in belief systems in mass publics was seen by him as an unqualified 'good thing'. The task of identifying other more specific implications he leaves for other thinkers.

Political competence complexified

Converse has his detractors. Criticisms of his work, and of that of other public opinion researchers, may be generally categorised as internal or external. There are those who seek to qualify - but never dismiss entirely - Converse's findings and/or conclusions themselves on the grounds of their flawed or partial presuppositions. Others agree that citizens are, on the whole, politically unsophisticated, but question the importance of the political competence (or this rigorous a conception of political competence) of the

average citizen to representative democracy.[13] In the following section, I review these critiques, all the while drawing out those characteristics of common sense that are discussed in detail in the next chapter. Stanley Feldman falls into the former of the above-mentioned categories. He argues that Converse may have underestimated the relevance (and, perhaps, potential) of alternative political conceptual frameworks.

Confronted with the problem of explaining the ways in which political attitudes and preferences are formed in mass publics in the face of evidence that political thinking does not derive, as Converse discovered, from broad and interrelated political principles, Feldman (1988) focuses on a body of research in public opinion and mass belief systems that suggests specific attitudes and beliefs are, in part, a reflection of people's core beliefs and values. According to such theories, equipped with knowledge of certain core beliefs and values (and a number of other criteria), the citizen may assess the desirability of policies or the performance of politicians based on the extent to which these are consistent with considered important beliefs and values. "Viewed this way", Feldman says, "people do not need to be ideologues in order to evaluate politics on the basis of beliefs and values" (1988: 418). Moreover, people need not be 'politically sophisticated' in order to procure the core beliefs and values used for evaluating politics, as these are ingrained in the nation's political culture and assimilated by citizens through "processes of socialisation and continual reinforcement by the norms of society and the language of political debate" (1988: 418).[14] On this view, citizens employ specific values and beliefs to make sense of the political world, but these values and beliefs do

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[13] Located somewhere between these two positions are authors who focus on the nature and relevance of 'external' influences on citizens' political behaviours, and to assessments of these citizens as deficient. For example, Henry Mayo (1960) suggests that when considering the inability of the average citizen to live up to the exacting requirements of democracy we need also account for problems inherent to the nature of democracy itself, and their possible effects on citizen participation and democracy. For instance, democracy may prove confusing to citizens due to the complexities and subtleties of policy making, or the system's methods of operation. In addition, Mayo points out that democracy contains "no ideology, no body of agreed and simple doctrine, no great aims or purpose to inspire devotion and sacrifice" (1960: 284) on the part of citizens. Gerald M. Pomper is critical of the Michigan Studies' comparative neglect of the political environment as an independent variable (in *The American Voter*), arguing that the methodology of survey research as a whole has led to an overemphasis on the individual behaviour of isolated respondents (1972: 427), treating them as isolated from their environment and shaping influences. He holds that political researchers should, in particular, attend to the stimuli voters receive from the parties and other electoral actors and their quality, on the grounds that citizens can only behave as rationally and responsibly as they are 'allowed'. Clear-headed parties, he claims, make for voters who are likely to relate their policy preferences to their partisan affiliations, to see a difference between parties, and to locate the relative position of parties. V. O. Key Jr. (1968) similarly argues that solidification of party positions forecloses opportunities for public choice among alternatives. When there *are* party positions and differences he contends, like Pomper, that people can perceive them. Indeed, Key goes so far as to suggest that if democracies are viewed as 'decaying', this may be attributed more to the shortcomings of 'political influentials' and their aptitude for acceptable public opinion formation, than to the inadequacies or ignorance of the democratic masses.

[14] Although these 'core beliefs and values' need not break with or undermine dominant beliefs and values, it is important to note that a range of beliefs and values, and possible combinations of these, is typically available.

not constitute an ideology, for it is only when values and beliefs are interconnected in an abstract manner that the basis of an ideology appears.

This perspective, as outlined by Feldman, may go some way towards explaining the internal inconsistency and instability in the political attitudes of many citizens, such as those sanctioned for their alleged socio-political ignorance by Converse in his work on mass belief systems. If political attitudes and beliefs are seen not primarily as a consequence of ideological reasoning, but instead as a result of the influence of less systematically structured core beliefs and values, then the slight correlation between conceptually related issues evident in Converse's findings may be attributed less to the ignorance and apathy of the individual citizen and more to the presence and availability of competing principles. Converse demands *some* form of order, some organising logic, in peoples' belief systems, but the specific and practical orientations of the mass public are multiple and, therefore, these people are reliant upon particular beliefs and values *relevant to these* to make sense of the political world.

Problem citizens, political competence and democracy

Like many of those citizenship theorists discussed earlier in this chapter, political scientists who adhere to the 'realist' theory of democracy take the political incompetence of the masses to be inescapable. These political researchers are inclined to agree with assessments of the average citizen as politically inept, but question the relevance of such judgements and ancillary dire pronouncements for democracy in the light of the nature and demands of current political practice. They consider politically unsophisticated citizens to constitute less of a problem in representative democracies, which are premised upon a generally accepted 'political division of labour'. Henry Mayo (1960), for instance, is concerned to qualify Plato's charge of incompetence, or lack of political wisdom, directed against democracy's principle of political equality. Although Plato may be accurate in his assessment of the mass of the citizenry as being ignorant of the technical workings of democracy and incapable of making complete and reasoned judgements on public policy, Mayo maintains this critique "no longer carries the same force against the indirect, representative democracy with which we are familiar" (1960: 285). Where the people do not make policy decisions, rather electing representatives to do this for them, "political wisdom of a high order on every complex issue is not required of all citizens" (1960: 285) but, instead, by their leaders.

Joseph A. Schumpeter (1976), whose assessment of citizens' political capacities, like Converse's, privileges constraint and independence in individual will-formation as indicators of quality, defends a similar position. He urges democratic theorists to

abandon unrealistic notions of 'the people' holding a definite and rational opinion about every policy issue, rooted in classical theory, proferring instead - as more empirically and theoretically defensible - a view of democracy as 'elite competition'. This view would assign to citizens the less onerous and more realistic task in this contest of electing the individuals who are to arrive at political decisions. Schumpeter argues that, for the utilitarian notion of a common will upon which the classical theory of democracy is based to qualify for rational sanction, a fundamental precondition would be the ability to attribute to the will of the individual a degree of independence and rationality which Schumpeter finds "altogether unrealistic" (1976: 39). The modal citizen of classical theory would have to exhibit, and exercise, a will that was distinct and definite; something more than "an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions" (1976: 39). Such an individual will-formation entails a capacity to isolate, observe, and critically assess the facts related to a given public policy issue, and to arrive at a decision according to the rules of logical inference and independently of pressure groups and propaganda - which do not "qualify for ultimate data of the democratic process" (1976: 39). Schumpeter seriously questions whether these conditions are fulfilled to the extent required to make democracy - in its classical guise - work.

Christopher Achen (1975) concurs with the above authors' appraisals of representative democracy's more modest requirements of ordinary citizens, but is keen to emphasise that even representative democracy requires of its citizens a minimal, or threshold degree of political competence in order to select the representatives who best reflect or support their political preferences. It is in relation to this point that he takes issue with some of Converse's findings and more dramatic conclusions on methodological grounds. Whilst he concedes to most researchers of public opinion the fact that citizens are largely politically unsophisticated - exhibiting, at most, a general grasp of political issues - Achen argues that this deficit need not pose a major threat to a theory of representative democracy. A theory of representative democracy recognises that the sheer volume and complexity of issues confronted by modern nation states prohibits a more detailed understanding of the business of government by most citizens. Citizens are, in this view, merely required to have enough understanding of public policy to enable them to select representatives who reflect or support their preferences. Achen is understandably concerned by the allegation, levelled by many public opinion researchers, that citizens lack even these capacities, but finds more troubling still Philip Converse's claim that the average citizen does not simply hold an unsophisticated or poorly organised preference on public policy matters, but lacks an image of the world coherent enough to enable the formation of preferences at all. According to Converse,

the average citizen exhibits little continuity in thinking on a given political issue over time, and only a slight correlation between attitudes to conceptually related issues at the same time (1964: 231-41). On the basis of these findings, he argues that a majority of citizens has no conceptual framework for political decision-making and, hence, no real political attitudes.

Achen rejects Converse's argument primarily on the grounds that Converse's (1964) analysis of the attitudinal stability of citizens is based on the a priori assumption that all instability of viewpoint may be attributed to the volatility of citizens' political attitudes, rather than the reliability of the survey instrument employed. Upon a re-examination of Converse's findings, Achen discovered that the instability of respondents' political attitudes could largely be ascribed to the vagueness of the questions asked, and other errors of measurement in the interpretation of data. Indeed, Achen argues that when the measurement errors of Converse's analysis are accounted for, "the well-informed and interested are found to have nearly as much difficulty with the questions as the ordinary [citizen]" (1975: 1229). Moreover, the ordinary citizen's political thinking demonstrates far more stability and coherence than Converse credits it with - not, however, that coherence and stability in political views should necessarily be seen as unequivocal indicators of a well-informed or sophisticated citizen. Achen argues that other, "more subtle ... features of conceptual sophistication" (1975: 1231), such as wisdom, may be considered equally important.

In his concluding remarks Achen almost offhandedly points to an interstice in political research: the identification and study of other, less tangible, criteria of political sophistication.[15] The nature and significance of these criteria to and for individual moral autonomy and political processes more generally - rather than simply its 'ideological' character, or constraint and stability - will concern us later in the thesis.

Clearly, not all political theorists and commentators who recognise the political failings of the citizen see this as necessarily constituting a problem for democratic practice. Indeed, some, such as Bernard Berelson, Paul Lazarsfeld and William McPhee (1948), argue that a certain degree of political unsophistication in the populus is positively functional for democracy. Whilst they do not subscribe to some of the more dire pronouncements of political theorists concerning the failings of the typical citizen, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee conclude on the basis of The Elmira Study voting data that certain requirements assumed for the successful operation of democracy are

[15] Other authors (Key 1968; Mayo 1960; Pomper 1972) argue that survey methodology is not appropriate to capture all aspects of respondents' political awareness, but do not otherwise depart from traditional standards of political competence, or assumptions of their validity.

not met by the behaviour of the 'average' citizen. Where traditional normative democratic theory demands that the citizen be interested in, well-informed about, and actively participative in, political affairs, many democratic citizens are not strongly motivated to participate in the political discussions that make up political life. Similarly, although according to the theory of democracy the citizen is expected to cast her or his vote on the basis of principle, with reference to the public good and having considered rationally the implications of this vote in the light of the alternative proposals, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee argue that a majority of citizens do not approximate these qualifications either. Instead, "the ordinary voter, bewildered by the complexity of modern political problems, unable to determine clearly what the consequences are of alternative lines of action, remote from the arena, and incapable of bringing information to bear on principle" (1948: 309), typically allows her- or himself to be influenced by sentiment and the opinions of trusted others. Thus, in Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's view, we are confronted with the seeming paradox that despite the failure of individual citizens to satisfy the requirements for a democratic system of government, as outlined by political theorists, the system of democracy itself is more or less successful, satisfying certain requirements of a functional political organisation. Although individually citizens' failings appear to pose a risk to the system of democracy, considered collectively, these properties serve to ensure the realisation of certain general features necessary for the functionality and survival of the democratic system as a whole.

While they counsel against the envisioning of citizen complacency as a functional requirement of democracy, arguing that citizens' apathy must have limits, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee argue that political philosophy has been remiss in its focus upon the virtues of the individual citizen to the exclusion of the workings of the democratic system as a whole. Moreover, classical political theorists, although correct in their identification of the ideal virtues of the democratic citizen, are held by these authors to have demanded these virtues in "too extreme or doctrinal a form" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1948: 322). Citizens, they maintain, *do* have some principles, information, rationality and interest where it comes to political decision making, but not in the extreme, elaborate, comprehensive, detailed form recommended by classical political philosophers and theorists.

Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee depart most distinctly from political researchers concerned with citizens' political competence, such as Schumpeter and Converse, in their problematising of the notion of rationality in citizens' political calculations. They argue that for many voters political preferences may better be considered analogous to cultural tastes; to be matters of sentiment and disposition rather than reasoned

preferences. In this vein, they perceive 'sense of fitness' to be a more striking feature of political preference than reason and calculation. Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee are quite right to call into question assumptions of what is meant by rationality, and to (perhaps unwittingly) emphasise the relationship and importance of 'culture' to peoples' political calculations. However, they perhaps draw too rigid a line between cultural 'tastes' as 'depoliticised' and detached from on-going, reflexive review and negotiation, and rationality in a "rigorous or narrow sense" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1948: 310). Where they argue that peoples' cultural tastes and political preferences are characterised "more by faith than by conviction and by wishful expectation rather than careful prediction of consequences" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1948: 311), this is to privilege relatively unquestioningly, and at the expense of other more obscure modes of (political) reason and calculation, a particular form of measurable, narrow, and largely instrumentally-oriented rationality. It is also to assume that consequences *may* be predicted, and discount as largely irrational and neophobic the 'risk behaviours' of ordinary citizens. In a complex socio-political environment, 'sense of fitness' may, in fact, amount to a sophisticated form of political reason. Indeed, it might be more complex, albeit subtle, than the constrained ideological mode of thought promoted by many of the above political scientists.

Some civic-republican oriented theorists cannot countenance Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's reduced requirements of the citizen, arguing that this position is insupportable, and that we should defend the democratic ideal and its requirements of the citizen. Graeme Duncan and Steven Lukes (1963) appreciate the sentiments of political researchers who, rather than cursorily dismissing traditional political theory as value-laden and unscientific, seek instead to test, using scientific methods, these theories' abstract notions about the ways in which people behave and societies function, in order to develop more adequate theories. However, they are highly critical of what they see as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's attempts to revise eighteenth and nineteenth century democratic theory on the basis of evidence concerning the failure of contemporary citizens to measure up to the democratic ideal. To begin with, Duncan and Lukes argue that Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee seriously misconstrue the nature of these eighteenth and nineteenth century theories, which were never intended to serve as empirical descriptions of the ways in which people actually behaved. Neither, they argue, were they represented as such. In fact, traditional democracy theorists were themselves well aware of the many impediments to the realisation of democratic ideals and, in the case of J. S. Mill, particularly those posed by the fallibility of citizens themselves. Nevertheless, their theories were a critique of reality in terms of a vision of human nature and possibilities - an aspect of normative democratic theory that Berelson,

Lazarsfeld and McPhee also neglect, according to Duncan and Lukes. For Mill, political participation was not simply a means to an end. Through political participation, and in the pursuit of truth and happiness citizens could, he felt, critically evaluate others' principles - whilst also subjecting to scrutiny their own. In this manner, citizens might realise mental improvement, learn and practice civility and, through the exercise of legal rights, approach the moral autonomy which Mill believed to be 'the true end of life'.

Rejection of the classical requirement of citizen participation *as an ideal* on the grounds that extensive citizen participation may no longer, in modern representative democracies, be considered one of the necessary conditions of democracy is, Duncan and Lukes maintain, unsupportable. Firstly, this argument is specious in that it is reliant upon a tacit redefinition of 'what is democracy'. Because the 'new democracy' does not match the ideal in terms of absolute political equality in decision making, this does not support the claim that facts can refute ideals, or the demand for changes in the essential requirements of normative democratic theory through tempering some of the requirements of the typical citizen. Whilst there are many means for a sceptic to refute normative theories, Duncan and Lukes hold that it is necessary to show just how the ideal is improbable, or to demonstrate the impossibility of its attainment - thereby *invalidating* the ideal - rather than simply to abandon it, despite the absence of such proof. Indeed, rather than abandon the ideal, as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee suggest, Duncan and Lukes argue that it behoves us to assess whether or not the new democracy is democratic in a sense that is acceptable to traditional theory (1963: 197).

Duncan and Lukes are also concerned that theories of 'the new democracy' (of which Berelson is a leading exponent) rely on worrying assumptions regarding the equilibrium-realising powers of the democratic system. Such complacency, they argue, promotes an acceptance of the existing order, whilst also endorsing the apathy of citizens as a functional requirement of the modern democratic system, and in the face of the supposedly unattainable goal of the 'ideal democratic citizen'.

Robert A. Dahl endeavours, indirectly, to qualify such criticisms of Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee's work. In "Further reflections on 'the elitist theory of democracy" (1968), he denounces the proposition that so-called elitist theorists, such as Berelson, wish to defend widespread apathy and general political incompetence as desirable features of representative democratic republics. Drawing upon Professor Walker's[16] critique of the work of Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, Dahl aims to demonstrate that these authors are concerned to contrast a hypothetical normative

[16] Dahl refers only to 'Professor Walker'.

democratic theory prescribing certain kinds and levels of behaviour with the findings on actual behaviour in Elmira. The authors then seek to explain how, despite the gap, the system does function (1948: 300). Although theirs is largely an empirical exercise, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee *do* make normative comments in relation to democratic citizens' political behaviours (and systemic requirements). However, Dahl is at pains to demonstrate that these comments are highly balanced, qualified and complex formulations that are by no means reducible to such extreme interpretations as those offered by Walker and, by implication, Duncan and Lukes (1963).

The problem citizen and political competence: a summary

In considering the political competence of the ordinary citizen, we are confronted with a contrast between the classical, civic-republican citizenship ideal, and a liberal-individualist informed 'reality'. The former holds that citizens should exhibit a commitment to public, political participation, whilst practicing self-restraint, discipline and rationality in political thought. Those citizens who choose not to actively participate in politics, and whose political thought is driven by impulse, sentiment and prejudice, lead impoverished existences, whilst also posing a threat to democracy and, in due course, to their own individual moral autonomy. A strict, liberal-individualist influenced 'realist' position, on the other hand, maintains that traditional democratic standards of political competence place unrealistic demands upon the ordinary citizen and are not, in any case, crucial for the adequate functioning of representative democracies, or to preserve the private moral autonomy of the citizen. As indicated earlier, however, few liberal theorists adhere to a stringent principle of political detachment. Neither do they dispute civic-republicans' account of the constituent elements of political competence, implicitly agreeing that, ideally speaking, citizens' political thought should demonstrate constraint, stability, and rationality. Liberal theorists merely question these standards' relative value and significance for the ordinary citizen in the light of contemporary social and political practice. Despite their competing conceptions of moral autonomy, where it should lie, how it should be defended, and who should be responsible for its defence, civic-republicans and liberal-individualists typically see eye-to-eye over the *means* of defence. In their attempts to conceptualise the changing nature of the modern welfare state, and grapple with its implications for the status and practice of citizenship, 'new' citizenship theorists demonstrate their own interest in defending individual moral autonomy, and expand upon many liberal theorists' somewhat anodyne portrayal of the nature of 'political reality'. However, whilst they provide us with an indication of the possibly increased requirement for some, maybe novel, standards of individual political competence, these thinkers seem unsure as to just what these capacities should look

like.[17] Citizens, they sparingly offer, are obliged to become more self-regulating, creative and reflexive in making choices. By default, then, we are returned to 'traditional' standards of political competence, which, as we have seen, by most accounts, ordinary citizens do not meet.

Common sense as a mode of political thought

Clearly, ordinary citizens bring to political processes modes of reasoning that lack the objectivity, stability, and constraint demanded by many political theorists and, for some, by democracy itself. These different ways of knowing are insufficiently studied and poorly understood by many political researchers, in part because they are relatively inaccessible to political science's preferred survey methodology, but largely because they are dismissed outright by political thinkers who are committed to a rational, scientific mode of political thought as being of most benefit to democracies, and to individual citizens. They are either treated as residual and, as such, assumed or ignored, or as the naive target for implicit or explicit critique.

Researchers like Feldman and Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee hint at or begin to hazily sketch the contours of ordinary citizens' conceptual frameworks for political reason. They do so by distinguishing these peoples' reliance upon culturally grounded core beliefs and values, rather than ideological modes of political thinking. In a similar vein, Christopher Achen (1975) recognises that the general focus in political thought on more objective and quantifiable qualities may neglect alternative, less tangible forms of conceptual sophistication, inherent to citizens' default - or preferred - frameworks for political 'analysis' or judgment: namely, common sense.

As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, it is not my intention, here, to engage in a detailed examination of common sense. This is the subject of the next chapter. For the moment, it is sufficient to briefly point out that the characteristics of thought - both 'positive' and 'negative' - that I have identified through the above analysis, are, in fact, key features of common sense. Ordinary citizens' political thought is not, as we have seen, ideological in the sense that it is governed by an ordered and orderly belief system. On the contrary, it is characterised by its typical lack of constraint and predictability. Although it may demonstrate some order through its adherence to considered culturally important beliefs and values, this order is frequently challenged by the often competing and contextualised nature of these. This element, or 'quasi-quality', of common sense, Clifford Geertz describes as "immethodicalness" (1983: 90; see also

[17] Alternatively, they seem to conflate modernising and individualising processes and different forms of political participation with increasing critical competence of citizens.

Billig 1996). Common sense knowledge is, Geertz argues, "shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc" (1983: 90). It comes in a range of cultural forms, but "not in formal doctrines, axiomized theories, or architectonic dogmas" (1983: 90).

Ordinary citizens' political thought typically translates the often abstract concepts and ideological principles of political debate into concepts that are closer to home. Because these concepts *are* translated by ordinary citizens in the terms of their own individual and group experience, it is fair to say that they are likely to be more meaningful to them as a result. Meaningful to them, perhaps, but frequently, as we have seen, idiosyncratic and inaccessible to the orthodox political researcher. This feature is closely related to the 'quasi-quality' of common sense that Geertz terms 'practicalness'. The 'practicalness' of common sense is, Geertz argues, a quality that "it bestows upon things" (1983: 88), rather than the other way around. Common sense is primarily concerned with 'knowing what's what'. This entails both interpreting things as being either practical or impractical, and *making* practical those things that are not.

The fact that I have been constantly referring above to the political thought of *ordinary* people, provides an indication of yet another feature of common sense; that is, its "accessibleness" (Geertz 1983: 91). Common sense is open to all, and its tone is, Geertz maintains, with respect to its common-ness, "anti-expert, if not anti-intellectual" (1983: 91). Common sense as a mode of political thought thus appears to be largely the preserve of the politically unsophisticated, and not elites. This succinct outline of several main features of common sense is calculated to demonstrate at this point that it is not *simply* 'clusters of ideas' or 'vague impulses' with which the above political theorists and researchers are dealing. Rather, we are talking about what Geertz terms a "relatively organised body of considered thought" (1975: 7).

Political theorists' typical lack of appreciation of common sense and its qualities is further exemplified, as I shall show, by the insufficiently reflexive nature of many proposals to improve ordinary citizens' political competencies. The following section is significant because it brings more clearly into relief the *political* nature of questions to do with political competence.

Refining the problem citizen

Presently, I demonstrate, through an examination of various proposals for the enhancement of the ordinary citizen's political competence, the ways in which the common sense of ordinary people presents a dilemma for exponents of a classical, civic-republican ideal of citizenship and deliberative democracy, and, a still more

fundamental problem for critical citizenship theorists. Where the former merely seek to educate the common sense of ordinary people and promote reflection upon 'the natural attitude', the latter aspire to undermine common sense altogether. Before considering these proposals, though, it is first necessary to evaluate in further detail the strict-libertarian argument touched upon earlier in this chapter, as presented by political philosopher, Michael Saward. Despite this argument's being flawed through its neglect of the practical problems of governing a society, it nevertheless raises important political questions to do with the improvement of ordinary people's common sense. Saward's argument holds that no such development of the political competence of ordinary people is either necessary or morally defensible. Saward's liberal approach to democracy leads him to a minimalist view of democratic theory's expectations of the citizen, and the conclusion that "so long as citizens can *have* preferences we must respect those preferences" (1998: 91, emphasis in original). Although his argument is specifically directed against theoretical proposals for exclusive non-democratic rule, Saward's thesis may also be read as a defence of ordinary citizens' sufficient political competence in terms of the validity of their knowledge of their own interests, and of their expressions of political preferences. In *The Terms of Democracy* Saward maintains that people ought to be regarded as the best judges of their own political interests, as "no single person or minority group can rightfully claim to have an equal or superior insight into the best interests of citizens, either individually or as a whole" (1998: 21).

Arguments for exclusive non-democratic rule share in common the claim that, due to their superior knowledge of common interests, an individual or group is legitimately entitled to decide upon the best political course for a community to pursue (1998: 23). Furthermore, as Saward sees it, the anti-democratic case from superior knowledge need not be based upon a fundamental claim of absolute knowledge of an undeniable truth. All that is required to justify non-democratic rule in some form is the demonstration of a consistently better knowledge of interests than that attained by other groups.

Saward begins his epistemic defence against the superior knowledge claim by rendering a distinction between non-contingent superior knowledge, which is superior knowledge of appropriate ends, and contingent superior knowledge, which is superior knowledge of technical means to a given end (Saward 1998: 25). This distinction is, in essence, one between factual and moral knowledge. Strong anti-democratic claims, Saward argues, must be able to sustain the claim to non-contingent superior knowledge of a community's interests. Whilst we may, and almost invariably do, recognise claims to superior specialised or technical knowledge, that is, knowledge about how to reach a certain desirable state of affairs, these forms of knowledge are always 'contingent' in the

sense that they are limited to "smaller and more or less separate spheres of activity within a community" (1998: 27). Contingent superior knowledge claims, where these are confined to the specific areas to which they are appropriate, are perfectly acceptable and, as Saward sees it, pose no immediate problem for democracy. However, contingent superior knowledge claims are relevant only to political decisions made in a limited sphere of expertise, and do not entitle possessors of such knowledge to privileged positions with regard to decisions in other areas requiring political resolution. This is due, in part, to the complex nature of politics itself.

Politics, in Saward's view, is not a distinct sphere of activity governed by contingent, specialised knowledge that is merely implicated in other spheres within a political community. Rather, politics - concerned as it is with the distribution of social goods, that are themselves dependent upon interests - is *constitutive* of spheres. Thus, "where interests are concerned ... politics is concerned" (1998: 28). Politics does not stop at the boundaries of other spheres of activity, and is not just about the nature and different sorts of political claims within these spheres, but also "the multi-sided relationships between them" (Saward 1998: 29). The introduction of a temporal dimension enhances further the complexity of politics, with the activities and relationships within and between spheres changing constantly over time. This complexity and scope marks the activity of politics as qualitatively different from other, more specialised, activities, and as one in which claims to possess superior contingent knowledge cannot "act as a foundation for legitimate political influence beyond a narrow, mostly procedural, role in a narrow range of issues" (1998: 29). Contingent knowledge, restricted as it is to factual or technical knowledge of procedures relevant to a particular sub-field of activity, does not involve an enhanced capacity to resolve issues morally, and it is this form of knowledge that is most relevant to judging interests within the larger political sphere. Only claims to superior non-contingent knowledge of community member's interests could in principle sustain an argument for non-democratic rule in the political sphere, and claims such as these are spurious, Saward argues.

Although political authorities could have legitimate contingently superior knowledge of a citizen's interest with regard to a particular issue, given the complexity of politics and the *full* range of a citizen's interests and relevant concerns, Saward maintains individuals "must be regarded as the best judges of their own interests" (1998: 30). It is impossible for an independent observer to make judgements regarding a person's 'real' interests, because we cannot have an insight into the full range of considerations that make up their overall interest at a given time in a given place (Saward 1998: 34). The validity of people's expressions of political preferences may similarly be defended against

arguments for non-democratic rule. Saward considers arguments that people's preferences may not be worthy of respect due to their being 'shifting' and not fixed, vacillating and insecurely held, to constitute a weak basis for anti-democratic claims. He points out that it may, in fact, be preferable that people's preferences are not fixed, given that this may indicate "a dogmatic attachment to an indefensible position" (Saward 1998: 36). In any case, he argues, it is paradigmatic expressions of preference, or those preferences that people understand are to formally influence or determine government action, such as referenda, and not random expressions of preferences, for instance those obtained in opinion polls, that count.

Because we must accede that all members of a political community are subject to fallibility in their substantive judgements of community interests, and that there is no independent way to assess degrees of fallibility in this regard for different people, we can not reliably assume that any person's claims to non-contingent superior knowledge are more or less fallible than those of other people (Saward 1998: 38). In the absence of any context-independent criteria for assessing the degrees of fallibility in people's non-contingent knowledge, Saward argues, we cannot justly render the knowledge claims of others of lesser value or importance. Therefore, Saward argues that an assumption that we are all equally fallible with regard to non-contingent knowledge of political interests (1998: 39) will capture the median, optimal position for a political community.[18]

According to liberal thinkers such as Saward, without any independent, objective means by which to assess the validity of peoples' preference formation processes, and political competency, there is no justification for intervention in, and improvement of, these. Claus Offe rejects on empirical grounds as unrealistic the libertarian tradition's normative stance, as presented by Saward. Political preferences, he argues, are and always have been subject to approval and disapproval - whether or not we care to acknowledge this - and, therefore, we must determine some standards of civic competence in responsible preference formation to be required of citizens. Furthermore, as Offe sees it, the stakes for doing so are high, since, without civic competence "of the sort that is compatible with and sustains democratic institutions", democracies can "self-destruct" (1997: 81).

In tackling the problem of what makes for the deliberative competence of citizens, Offe considers first the standards of competence demanded of citizens in the strict libertarian

[18] In the terms of Saward's thesis, then, Converse's (and others') representation of political competence as a form of contingent knowledge that is, or should be, governed by certain procedures and requirements - such as consistent reference to a belief system that exhibits constraint - does not adequately account for the complex nature of politics, and the need for a capacity to be able to resolve issues morally.

tradition, as outlined by Saward. According to this tradition, "citizens cannot be expected to have particular preferences, nor arrive at them in a particular way, in order to qualify as democratically competent citizens" (Offe 1997: 83). Regardless of whether these preference orders are based on demonstrably false assumptions about the world, immorally disregard the well-being of others, or are excessively short-sighted and ill-considered, they must equally be respected so long as they do not conceivably lead to the violation of the interests of others, as determined by law. These preferences must be respected as "the legitimate expression of a person's freedom" (1997: 83), with no-one entitled to censor, manipulate, repress or privilege certain preferences, so long as they conform to the laws of the land. Offe feels that such a position is naive in the extreme, given that there is no society in which all preferences are admitted as equally worthy of tolerance, and that preferences themselves emerge from and are shaped by social context. Thus, even where people's preferences do not violate the interests of others, they are subject to approval or disapproval according to a society's normative code of 'good' versus 'bad' tastes.

Because he feels that we cannot countenance unqualified libertarian democracy and substantive conceptions of the common good, Offe nominally defends an intermediate position in democratic theory, in which adequate citizenship and competent citizens may be assessed not on the basis of the content of preferences themselves, but according to the degree to which these preferences display evidence of having been arrived at through efforts at self-examination, reflection and deliberation - including consideration of these desires and their merit in relation to those of others. Political legitimacy, from this perspective, derives from the *quality* of the deliberations which form the basis for a judgement supported by all or a majority. This position must, however, confront the dilemma of who is to judge the quality and resultant merit of preferences.

Offe rejects arguments for political elites legitimately ignoring or overriding preferences on the grounds that these preferences are causally constrained or less than rational in terms of their consequences. These points of view may or may not be sustained, but, in any case, are too easily conflated with a critique of those preferences due to their origins in conditions that are considered to be less than satisfactory for fulfilling the standards of deliberation, autonomy and collective self-determination. This position leads to the exclusion of preferences and voices adjudged to be unrefined and prepolitical according to somewhat arbitrary standards, and thereby endorses an underlying criterion of adequate citizenship competence that lacks precision.

The standard, if not necessarily preferred, response to the "liberal dilemma of determining whose right it should be to establish and apply criteria to distinguish between 'selfish' and 'virtuous' political preferences" (Offe 1997: 97), and ensuring that citizens themselves develop and cultivate a commitment to virtuous political preferences, is usually educational. Formal, compulsory education in the rights and obligations of citizens and as part of a more general liberal education is seen to inculcate "critical and disparate attitudes towards prevailing conceptions of the good as part of the framework of liberal democracy" (Offe 1997: 97).

Offe's immediate objections to the notion of liberal education as a solution to the development of citizen competence are twofold. Firstly, a strong version of civic education may 'do too much', serving as a process of indoctrination rather than fostering the desired capacity for autonomous judgement,[19] or it may do too little, especially considering that formal schooling competes with a variety of other sources of political education - not all of which can be trusted to "adhere to the ideal of deliberative preference formation" (Offe 1997: 97). Secondly, and more tellingly, where educative processes are posited as a means to develop competent citizens this reinforces the distinction between 'raw' and 'deliberative' preferences and marginalises alternative, more democratic and universalist approaches to the development of adequate citizenship competence. Offe sees such alternative approaches as consisting in "the design and strengthening of institutions that effectively transform the privilege of civic-republican elites into a social and mental property shared by all citizens" (1997: 98).

Offe identifies two main impediments to the realisation of the ideal deliberative procedure of preference formation. The first of these relates to the nature of the procedure itself. Deliberative political action is demanding of the citizen, obliging her or him to develop certain commitments and attitudes and act in accordance with these mental routines of preference formation. In the light of the onerous nature of the procedure, the citizen is likely to be circumspect when weighing the potentially intrinsically rewarding process benefit to be gained through adherence to this practice against the costs and risks associated with others not playing according to the 'rules' of this deliberative mode of political participation, instead pursuing her or his own private preferences at the expense of both the common good and the 'good citizen'. The second

[19] For many liberal virtue theorists, it is the role of the education system to teach political virtue, encouraging children to "engage in the kind of critical reasoning and moral perspective that defines public reasonableness" (Kymlicka and Norman 1995: 298). Kymlicka and Norman see the main objections levelled at the idea that schools should promote a willingness among children to question political authority, and to distance themselves from their own cultural traditions when engaging in public discourse, as being based on the traditionalist grounds that such sceptical reflection threatens to undermine tradition and parental or religious authority in private life (1995: 298).

barrier is the task of identifying associative institutions which are conducive to, or possess the potential for, cultivating democratic citizenship competence.[20] Whereas in the past the associational conditions of civil society in which the 'good' citizen was embedded and learned the 'habits of heart and mind' necessary for democratic participation were considered adequate, these associational conditions can no longer be assumed to be present, or, necessarily enabling or competence fostering.[21]

James S. Fishkin (1991), like Offe, recommends an ideal of deliberative preference formation as a means of strengthening democracies whilst negotiating and attempting to reconcile the divide between political elites and ordinary citizens. Where other political theorists are willing to sacrifice political equality in order to achieve deliberation and mental competence in politics, Fishkin argues this is both insupportable for a defensible, thus adequate, version of democracy, and unnecessary. Faced with what he sees as a false dilemma of forced choice between "politically equal but relatively incompetent masses and politically unequal but relatively more competent elites" (1991: 1-2), hence, between the values of political equality and deliberation, Fishkin proposes the 'deliberative opinion poll' as a possible solution. The deliberative opinion poll, he maintains, embodies both political equality, "because everyone has an equal chance of being represented in the national sample of participants", and *true* deliberation, because this process "immerse[s] a selected group of citizens in intensive, face-to-face debate" (1991: 2).

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[20] For some citizenship theorists, the task of fostering adequate democratic citizenship competence appears to have been reduced to one of simply designating and defending the 'appropriate' setting and associational conditions for this undertaking; 'appropriate', that is, to the theorist's own particular conception of 'the good life'. Although he ultimately defends civil society as the site in which we learn through participation in a network of free associations the civic virtues which make democratic politics possible, Michael Walzer (1995) does not do so without first problematising the reductionist approach outlined above. According to him, no other single setting, such as the democratic state, the economy, the marketplace or nationalism is adequate to the task of realising 'the good life', or to the learning of civic virtues. Arguments that posit these as preferred sites - because they all claim to be correct and complete - neglect the pluralism required of any truly civil society. In their singularity, these perspectives miss or actively marginalise other commitments and loyalties, each of which may be defended as equally valid and central to 'the good life'. Civil society, on the other hand, is not singular but a 'setting of settings', in which the other answers to the good life may be included, and the liberal insistence that each leave room for the others, mollified. The civil society project would ideally, as Walzer sees it, relativise and revise these other 'answers' - decentralising the state, socialising the economy, and pluralising and domesticating nationalism.

[21] Kymlicka and Norman (1995) are also keen to point out that this view, despite its venerability, need not necessarily be substantiated and is, in any case, not without its limitations. Associations in civil society can teach qualities which are positively antithetical to good citizenship - promoting self-interest, intolerance and prejudice as well as deferential, rather than independent and active, civility. Nor are Kymlicka and Norman satisfied with Walzer's proposals to reconstruct associational networks under new conditions of freedom and equality where the activities of these associations are seen to sustain subordinate relationships or promote 'regressive' qualities. Government interventions along these lines, they feel, threaten to undermine the independence and voluntary character of these associations, which are, after all, their *raison detre*, not the learning of civic virtues.

Fishkin holds that ordinary opinion polls (for example, those surrounding American presidential selection) demonstrate little evidence of deliberation on the part of most American citizens who, with access to limited information and restricted opportunities for thoughtful interaction on public issues, choose their candidates 'more or less the way they choose detergents'. Neither does media televising of the primary season appear to assist the process of deliberative opinion formation. If anything, Fishkin argues, the primary season, with all its 'information' dissemination, may be interpreted as an "unfolding process of non-opinion formation" (1991: 6). This state of affairs, he maintains, will not do, for "if the preferences that determine the results of democratic procedures are unreflective or ignorant, then they lose their claim to political authority" (Fishkin 1991: 29), and are, therefore, open to de-legitimation. Deliberative opinion polls, on the other hand, by offering face-to-face small group democracy akin to that of the Athenian Assembly, would promote thoughtful, self-reflective opinion formation among participating citizens, eliminating the impulsive, uneducated and ill- or un-organised nature of their deliberations. In effect, representative deliberative opinion polls would measure "what the public *would* think, if it had a more adequate chance to think about the question at issue" (Fishkin 1991: 1, emphasis in original). Moreover, as Fishkin sees it, deliberative opinion polling need not simply serve a predictive purpose, but may be attributed with prescriptive force, as the results are the "voice of the people under special conditions where the people have had a chance to think about the issues and *hence should have a voice worth listening to*" (1991: 4, emphasis added).

Fishkin speculates in his treatise upon the ideological results of producing more politically sophisticated citizens in terms of their ensuing general political orientations (that is, liberal or conservative). But because he sees, like most political theorists who deal with public opinion and its quality - or lack thereof - increasing the knowledge or sophistication of citizens along certain lines as an unqualified 'good', such speculation does not extend to a consideration of the potential merits of citizens' 'pre-sophisticated' political capacities. Nor does it entail a wider and more detailed analysis of the ideological ramifications of his deliberative procedures for these qualities. This is illustrated by phrases such as those highlighted above, which are littered throughout his work. Neither does Fishkin discuss in any detail how it is that participants in deliberative opinion polls are expected to become more knowledgeable, deliberative, and, thus, sophisticated. He cites, after Carole Pateman (1970), the 'educative' function of participation itself (which is by no means guaranteed) and the interaction with others who are also becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated. By inference, though, we are led to believe that it is political elites who will be largely responsible for enhancing the political sophistication of citizen participants in these processes. Whilst, seemingly, Fishkin defends absolutely the principle of political equality, by a process of

subterfuge, he appears to have reserved a categorical educative role for political elites. There are, of course, several problems associated with this stance. Although these problems have been alluded to, and at times even confronted, by the preceding theorists, this issue has not been sufficiently, or satisfactorily, dealt with.

Citizens' improvement and common sense

Offe is circumspect in endorsing a role for political elites in processes of preference formation. He recognises the potentially arbitrary, or self-interested, nature of elites' intervention in such processes - especially without some independent, objective standards for the assessment of preferences. Offe also distinguishes the importance of preserving the integrity of different approaches to the development of adequate citizenship competence, including, one is led to assume, diverse cultural traditions and 'ways of knowing'. He is, as a result, wary of juxtaposing 'raw' and 'deliberative' preferences and, by implication, the political thought of elites and lay-people. Ultimately, however, he still sees the mental routines and properties of civic-republican elites as something that should be transformed into a social and mental belonging shared by all citizens, reasoning that this would provide ordinary citizens with the opportunity and encouragement to 'get their choices right', thereby fulfilling an interest in autonomy. Offe here unquestioningly assumes that political elites possess social and mental properties worth sharing by all citizens. Whilst this may, to an extent, be the case, the expectation that elites' reflective approaches to preference formation are adequately critical, and thus worth emulating, and that rigid constraint in preference formation is necessarily a good thing, needs to be more rigorously problematised, rather than simply accepted. Arguably, ordinary citizens' interest in autonomy would best be served by institutions and processes that acknowledge and accommodate different forms of rationality, and modes of reasoning.

Saward's 'agnosticism' renders him susceptible to an extension of Offe's criticism of liberalism's naivety. His separation of contingent and non-contingent knowledges, and defence of political equality in principle on this basis sidesteps Offe's realist argument that contingent knowledge *does* frequently dominate political decision-making processes in the modern West and, in doing so, potentially threatens democratic rule. Distinguishing contingent and non-contingent forms of knowledge as being either factual or moral, and confining contingent knowledges and their claims to superiority to the specific areas in which they are deemed appropriate, preserves their 'difference', rather than acknowledging, analysing, and, perhaps, promoting, their critical interaction and infusion. This separation (potentially) leaves non-contingent knowledge and those 'reliant' upon it ill-equipped to correspond with, and perhaps tame, contingent knowledge and political elites' dominance of decision-making processes. Where Saward

isolates contingent and non-contingent knowledges and appears happy to retain this separation, and Offe and Fishkin hold a relatively unquestioned educative role for political elites in processes of improving the political deliberations of ordinary citizens, Daniel Yankelovich (1991) hopes to close the divide between political elites and ordinary citizens through the development of an alternative, mediating form of knowledge that, as he sees it, preserves the best qualities of ordinary citizens' and political experts' political reasoning.

In *Coming to Public Judgement: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (1991), Yankelovich is concerned to address what he sees as the major problem facing American democracy today. This is, he argues, the eroding ability of the American public to participate in the political decisions that affect their lives. Whilst citizen participation in America's political decision-making process has ostensibly been improved in recent years through the development of formal arrangements to ensure public involvement, Yankelovich argues that, in reality, a barrier separates the general public from political experts and elites, and thereby excludes them from political participation, or, 'active' citizenship. This barrier, he maintains, is 'creeping expertism', which is itself a symptom and assumption of the 'Culture of Technical Control', a culture underpinned by the philosophy of objectivism.

Yankelovich proposes a two-part strategy to resolve the expert-public gap and in doing so improve the public's freedom and capacity to contribute to self-governance. The first part of this strategy aims to enhance the quality of public opinion to the level of 'public judgement', a level of sophistication that will enable the public to better stand its ground against political experts and elites, thus, ideally, help to 'tame' the 'Culture of Technical Control'. The process of developing public judgement from mass opinion involves three stages. The first of these is consciousness raising, in which the public's awareness of an issue is enhanced, along with its concern and preparedness for action. 'Working through the issue' that requires, on the basis of raised awareness, confronting the need for change, constitutes the second stage. In the third stage, resolution, the public completes the working through process by reflexively confronting and resolving the various cognitive, emotional and moral ambivalences that may remain.

The second part of Yankelovich's strategy entails a critique of the 'Culture of Technical Control' and its epistemological underpinnings in objectivism to weaken its claims against public judgement. Drawing principally on the work of Jurgen Habermas (in particular his insight, after Immanuel Kant, that knowledge is always governed by human interests), Yankelovich argues that objectivism's insistence that there is only one

form of genuine knowledge - that is, empirically-based scientific knowledge - has been thoroughly discredited. As a result, he claims that public judgement, should it conform to the requirements of purpose, truth and proof, and thus qualify as a genuine form of knowledge, is in some conditions equal or superior in quality to the judgement of experts and elites.

Perhaps more than any of the previous authors, Yankelovich appreciates aspects of ordinary citizens' political thought, its qualities and shortcomings, and its relationship to the thought of political elites. This appreciation derives from his realist understanding of the nature of politics and the function of ordinary citizens in political processes and society as a whole. In his attempts to reconcile the antagonistic relationship between elites and ordinary citizens, Yankelovich first relativises many political theorists' demands of ordinary citizens and, in this manner, qualifies their pessimistic and at times scathing assessments of citizens' political competence. Yankelovich introduces to public opinion analysis some of the ambiguity and resultant complexity associated with political issues, which is largely absent from many political researchers' deliberations. He also questions the notion that definitions of quality opinion "suitable to judge the thinking of political philosophers, technical experts or scientists" (1991: 24) should be applied to ordinary citizens. Expectations that the public should think in ideologically structured ways are, he argues, unrealistic and driven by the dogmatic and restrictive - even "tyrannical" (1991: 222) and "barbaric" (1991: 199) - doctrine of objectivism. Yankelovich's defence of public judgment as a form of knowledge conducive to deliberative democracy maintains, as does Saward's argument for political equality, that objectivist knowledge, whilst useful for exercising dominance and technical control, is inadequate for the purposes of addressing political questions of interests and values. Unlike Saward, though,[22] Yankelovich shares with Offe the view that there is room for improvement in the quality of ordinary citizens' political thinking and resultant preferences, for when insufficiently informed and deliberative, people's political thinking is similarly inadequate. Yankelovich, like Offe and Fishkin, attempts to improve citizens' competence primarily through eliminating the un- or ill-organised nature of their deliberations, consequently enhancing their thoughtfulness, reflexivity and constraint. He supports the values of consistency and stability in political thought, but not the strict logical consistency demanded by most political theorists. Rather than seeing ideological thinking as the benchmark for political competence, Yankelovich suggests as an alternative criterion the public's acceptance of responsibility for the

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[22] Saward (1998) argues that the contrast between deliberative and aggregative traditions in democratic theory is erroneous. Regardless of the amount of deliberation, aggregation must take place for democratic decisions to be reached and, therefore, as he sees it, there is no such thing as a 'deliberative model of democracy'.

consequences of its views (1991: 24). Where people adhere to this (moral) principle, he maintains, they will consider more judiciously their former 'top of the head' responses, and be obliged to confront and reconcile ambivalences in their political thought. For example, citizens will no longer be able to think in compartmentalised terms, a habit that allows them to keep related aspects of an issue mentally separated, permitting them to "maintain contradictory and conflicting opinions without being mentally discomforted" (Yankelovich 1991: 31). With the elimination of volatility and inconsistency in people's political thought, they are, Yankelovich argues, likely to convince political elites that public opinion can and should be taken seriously. It is at this point that the deficiencies in Yankelovich's thesis are most readily apparent.

Yankelovich has, through his extensive research and analysis of public opinion, gained an understanding of the relevance and legitimacy of common sense knowledge. He treats such knowledge with a degree of respect. I argue, however, that his is a restricted perception of the moral and political content of common sense knowledge. He does not fully contextualise this mode of knowing in terms of its cultural-hermeneutic basis and, as a result, relatively unreflexively assumes that one can and should 'rationalise' it (albeit in not such a drastic fashion as that proposed by many political scientists). Yankelovich's neglect is perhaps best illustrated by his attribution of the condition of epistemological anxiety to experts and elites whose modes of knowing are perceived as threatened, yet failure to ascribe to the public the same condition. If we take seriously Yankelovich's critique of the doctrine of objectivism and Brian Wynne's (1996) assessment of the common sense knowledge of ordinary people as being always potentially in epistemological conflict with objectivist knowledges, though, we see that its improvement or rationalisation may render it no longer common, and thereby undermine its political edge. Yankelovich's failure to contextualise, or ground, people's common sense leaves him unable to grasp people's commitment to *their* common sense. It is this attachment, as I show in the following chapter and with reference to my case study, that encourages and imparts the necessary confidence to ordinary people in their resistance to the 'Culture of Technical Control'.

Where civic-republican and deliberative democracy theorists seek to educate and discipline the common sense of ordinary people, the cultural pluralists' citizenship ideal entails an all-out assault on this mode of knowing. Cultural pluralists' calls for differentiated citizenship on the basis of rights or claims that derive from group membership are "sharply opposed to the concept of a society based on citizenship" (Kymlicka and Norman 1995: 303) and therefore, as Kymlicka and Norman (1995) see it, represent a radical development in citizenship theory. Perhaps the most influential

theorist of cultural pluralism, and the thinker who has contributed most to the development of this body of theory in recent years is Iris Marion Young (1990; 1998). Indeed, it is largely Young's work that provides the basis for Kymlicka and Norman's critique of the cultural pluralist position.

In their review of citizenship theory, Kymlicka and Norman do not appear to fully appreciate the nature and scope of Young's project. They assume that Young seeks simply to modify the dominant conception of citizenship to better accommodate cultural pluralism. Young is set not only upon unseating the 'common sense' conception of citizenship as universal and necessarily made up of common rights, but also the dominant paradigm of distributive justice, notions of the public realm and common good. For Young, adequate self-government - and thus, citizen competence - entails questioning (through attention to difference) on an on-going basis, the nature, authority and permanence of the political community and all social mores. Implicit in her work are a critique of ordinary citizens' political capacities, and a tacit censure of (what is held to be) the dominant common sense understanding of socio-political reality. The implications of Young's critical-theory-informed position and its assumptions for the common sense of ordinary people will be considered in some detail in Chapter Six. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that, for Young, as for many of the political theorists considered above, ordinary people's common sense limits their capacity for moral autonomy, along with that of others.

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Regardless of the degree to which they view political competence as important to the health of democracies and individual moral autonomy, political theorists and researchers typically agree that the ordinary citizen is lacking in said competence. The ordinary citizen simply does not meet the ideal or, for some, required, standard. Based upon these assessments, a deal of attention has been devoted to the question of how best to institute appropriate means by which to improve the average citizen's political competence.

This chapter has raised questions to do with the validity of the above assessments, and merit of ensuing proposals for the enhancement of ordinary citizens' political competence. I have argued that these assessments and proposals are premised upon a relatively unproblematised ideal of rationality. Further, I have argued that they are founded upon a limited conception of the ordinary citizen's extant political aptitude, and that this, in turn, derives from a detached and ambivalent understanding of ordinary

people's common sense. Political science, I have suggested, is ill-equipped to study and appreciate the complexities of ordinary people's common sense. This is both due to the strength of the concept of the ideal type citizen in political theory, and the related limitations of political science's epistemological and methodological assumptions. The subtleties, and, with them, the possible political qualities and sophistication, of common sense may be collapsed through the use of instruments such as the opinion poll. If we are to grasp satisfactorily the *political* nature and importance of ordinary people's common sense, and thereby address the principal aim of the study, then, we must turn to the sociological literature. For whilst sociology shares with political science a strong positivist tradition, this has been leavened somewhat by a robust, and oft-competing, interpretive, or *Verstehen*, tradition. This sociological approach recognises the fact that common sense is sociology's very subject matter, and of vast import to its project as a result. In lucid moments, as I show, it also recognises that the common sense of ordinary people is both a site of and resource for socio-political struggle.

CHAPTER TWO
SOCIOLOGY AND COMMON SENSE

In *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*, Anthony Giddens contends that sociology "stands in a relation of tension to its 'subject-matter' - as a potential instrument of the expansion of *rational autonomy of action*, but equally as a potential *instrument of domination*" (1993: 167, emphasis in original). Giddens might have further added that no small amount of tension derives from the considered threat posed to the adequacy of sociology by its subject matter - a notion implicit in his thesis of a double hermeneutic. A recognition of the 'relation of tension' demands of the would-be reflexive or critical sociologist some consideration of common sense knowledge, which forms the nexus between lay people and sociology, for if the sociologist is to introduce her or his conceptions and findings to people's practices of everyday life in such a way as to enhance rather than undermine their autonomy, this must be through informing these people's own understandings of these practices and events, developed in particular contexts.

Post-Enlightenment, social theorists typically viewed experts and expertise as a necessary corrective to common sense in the pursuit of emancipatory knowledge and autonomy. Whilst many theorists and commentators still harbour this view, the combination of a 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences with a widespread backlash against the growth of instrumental rationalism and its (perceived) disempowering effects has led some thinkers to suggest that common sense may serve as an essential reformatory to experts and expertise as it presents, and others still when it is improved upon or 'made critical'. Other theorists, such as Zygmunt Bauman (1976; 1988), on the other hand, dismiss all such proposals, arguing that common sense is fundamentally antithetical to emancipatory reason, true freedom and autonomy and must, therefore, be undermined altogether.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that common sense is, on the whole, ill-considered in 'political' thought, and I concluded as a result that to adequately grasp common sense's nature and substance it is necessary also to canvass 'social' thought on the matter. To this end, I examine in this chapter various social theorists' conceptions of common sense. I aim to show that in this corpus also, whether due to methodological fiat or essentialist typifications of what is or should be considered to constitute autonomy, common sense has typically been conceptualised in an unduly limited

manner. My task is to reveal these limitations and to demonstrate the need for an expanded conception of common sense in order to avoid deterministic accounts of the social world, but also as a means to expand the range of possibilities for socio-political change.

I begin with a critique of phenomenological sociology's conception of common sense, for it is this approach that furnishes the discipline's seminal and generally agreed-upon definition of the phenomenon. In doing so, I identify and discuss those basic elements of common sense that make for it as a struggle. I then turn to a brief examination of scientific sociology, in large part out of whose alleged inadequate understanding and treatment of common sense phenomenological sociology was developed. In the third section, I consider a number of specific attempts to go beyond description and to construct critical understandings and forms of common sense as a means for enhancing ordinary people's autonomy. My aim, here, is to develop a basis for identifying those contexts and conditions in which the common sense of ordinary people is most likely to be 'a struggle', and a more or less useful socio-political resource. In the final section of the chapter, the focus narrows to an analysis and critique of the radical critical theory perspective on common sense. Out of the above theoretical critiques, I isolate criteria with which to explore how the common sense of ordinary people might be considered to be critical. This then contributes to the methodological framework developed in the following, methods, chapter.

Phenomenological sociology and common sense

Alfred Schutz's philosophy consists of a phenomenology of the natural attitude, or the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life. He sees common sense as that knowledge that is required to guide and sustain ordinary conduct in everyday life, the paramount reality from which no-one is exempt as it underpins all other strata of social reality. Common sense therefore contains basic beliefs and understandings of a high generality that are constitutive of a shared reality. Schutz describes these beliefs and understandings as typifications. The construction and composition of typifications are dominated by the practical, 'here and now' motive and a 'system of relevances' shared by members of a given 'in' group. Common sense knowledge of various dimensions of the social world is, as a result, fragmentary and inconsistent - it varies in degrees of clarity and detail from "full insight or 'knowledge about' ... through 'knowledge of acquaintance' or mere familiarity, to blind belief in things just taken for granted" (1962: 55). This incompleteness is not considered problematic by the actor in the natural attitude though, so long as their (common sense) knowledge is "sufficient for coming to terms with fellow-men, cultural objects, social institutions - in brief, with social reality" (1962: 55).

Indeed, Schutz argues that the ideal of knowledge of everyday life is 'likelihood', rather than certainty, an ideal of practically applicable recipe-like knowledge that provides 'bearings' for proceeding in particular ways applicable to the purpose at hand.

Everyone, Schutz maintains, shares an orientation to this idea of knowledge. Moreover, everybody knows it to be the common idea of knowledge, inasmuch as one of the taken-for-granted idealisations which structures daily life and is a part of common sense knowledge is the typification of inter-subjectivity. This 'obvious' quality of 'our' world (which itself presupposes the typifications of communication and language that underlie social relatedness) assumes that the objects and events of human experience *are* intersubjectively available, and more or less the same for all actors. Thus, common sense knowledge is knowledge we can take for granted, that we are all basically the same with respect to, and that we share similar knowledge in all practically relevant respects without the need to call this knowledge into question 'until further notice' - that is, until a problem arises that cannot be solved in terms of it. In short, common sense knowledge is, for Schutz, knowledge about others that is shared with others in the course of everyday life.

Since in their view common sense "constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist" (1966: 27), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann insist that it is this form of knowledge, rather than relatively unimportant theoretical thought or ideas, that must be the focal point for the sociology of knowledge. To this end, they examine the role of common sense knowledge in the social construction of everyday life and institutions. Berger and Luckmann's conception of common sense closely resembles that of Schutz. This is because their work is developed from the phenomenological perspective of Schutz and, with regard to "the prolegomena concerning the foundations of knowledge in everyday life" (1966: 28) does not significantly depart from his account. Berger and Luckmann see common sense as that knowledge shared with others "in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life" (1966: 37). Common sense is "what people 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives" (1966: 27). It provides solutions to common problems and a total orientation for the individual in her or his everyday life.

From the general perspective of phenomenological sociology, embodied in the work of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann, common sense knowledge fulfils several essential functions. As a largely unproblematic and taken-for-granted body of knowledge, common sense establishes a baseline for action. Safe in the assumption that the sector of the world taken for granted by everyone who is one of Us - everyone who largely shares

our system of relevances, way of life and perceptions of what is good, natural and right - the actor is able to plan, determine the practicability of, and undertake particular courses of action with a reasonable expectation of a successful outcome. Furthermore, the habitualisation of human activity made possible by common sense and its realm of the world taken for granted furnishes a domain within which alone doubt and questioning become possible. In this sense, Schutz argues, common sense knowledge is the foundation of any possible doubt - doubt that, in turn, makes deliberation and choice possible.

Phenomenological sociology presents an essentially conservative conception of common sense. Common sense is portrayed as a body of knowledge oriented towards the orderly reproduction of social reality through its provision of 'scripts' and 'recipes' for the habitualisation of activity. Common sense is thus seen as sufficient for coming to terms with (and reproducing) social reality, but not as doubting, questioning or, indeed, engaging in any meaningful reflection upon, this reality. Although privileged as central to the very existence of society, common sense is simply envisioned as permitting the development of more sophisticated traditions of thought - freeing energy for important decisions and opening up a "foreground for deliberation and innovation" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 71). As a corollary, although Schutz and Berger and Luckmann recognise that common sense is 'anthropological', or relative to particular communities, as do all social theorists by virtue of the logic of their discipline and its system of relevances,[1] their respective accounts place an emphasis upon common sense as a largely unproblematic and taken-for-granted body of knowledge which is held in common by all, rather than differing from group to group. To be fair, though, other theorists have also reflected upon the distinction between common sense as anthropological and universal without necessarily considering the political implications of this feature.

According to Lawrence Joseph, "a common sense view of the world assumes an objective physical reality that we all share and that exists whether we perceive it or not" (1994: 6). If we are to render common sense an "analysable interpretation of experience" (Geertz 1975: 76) rather than simply an assumed phenomenon, therefore, Clifford Geertz argues our first task must be to "redraw the erased distinction between matter of fact apprehension of reality and down to earth assessments of it" (1983: 10).

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[1] Berger and Luckmann contrast the average person with the sociologist based on her or his systems of relevance. Whereas the average person in the natural attitude takes her or his 'reality' and 'knowledge' for granted, by virtue of the logic of her or his discipline and its system of relevances, the sociologist is obliged to question the basis of this 'reality', given the existence of other, alternative, taken for granted realities (1966: 14). Relativism of the sort described by Berger and Luckmann does not necessarily lead to reflexivity on the part of the sociologist, as I argue in the next chapter.

For while its practitioners and advocates may, and frequently do, insist that it is "the simple truth of things artlessly apprehended" (1983: 10) and thus universal, common sense is, Geertz maintains, a cultural system, albeit a loosely connected one (1983: 76). Common sense is, moreover, an everywhere-found cultural system whose content varies radically from place to place and one time to the next, but whose shared stylistic features permit it to be trans-culturally characterised. Geertz furnishes as an example of common sense's universal and anthropological nature the phenomenon of hermaphroditism that is, he argues, based upon his survey of the ethnographic literature, everywhere recognised as an anomaly, but treated differently as such according to the common sense of the people concerned.[2] Geertz's point is salient. Common sense may, indeed, be universal in the sense that it exhibits certain ubiquitous features - chief of which is its assumption, to a greater or lesser degree, of a shared reality. However, Geertz is at pains to caution the analyst against over-emphasising this aspect of common sense and, in the process, of conceivably exercising rather than analysing common sense.

Other theorists appear less inclined to interrogate the basis for common sense's claims to universality, instead highlighting the objective uniformity of human experience (and, by implication, human interests). In considering whether common sense is universal or relative to a group, Siegwart Lindenberg argues that although its basis is factually universal - rooted in a uniformity of human experience which renders it compatible in principle - this does not mean "that the compatibility is obvious, nor does it mean that all knowledge acquired from human experience is valid" (1987: 213). As a result, Lindenberg concludes that an objective uniformity of human experience is universal, but that knowledge of this uniformity is not. Lindenberg's tendency to stress the objective uniformity of human experience and the inherent compatibility of common sense knowledge derived from this experience may be attributed to his particular political project, which aims to develop a broader and thus, as he sees it, potentially more critical baseline for human interaction. He argues that common sense must be conceived to be more than just a shared body of knowledge. Given its function as an objective basis for compatible knowledge derived from human experience, and its intentional universality[3] - that is, its governance by the regulative belief or presumed understanding that "*because* we are human beings endowed with much the same nature living in a world with considerable uniformity" (1987: 202, emphasis in original), we

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[2] Geertz's qualification of the notion that common sense thinkers necessarily assume a shared reality is an important one. This distinction introduces the possibility of more or less critical forms of common sense, according to the degree to which they objectify aspects of social reality.

[3] Lindenberg's (1987) notion of intentional universality closely parallels Schutz's 'typification of inter-subjectivity'.

share a general baseline for human interaction - Lindenberg maintains that common sense always furnishes the possibility of finding common ground with strangers, and of interacting with others as equals. Common sense is, in his view, essential for human interaction within a group and across group boundaries. This may indeed be the case. However, Lindenberg's implication here is that all that differentiates (and perhaps, separates) groups is their *knowledge* of the uniformity of human experience, and not experience itself. He overlooks the fact that various cultures entertain not simply different accounts of social reality, but different realities. It appears that in pursuit of his political objective Lindenberg may have fallen prey to the intentional universality of common sense which he distinguishes, and Geertz warns the analyst to guard against. The characterisation of common sense as universal, or unrestricted, a body of knowledge to which all subscribe or would subscribe upon recognition of its universal applicability is, Geertz stresses, to endorse (at some level) the "unspoken premise from which common sense draws its authority - that it presents reality neat" (1975: 76).

There are important analytical and political implications associated with accentuating the universal rather than anthropological constitution of common sense, as does phenomenological sociology. This position neglects the relationship of knowledge to social structure and allied questions of power and the unequal distribution of knowledge. At the same time, it serves to negate, or limit, the prospect of common sense as a political resource or as a basis for socio-political struggle. Schutz, Berger and Luckmann are not, of course, oblivious to the relationship between common sense and social structure: Berger and Luckmann's treatise is, after all, in the sociology of knowledge.[4] However, they do exhibit a degree of ambivalence with regard to the consequences of this association. Moreover, this ambivalence is not simply confined to their earlier work or a product of the particular historical moment in which this was conceived. Instead, it may be traced to a self-imposed limitation of phenomenological sociology's method, which is perhaps best illustrated through reference to some of Thomas Luckmann's more recent (1987) writings, in which he explicitly considers the relationship of knowledge to social structure.

Due to their complex divisions of labour that lead, in turn, to the development of other social strata on the basis of particular political and economic factors (along the lines of age and gender, for example), advanced capitalist societies are, Luckmann holds, characterised by structurally variable and structurally similar biographies. This demarcation results in common knowledge being differentiated into diverse versions;

[4] It is also one that specifically rejects the earlier focus on power in sociology of knowledge debates. Schutz most clearly addresses the association between common sense and structure in 'The well-informed citizen: an essay on the social distribution of knowledge' (1964).

versions that are, nevertheless, still accounts of common knowledge. The general content of common sense knowledge - that which is considered common, as opposed to special, knowledge - is still generally distributed, but in versions determined by social structure. It is *only* in this sense, Luckmann argues, that it is possible to speak of unevenness in the social distribution of common knowledge (1987: 189). Luckmann then proceeds to recount the ways in which the increased specialisation and theoretical elaboration of knowledge in advanced capitalist societies leads to more areas of life being dealt with by experts "of one kind or another" (1987: 190), and thus demonstrates just how uneven in a political sense - that is, restricted - this distribution has become. Socially relevant knowledge, as it becomes more highly specialised, acquires a 'distinctly theoretical structure', becomes 'less practical', 'less commonsensical' and, at the same time, gains in autonomy. With this growing autonomy, "the distance between laymen and experts grows" (1987: 190) and the precise distribution of what has 'become' specialised knowledge *itself* becomes part of specialised knowledge, as well as knowledge of the means to access these 'domains of expertise'. The divide between lay-people and experts is further entrenched through the increasing theoretical systematisation made possible through processes of expertise themselves, in which the expertise is made inaccessible and opaque to outsiders, *and* legitimated for them (1987: 191).

Luckmann has not, it seems, abandoned the strict phenomenological analysis of common sense knowledge adopted in his and Peter Berger's earlier work. In that work he was obliged by the rules of phenomenological method to refrain from engaging with the "innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality, which [common sense] takes for granted" (1966: 34).[5] Phenomenological analysis, he and Berger insisted, "refrains from any causal or genetic hypotheses, as well as from assertions about the ontological status of the phenomena analysed" (1966: 20). In describing the 'reality' of common sense these interpretations were, he claims, taken into account, but within phenomenological brackets. Yet, this restriction does not allow Luckmann to concern himself with or to distinguish the dynamics of lay-people's common sense knowledge in circumstances wherein the increase in specialised

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[5] Geertz avers that any analysis that seeks to suggest or to demonstrate that common sense is a cultural system must reckon with its "wildly heterogeneous" (1975: 92) content, both across and within societies, and with its lack of a logical structure and substantive conclusions. Gramsci similarly argues that one cannot look to common sense for philosophical propositions, or judge its validity or truth, as it is a "chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find here anything one likes" (1971: 345). Nevertheless, both Geertz and Gramsci account for common sense's conflictual and at times anti-hegemonic character in their conceptualisations of common sense. In Gramsci's case, this runs against his general Marxist orientation, for Marx was not concerned with the validity of the content of common sense beliefs, but instead with their "formal solidity" (Gramsci 1971: 346) as part of a body of thought which accepts uncritically the predominant conditions of society as natural, and right.

knowledge causes a decrease in the proportion of common knowledge held by members of society. In such an environment there are likely to be increased tensions and conflicts between competing claims over what is or 'should be' understood as being common sense, as well as a highlighting of the differences between competing versions of common sense as a means to defend their distinctiveness against external 'interpretations'. Luckmann claims that subjective knowledge (and, by implication, diverse versions of common knowledge) "functions in ways which reveal that structure to phenomenological description" (1987: 182). The 'ways' Luckmann has in mind are limited to routinised, habitualised actions and behaviours that ultimately result in institutions and 'objective' social reality. In reading the character and functions of common sense from the social structure this knowledge is held to result in, Luckmann is not only engaged in a process of tautological reasoning but also cannot account for institutionally invisible actions and behaviours and the common sense knowledge that informs them. Luckmann cannot discern *degrees* of legitimation of prevailing forms of power.

Luckmann's phenomenological stance also disregards the relations of power in which experts create problems and risks, appropriate and render common sense specialised, and thereby expand their domains of expertise and control. The differentiation of common sense clearly holds the potential for the development of asymmetric power relations, with some groups' specialised versions of common sense gaining ascendancy over others, based upon their correspondence with external, abstract principles, rather than group experience. Common sense is, as noted earlier, confined by Luckmann to a social stock of knowledge that is relatively static, uniform, acquiescent and oriented towards order - in this case, through its acceptance of the legitimations of expertise. As a consequence of both his and phenomenological sociology's restricted conception of common sense, Luckmann does not perceive the increasing structural transformation of 'the social stock of knowledge' as unduly problematic. Nor does he appear overly concerned about the prospect of increased layperson reliance upon expertise, because ultimately "the sciences, no matter how one adds [them] up or reduces them to one ... are entirely incapable to substitute their cognitive schemata for the kind of knowledge required to regulate action in ordinary situations" (1987: 196).[6]

In recent years, several thinkers have criticised with varying degrees of rigour phenomenological sociology's propensity to limit common sense to the perception of a

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[6] The sciences need not necessarily *substitute* their cognitive schemata. Instead, they may damage common sense rationality, values and traditions, and people's civic competence through the imposition of alternative, alien understandings and models of the human and social (on this point, see Wynne 1996 and O'Neill 1995).

shared reality. For example, Daniel Misgeld (1987) argues that phenomenological sociology does not do justice to common sense as a form of practical deliberation. Based upon a comparative cultural analysis of common sense, Clifford Geertz likewise reasons that common sense consists not merely of the apprehension of reality, but also of "down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom, judgements or assessments of it" (1975: 8), an understanding he sees as insufficiently recognised in the work of phenomenologists, Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz.[7] Anthony Giddens is similarly concerned to qualify Schutz's sweeping depiction of common sense as simply composed of a stock of knowledge. He maintains that the bundle of understandings or 'stock of knowledge' which comprise Schutz's conception of common sense knowledge covers two analytically separable elements. The first of these, which refers to "the interpretative schemes whereby actors constitute and understand social life as meaningful" (1987: 121), Giddens dubs 'mutual knowledge'. This Giddens distinguishes from what he calls 'common sense' understood generically, which he defines as "a more-or-less articulated body of theoretical knowledge, drawn upon to explain why things are as they are, or happen as they do, in the natural and social worlds" (1987: 121). On this view, common sense beliefs underpin mutual knowledge, both in instructive terms, and through the

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[7] The predominance of a conception of common sense as the unreflexive and hegemonic perception of reality in the social sciences is perhaps best illustrated through reference to Richard Thompson's 1995 critique of Geertz's study of common sense. In his analysis of the influence of common sense upon judicial decision making, Thompson is concerned to reject the positing of a single system of common sense shared by all, chastising Geertz (along with judges) for this perceived failing. In pointing out that common sense differs according to class or minority background, he poses the question, "can we really assume that the common sense of coal miners is really the same of that of the Duponts?" However, Thompson proceeds to do just that by referring to "a reliance upon common sense standards" on the part of judges as imposing a "homogeneous conception of persons on a diverse reality" (1995: 130). The reader is left to deduce that what Thompson in fact means is *dominant* common sense. This slip might be dismissed as merely an omission on Thompson's part, were it not for his portrayal of common sense as universal in another respect. Thompson's limited conception of common sense may be demonstrated, yet again, through reference to his further criticism of Geertz on the grounds of his failure to attempt to "indicate where common sense gradually shades into more disputed or ideological aspects of culture" (1995: 130). Once more, Thompson misreads that author's considered analysis. Geertz does not render a clear distinction between common and more contentious modes of thought, that is, ideology, because he argues that such a line cannot be drawn. Unlike Thompson who, after Bourdieu, defines common sense as "the universe of the undiscussed and undisputed" which "both defines and sets limits on the universe of the discussed and the disputed" (1995: 131), Geertz argues that common sense is not simply hegemonic. Nor, he argues, is it solely the perception and reproduction of a dominant social reality. For Geertz, common sense is (despite its own insistence to the contrary) *also* resolutely ideological - diverse, unstructured and contradictory - hardly the conception of common sense that Thompson sets up as a target for his review. The confined nature of Thompson's account of common sense is further exemplified through his portrayal of the content of the "undisputed and undiscussed" in US culture. Thompson assumes, for example, that most Americans embrace as common sense an atomistic and economistic conception of humans. This, he argues, leads to an 'act-centred' focus for assessing legal responsibility, rather than the 'whole-person' analysis that makes sense in "cultures where human beings are defined not by some individualist essence, but by their place in a network of social and cultural relations" (1995: 132). According to Finkel (1995), though, the latter is precisely the form of analysis - one he dubs 'common sense justice' - employed by ordinary American citizens serving as jurors. Given that they do so against the injunctions of judges, Thompson's assessment of the content and nature of common sense seems unnecessarily universal, and restricted as a result.

provision of a framework of 'ontological security'. Giddens insists that this separation is necessary because mutual knowledge and common sense knowledge are the subjects of different modes of analysis and subject to different standards of evidence - for where the former are experienced as meanings, the latter are expressed as beliefs: "authenticity on the level of meaning has to be distinguished from the validity of propositions about the world that are expressed as beliefs within a particular meaning-frame" (1987: 158).[8]

Giddens' qualification of Schutz's conception of common sense may be seen as part of his more general design to develop a means for reconciling subjectivist and objectivist traditions in sociology by accounting for structure and agency whilst according primacy to neither. His conceptualisation of common sense attempts to accommodate the notion of the social world as the work of skilled, active human subjects through the element of 'mutual knowledge', whilst not discounting the objective character of norms, the causal conditions of action and the assymetries of power affecting norms and praxis that inform the notion of common sense as 'stocks of knowledge' inherited from the past and accepted relatively uncritically. Whereas Schutz places an emphasis upon common sense as knowledge required for coming to terms with reality (and considers knowledge which goes beyond this to constitute special forms), Giddens' distinction stresses that this is to emphasise only the baseline *function* of common sense. It is this aspect of common sense that *permits* descriptive knowledge - knowledge of the proper ways in which to conduct and interpret action and experience, which is also, as Giddens sees it, a part of common sense knowledge. At the same time, Giddens (perhaps unwittingly) clarifies his position regarding the universal and anthropological aspects of common sense by characterising 'mutual knowledge' and its rules as contextually specific, with 'common sense' constituting the 'more universal' beliefs or assumed certitudes on which this is grounded.

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[8] The distinction between mutual knowledge and common sense also lends weight to Giddens' thesis of the 'double hermeneutic' as applicable to the natural sciences. Giddens insists that it is mistaken to focus upon a double hermeneutic as specific to the social sciences, as this does not adequately account for "the practical impact which natural science has upon the lives of lay individuals" (1987: 12), and, in turn, the on-going influence that lay beliefs and activities exert on natural scientific developments. However, to enable the application of the double hermeneutic to the natural sciences, thus restoring lay actors' agency and highlighting the social character of the natural sciences, Giddens argues it is necessary to isolate mutual knowledge from common sense, for while relations between the natural scientist and her or his field of investigation may be constituted and mediated by common sense - "scientific ideas may derive from common sense beliefs and concepts, as well as place them in question" (1987: 14) - this relation retains a degree of autonomy with respect to the mutual knowledge informing relations between natural scientists themselves, or between them and the lay public. In short, Giddens' concept of mutual knowledge demands a double hermeneutic applicable to the natural sciences, whereas common sense, as he understands it, does not.

Giddens' conceptual differentiation between mutual knowledge and common sense is also intended to provide the means by which to address the problem of contextual relativism and, in particular, to mediate problems of interpretation between common sense constructs and the constructs of social scientific thought. Whereas descriptive accounts of mutual knowledge are relatively incorrigible to the outside social researcher, based as they are on contextually specific events and practices, the common sense certitudes that underpin these *are* available to the theories and research techniques of social scientists. Social scientists are able to assess the validity or otherwise of common sense certitudes and, should they gain the trust of lay people and respect for the substance of their findings, to introduce their own critical insights to these people's everyday lives. There are two main problems with Giddens' bifurcation of common sense. Firstly, Giddens implies that contextual relativism applies only at the level of mutual knowledge, and not at the more fundamental, 'universal' level. To conceptualise common sense as operating on two distinct levels may serve a useful heuristic function, but it also imparts to these levels themselves, and to common sense certitudes, a solidity that might or might not exist. It appears to me also to offer too neat a separation between the 'true' knowledge of the social researcher (free, one assumes, of ideology and attentive to the contingency of beliefs) and the 'beliefs' of lay-people. Secondly, and relatedly, Giddens suggests that social scientists themselves have nothing to learn from lay people. This is despite his recognition of the potential threat posed to sociology's subject matter by the social sciences and, thus, the political nature of common sense.

The above discussion has largely dealt with phenomenological sociology's conception of common sense. This is because common sense is the primary focus of this approach, and subject of its most original and influential analyses. Although phenomenological sociology has provided an essential description of the constitution and functions of common sense, in the above account I have identified important omissions in this theoretical approach's conceptualisation of common sense, and suggested that these may be largely attributed to Schutz's particular application of the phenomenological method. Through its failure to adequately account for common sense as particular, and as more than simply the apprehension of reality, phenomenological sociology effectively de-politicises this mode of thought. Phenomenological sociology developed primarily as a critique of scientific sociology and, in particular, scientific sociology's perceived problematic relationship with common sense. I now present a brief and generalised description of scientific sociology's attitude toward common sense knowledge, and outline the substance of the phenomenological critique of scientific sociology and its relationship with common sense. Before doing so, however, I will firstly identify the ways in which the doctrine of science more generally conceptualises and deals with

common sense, for it is this canon that served as a model for the scientific sociology of Emile Durkheim.

Science and common sense

With the development of modern science, Edmund Sullivan (1987) argues, theoretical knowledge was characterised as objective and value-free, and the expert theoriser as concerned with the pursuit of the true, relegating questions of value and morality to traditional mores and practices. Through the employment of practices calculated to transcend the interests of the inquirer and enable, through its specification and isolation, the control and manipulation of a phenomenon, theory was separated from practice, with the value neutrality of theory located in the institute of the expert, and practice located in common sense (1987: 221). Sullivan regards these devices of scientific-technological expertise as the re-enactment of primitive purity rites in a secular form, in which "purity from error is achieved through extrication from common sense; purity from the diffuseness and embeddedness of common sense ... through the bureaucratisation of knowledge in the multiple forms of expertise" (1987: 225). Common sense is thus viewed by the expert theoriser as dangerous and untruthful, analogous to 'dirt' and 'pollution' in Mary Douglas' (1966) analysis of pollution beliefs and behaviours.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt also holds (after Alfred North Whitehead) that the emergence of modern science and Cartesian reason were responsible for the 'retreat of common sense'. In her desire to explain the particular vehemence with which modern philosophy turned on common sense and tradition in general, though, Arendt isolates more specifically the source of the 'error' that is deemed by modern philosophers to reside in common sense. Modern science and radical Cartesian doubt revealed that "the senses, and thus man, had been deceived" (1958: 273). The self-evidence of truth and reality as perceived by the senses was collapsed with the demonstration that what truly 'is' does not necessarily appear of its own accord, and that the human capabilities are not adequate, in any case, to perceive this reality. Common sense was hence relegated from its status in the pre-modern scientific world-view as a unifying sense that fit all the other strictly individual senses and sense data into the common world, to an "inner faculty without any world relationship". Following the 'Cartesian Revolution', Arendt argues, humans no longer held in common an objective shared reality, but simply a shared structure of mind (1958: 280-4). Reality was separated from consciousness, with Science and rationalistic expertise able to exercise a monopoly on the conception of 'objective reality' through the power of abstraction. With this development, scepticism

towards common sense and the evidence of the senses was held to be an essential prerequisite for the development of true, emancipatory knowledge and reason.

Scientific sociology and common sense

Concerned as he was to establish and defend the legitimacy of sociology as a distinctive science, Emile Durkheim argued that the scientific study of society should be conducted in a spirit homologous to that of 'the other natural sciences', retaining the fundamental principle of Cartesian rationalism and, thus, adopting a similar stance towards common sense. Durkheim conceived the task of sociology to be the study and explanation of social facts, which he defined in *The Rules of Sociological Method* as "ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with power of coercion, by which they control him" (1895: 3). The observation of structural and symbolic social facts, he argued, should be organised according to rules which demand that personal biases and preconceptions be eliminated, the phenomena under scrutiny be clearly defined, an empirical indicator of the phenomenon under scrutiny be found, and social facts be considered as 'things' - allowing the search for their properties and characteristics to take place, and permitting the drawing of verifiable conclusions about their nature (1895). This last rule constitutes the most crucial aspect of Durkheim's sociology as science, establishing as it does the discipline's subject matter, and enabling its study through the use of scientific methods. Durkheim's first attempt to apply the rules of his sociological method and to demonstrate the utility of his methodological and ontological advocacy provides an apposite illustration of his notion that adequate sociological knowledge must be achieved through methodically-disciplined abstraction from common sense. In *Suicide* (1968), Durkheim sought to reveal that a phenomenon at the time commonsensically considered uniquely psychological, should be regarded as a social rather than individual fact, and studied as a thing. Hence, Durkheim's sociology held that the intuitions and observations of social life from the natural, or pre-theoretical, attitude and common sense are prone to misconception. Common sense is primarily considered as a problem, as something to be controlled or evaded (Blum 1970) in the observation of facts so as to ensure the integrity of the theories developed to explain these facts and, of particular importance to Durkheim, to provide knowledge that could be employed to obtain a 'better society' - largely through the education of common sense.

Throughout much of his academic career Raymond Boudon has been preoccupied with defending the idea and practice of sociology as science.[9] For him, this entails adhering

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[9] See, for example, Boudon, R. 1980 [1971]. *The Crisis in Sociology: Problems of Sociological Epistemology*. New York: Columbia University Press

to Durkheim's stricture that scientific sociology is to be developed against common sense, and that social facts should be treated as things. Accordingly, Boudon argues that the social sciences frequently develop false beliefs, and thus, deficient theories and practices, due to "the interference of common sense knowledge" (1988: 3). Common sense epistemology, he argues, includes a number of principles to which we grant a universal value and of which we are hardly conscious. These principles may indeed be considered, without danger, to be universally valid in the domain of everyday life and the natural attitude. However, outside this context such principles as the principle of the singularity of truth, the principle that a true theory of a phenomenon should represent it *as it is*, and the postulate of universal determinism (according to which everything has a cause) can easily, Boudon maintains, be illegitimate. Due to their general validity in everyday life, though, Boudon argues we are "weakly incited to raise the question of their validity" (1988: 3) and, consequently, treat principles as valid where they are not, and theories as either true or "more credible" (1988: 3) than they are entitled to be.

Boudon's position may be seen as somewhat overstated. He presents common sense as being made up of epistemological principles that have the character of strictly logical, undebatable truths. These principles should, perhaps, rather be conceptualised as formalisations of a priori frameworks that help to guide people's conduct and action in everyday life. As such, they are not necessarily understood by social actors to be universally valid without qualification, but as 'true for all practical purposes', or 'until further notice'. They might perhaps be better (that is, less deterministically) apprehended and described in Geertzian terms as ubiquitous features of common sense, rather than objectified as principles. This tendency to overemphasise the solidity of common sense epistemological propositions is, as argued earlier, also evident in phenomenological sociology (although to a lesser degree), and will be discussed in further detail momentarily in terms of its political implications. Boudon also neglects the degree to which common sense informs, and is necessary for, the practice of scientific sociology. This is despite Leon Blum's (1970) assertion that most sociologists recognise that they *must* exercise common sense and tact in conducting inquiries, either treating this as irrelevant, or a problem to be controlled or evaded. If scientific sociologists did not previously appreciate their discipline's intimate and problematic connection to common sense (despite Marx's admonitions), phenomenological sociology's critique of scientific sociology was to give them some cause for disquiet.

Schutz's critique of scientific sociology stems from his observation that, in taking for granted the world of cultural objects and social institutions and treating their existence as an a priori assumption, this field of study does not grasp the objective reality of social

phenomena but, rather, deals with the products of typification (1962: 53). The constructs of the social scientist are therefore (merely) "constructs of the second degree" (1962: 59), or, once-removed modifications of common sense. As a consequence, scientific sociology, Schutz argues, perpetuates and re-affirms the reifying tendencies of common sense, instead of exposing them for what they are. For Schutz, it is not the task of sociology to focus on grasping social reality but to uncover the logic of typification through which actors organise their everyday actions and construct common sense knowledge, thereby generating and sustaining their belief in social 'reality'. If sociology is to accomplish this task, it must adopt as its subject matter common sense knowledge of everyday life, "the unquestioned but always questionable background within which inquiry starts and within which alone it can be carried out" (1962: 57).

By means of the above critique, Schutz sees himself as restoring some conceptual autonomy and creativity to the ordinary social actor, typically denied her or him by conventional scientific sociology. Schutz's humanistic project seeks to demonstrate that the subjects of sociological analyses are not mere puppets, whose thought and action are determined by external social facts and internalised values, but rather as socially and culturally competent actors. The subjective interpretation of meaning is not, he argues, isolated to the methodology of the social sciences, but "a principle of constructing course of action types in common sense experience" (1962: 24), an activity undertaken of necessity by social actors in the course of their everyday lives. Moreover, social actors are, he insists, possessors of rational capacities. Whilst actors' rationality of knowledge in everyday thought bears little relationship to the archetype typically conceived of by social scientists, due to its relatively inscrutable nature, it is nevertheless, Schutz argues, sufficiently integrated and transparent to be used for solving most practical problems at hand (1962: 82). Schutz's criticism of scientific sociology has exerted some impact on modern sociological analysis, demanding as it does the reconceptualisation of the social actor and associated increased reflexivity in the practice of social science. However, Schutz's critique has also, I believe, served to entrench, along with its identified constraints, the conception of common sense knowledge upon which phenomenological sociology's critique is based. The social actor has been liberated from the deterministic abstraction of scientific sociology and reanimated, only to be hamstrung by a conservative, and ultimately deterministic, conception of common sense.[10] This is reflected, to some degree, in the somewhat restricted character of sociology's reflexive turn.

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[10] I should state at this point that in rethinking common sense it is not my intention to conduct a relativising critique of sociology calculated to blur the dividing line between the practical sociology of lay actors and conventional academic sociology (as in the ethnomethodological critique). Instead, I explore the limitations of existing conceptualisations of common sense, and ways in which the common sense of

Sociology's 'reflexive turn'

Perhaps the foremost advocate of reflexive sociological analysis in recent years, through his formulation of structuration theory, has been Anthony Giddens. Giddens argues that due to their 'naturalistic presumptions', or adherence to the notion that "social life can be analysed in terms of the operation of factors of which social actors are ignorant" (1993: 68), proponents of the orthodox consensus of the social sciences assumed that the practical connotations of social science have a 'technological' form. On this view, it is, quite simply, the role of the social sciences to correct false beliefs that actors have about social activity or institutions. Giddens agrees that this is indeed the task of the social sciences, and one that, given the frequently flawed nature of lay-people's common sense knowledge of social reality, they may fulfil.[11] However, he holds that the increased recognition that the social sciences deal with "concept-bearing and concept-inventing agents who theorise about what they do as well as the conditions of doing it" (1993: 70) or, in terms of his own theoretical construct, that the social sciences involve a double-hermeneutic, demands the adoption of a more reflexive and ethical stance in undertaking this charge.

Giddens argues that it is now generally accepted that "the technical concepts of social science are, and must be, parasitical upon lay concepts" (1993: 70). Indeed, he maintains that it is because technical social science concepts are logically tied to common sense that so many social scientific findings - no matter how innovative they were first considered - become 'banal' through their absorption into the social world that they were first coined to analyse. In fact, Giddens argues, the practical impact of the absorption of social scientific concepts into the social world, and their incorporation into the practices of social activity, far outweigh the 'technological' influence of the social sciences. This, he believes, is a phenomenon that holds significant implications for the social sciences and their practice. Because social science "does not stand in a neutral relation to the social world, as an instrument of 'technological change' ... critique

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ordinary people might be considered critical, and assist them in their on-going struggle to realise moral autonomy.

[11] The social sciences, Giddens (1993) reasons, can deliver enlightenment to lay actors in several respects, as: common sense knowledge is frequently wrong, and may lead to prejudice, intolerance and discrimination; due to the nature of the double hermeneutic of the social sciences, 'correct' knowledge may, in fact, be the result of sociological research; common knowledge about behaviour differs from one group and milieu to another; people are normally able discursively to identify only a little of the complex conventional framework of their activities; behaviour may have unintended as well as intended consequences; ways of acting, thinking and feeling may exist outside the consciousness of individuals; and, ordinary language is too ambiguous for dispassionate analytical scientific description.

cannot be limited to the criticism of false beliefs" (Giddens 1993: 71), but must be alert to the transformative capacities of its own concepts and theories.[12]

Whilst many sociologists are increasingly devoting attention to the implications of the reflexive character of their practice (Jary and Jary 1991: 525), I argue that most do so according to a more restricted concept of reflexivity than that which Giddens espouses. Their reflexivity is, for the most part, confined to sociological analysis itself. For example, George Ritzer (1998) recently called for the 'resuscitation' of the sociology of sociology as a means to defend the discipline against the threat of 'McDonaldization', or, functional rationalisation at the expense of substantial rationality.[13] In advocating a sociology of sociology, or reflexive sociology, which demands a sociological critique of sociological reasoning as a prerequisite of any rigorous sociological practice, Ritzer follows closely the approaches of Alvin Gouldner (1979) and Bennett Berger (1981; 1991). For these analysts, the focus appears to be epistemological vigilance to ensure sensitivity to the way social structures affect what they think and do, and thereby to defend or improve the sufficiency of sociological practice. This reflexivity does not necessarily extend to a concern with the impact of sociology upon its subject matter, though. Instead, it is largely confined to sociologists or would-be sociologists themselves, and to the discipline's own 'epistemological security'. It might be argued that, given the nature of the double hermeneutic, epistemological vigilance is all that is required to ensure that sociology serves an emancipatory rather than 'enslaving' function. On this view, what is good for sociology is good for lay-people, so to speak. But a genuine concern with the impact of sociology on its subject matter *should* demand that greater attention be paid both to the content and nature of ordinary people's common sense, and to the notion and practice of reflexivity. This point will be considered in further detail in the following chapter on methods.

Rethinking common sense as critical and political

The increased reflexivity of the social sciences in recent years has been accompanied by some attempts to rethink common sense, its relationship to experts and expertise, and to the potential autonomy of laypeople. This shift indicates, at some level, and among some thinkers, an acknowledgement that common sense is a struggle, and that it is more

[12] As a result, Giddens rejects altogether ethnomethodology's stance of methodological indifference, which holds that because societal members' everyday activities are instances of practical sociological reason, "there can be nothing to quarrel with or to correct" (Garfinkel 1967: viii) in this reason. Although ethnomethodology may be considered humanistic in the sense that it stresses members' possession of social competence, showing that social reality is created by individuals, rather than presenting them as 'cultural dopes', it then resolutely refuses to assist members to recognise sites and instances of oppression and domination, maintaining that "ethnomethodology is not directed to formulating or arguing correctives ... a remedy for practical actions ... [or] in search of humanistic arguments" (1967: viii).

[13] See also Ritzer, G. 1990. "Metatheory in sociology" in *Sociological Forum* 5 (1): 3-17.

or less critical. Some academics consider common sense to be essential to human interaction and competent institutions. Hence, these academics' argument is that we need simply increase opportunities for its exercise. Others sanction critical forms of common sense as a means of improving institutions and enhancing, to some degree, people's autonomy, but devote little or no attention to the question of how common sense may be 'made critical'. Still other neo-Marxists, discerning in common sense certain anti-hegemonic and humanistic merits or possibilities, aim to develop critical forms of common sense as a means to reform or displace what they understand to be an inequitable and repressive social order. In the following section, I examine these various arguments. In the process, I identify the nature of the struggle in which ordinary people's common sense is held by various thinkers to be primarily engaged. I also draw out those characteristics and forms of common sense that are considered to be critical, as well as the contexts and conditions in which they are likely to be evidenced, to develop, or to be developed. In mapping this particular survey of common sense, I thus point to means by which we might identify, and privilege, the common sense of ordinary people as a socio-political resource.

Like Siegwart Lindenberg (1987), Phillip Howard (1994) belongs to the first of the above schools of thought. He sees common sense as an essential component of any form of human activity and a prerequisite for the possibility of positive outcomes to truly human activity. Based, in part, upon his largely positive conception of common sense, Howard castigates the bureaucratic, procedural nature of modern regulatory institutions that, through their attempts to ensure certainty by means of rigid, objective legal dictates restrict, and at times positively outlaw, the exercise of judgement, initiative, responsibility and common sense. Howard is not, however, indiscriminate in his critique of bureaucracy. He acknowledges that many rules, laws and protections are, indeed, necessary. Neither is he simply 'anti-big-government', arguing that where big government is frequently blamed for policy failures and other societal woes, this is to largely miss the point. The salient question is, as he sees it, not why government is so big, but rather why it fails in so many tasks. Howard primarily attributes this failure to the procedural orthodoxy on which modern government is now built, an orthodoxy which renders it a regulatory system which "goes too far whilst doing too little" (1994: 11).

Modern law seeks to keep government in close check and to provide crisp guidelines for private citizens, ensuring individual freedom, universal fairness and objectivity through specific legal mandates. However, Howard argues that these goals are being driven by a philosophy of rationalism that seeks to predetermine relations between citizens and the

state in advance, finding a natural order in government similar to that held to exist in nature. In their attempts to formulate sufficient and detailed enough rules to address every possible contingency (thereby satisfying their own desire for certainty), lawmakers and bureaucrats leave no room for the exercise of judgement and common sense. Yet the exercise of common sense is, as Howard sees it, essential to successful human relations and government. Unlike procedural objectivity and bureaucratic processes that are informed by the philosophy of rationalism, common sense is insistently contextual; it is attuned to the particular situation and human foibles and, thereby, to necessary exceptions to general principles. Where through the dominance of the philosophy of rationalism scope has not been left for the exercise of common sense, Howard argues that several deleterious consequences have been the result, not least of which is the rift between ordinary citizens and government. Government appears distant, Howard maintains, because its actions and the reasons employed to justify them "seem remote from human beings who must live with the consequences" (1994: 9). Governments' actions seem arbitrary due to their failure to deal with real-life problems in a way that reflects an understanding of the situation. Moreover, governments have, through their failure to recognise that it is not possible to *guarantee* universal fairness and objectivity, fostered enmity and mistrust between citizens themselves. Rationalist bureaucracy's (albeit well-intentioned) attempts to satisfy 'formal equality of treatment' through proceduralism reduces governments' capacities to act in the interests of all, but also, as an unintended consequence, creates divisiveness and increased prejudice. Law, where it attempts to ensure distributive justice and "purge people's souls" (1994: 144) tends to exile human judgement, common sense and uncertainty - exposure to which, Howard argues, generally fosters open alternatives, co-operation and human activity.

Howard sees rationalism as posing a threat to people's autonomy where this is detached from the perceived reality of their circumstances and does not allow them to exercise common sense in their everyday lives. He feels that modern regulatory institutions should be made 'more human' through their incorporation of the understanding that any process for enabling human action must have an open-ended character that promotes the sensitivity and openness required for creative choices and responsibility. Howard's may be seen as a conservative stance: he does not wish to fundamentally change institutions but to render them more effective whilst opening spaces for citizens to exercise some degree of autonomy, free from what he sees as oppressive and intellectually inhibiting regulations. Howard does not, however, subject common sense to critical scrutiny. A similar argument for the importance of common sense's 'humanness' is developed by Norman Finkel (1995), who also considers common sense to be an essential counterpoint to the rationality of the law.

Finkel (1995) examines the relationship between 'law on the books', as set down in the US Constitution and developed in cases and decisions, and what he calls 'common sense justice' - the ordinary citizen's notions of what is just and fair. Juror's common sense justice is, he argues, embedded in the intuitive notions these people employ when judging both a defendant and the law. Jurors are insistently subjective in their approach to their task; they do not so much find reality, Finkel maintains, as construct it through the use of narrative rather than propositional thinking, and the formulation of stories which make best sense of the facts. Juror's decisions are not, therefore, given in, found in, or deduced from the objective, external reality, but constructed in subjective reality. And given that the juror's task is fundamentally interpretive, as opposed to logical-deductive, mathematical or actuarial, Finkel argues that subjectivity *must* enter juror's deliberations. Because the common sense context is typically wider than the law's, common sense justice considers, and accounts for, the historical circumstances of a criminal act, and the human, flesh-and-blood motivation for human actions and intentions. This, Finkel maintains, constitutes a better context in which to judge human action. Due to his particular stance, Finkel lauds the fact that when the law or its practitioners from the bench attempt to curb jurors' subjective preferences with objective rules, instructions, or a circumscribed focus, jurors are likely to "bend and reconstrue the objective rules in subjective ways, or nullify such rules altogether" (1995: 326). Jurors do not, however, yield entirely to the subjective. Finkel found that they are selective, rather than indiscriminate in doing so, "evaluating ... by some individualised measure that must be objective, reality-based and shared" (1995: 326). Nor are jurors cavalier or anarchic in their nullification of the law: nullification, Finkel argues, " ... represents the jury's desire not to defeat but to 'perfect and complete' the law. It is the 'no confidence' vote of common sense justice refusing to follow the path the law has marked out - and pointing to a new path based on what seem to be more just grounds" (1995: 2).[14]

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[14] In his account of juror's practices, Harold Garfinkel (1967) also observes that jurists are typically asked to change their habitual rules of social judgement. Jurists understand that they are obliged to shun ambiguity and common sense reasoning, both in the course of proceedings and in subsequent explanations of their decisions. Garfinkel found that in spite of these rules and pressures, jurists define retrospectively the decisions that have been made, with the outcome preceding the decision (1967: 114). Lay people's common sense decision making is, in his view, predominantly concerned with post-hoc order and rationality. Lay people are, he maintains, preoccupied with being able to justify their actions to the generalised other and, thereby, with satisfying the requirements for the expectation of social support. This is too conservative a view of common sense, diminishing common sense's argumentative nature through a concern with its conservative aspect. Despite his reflection elsewhere that members' practical sociological inquiries actively *invite* ambiguity, equivocality or improvisation (1967: 14), Garfinkel consistently portrays members as driven by the desire to demonstrate their social competence and accountability.

The logic of common sense - in this case, common sense justice - rejects unrealistic attempts to impose upon it external, abstract rules and means of judgement. It especially does so where these standards are deemed incapable of coping with the messiness of social reality and, by aiming to eliminate or drastically delimit uncertainty, reduce possibilities for the exercise of choice and responsibility. The above researchers see common sense as inherently critical of forms of expertise and governance that do not accord with, or take account of, 'human reality'. Whereas Howard seeks to make space for the exercise of common sense by tackling the procedural orthodoxy that underpins regulatory institutions, Finkel shows that where opportunities arise, common sense thought infiltrates and influences these institutions, introducing subjectivity and humanism to otherwise detached and restrictive 'objective' processes. Neither Howard nor Finkel subjects common sense to critical scrutiny, although Finkel does make a distinction between ordinary common sense and common sense justice that is, he feels, more critical. Critical common sense, it appears, develops in situations where people are obliged to defend their traditional modes of reasoning from the strictures of objectivist institutions, but are at the same time restrained by some modicum of respect for these institutions and a sense of the gravity of their task. In other words, for Finkel, critical common sense demands at some level the negotiation of a dialogue and balance between common sense and expert discourse.

Lindenberg (1987) holds a like view regarding the importance of common sense to human relations, seeing it as central to the possibility of human interaction as equals. However, he argues that common sense need not necessarily foster relations between groups on the basis of an acknowledged common humanity and that, therefore, common sense need not be critical. As a result, Lindenberg is concerned to identify those phenomena that may pose a threat to common sense's continued, and effective - that is, critical - operation. Drawing upon the insights of Durkheim, Lindenberg isolates strong group solidarity and power as the greatest structural threats to common sense. Strong solidarity constrains the exercise of common sense within a group through the associated development of an unexamined and undiscussed common consciousness.[15] A weakening of solidarity within groups, on the other hand, promotes the recognition of a communality across groups based upon the uniformity of human experience, and a potential broadening of the foundation of common sense through the 'incorporation' of newly found differences. In other words, this ensures both a basis for interacting as equals and raised standards of evidence for claims about the world and social phenomena that are incompatible with common sense. Lindenberg argues that

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[15] Ernest Gellner (1992) has reduced this insight to a proposed universal principle which holds that logical coherence and social solidarity are inversely related.

asymmetric power relations are equally threatening to common sense as, where power governs social relations, the communality of human experience is reduced, communication between levels is impaired, and, with an associated increased control of communication, language becomes divorced from experience.[16]

Common sense is, for Lindenberg, critical to the degree to which it distinguishes, accommodates, and incorporates different interpretations of reality and solutions to common problems. The greater the 'openness' of common sense and resultant expansion of the baseline for human interaction, the more critical the common sense is likely to be, or become. Because he sees critical forms of common sense as flourishing in conditions of reduced solidarity within groups and extensive relations between groups, Lindenberg argues that the social sciences can play an important rȯle in the development and expansion of critical common sense. By revealing the communality of human nature and experience 'concealed' by disparate customs, language codes, laws, values and norms, and the rationality of other groups' solutions to practical problems, the social sciences may contribute to the development of common ground between strangers (Lindenberg 1987: 209-20). This observation is, however, accompanied by a caveat - a qualification which indicates that Lindenberg is cognisant of what Giddens (1993) describes as the relation of tension between sociology and its subject matter. Practical experience is crucial to Lindenberg's conception of critical common sense. He feels that whilst education can improve basic cognitive capacities and, thereby, the learning efficiency of practice or experience, as it can the identification of previously unnoticed uniformities, education can also "interfere with learning from experience by protecting beliefs against experience" (Lindenberg 1987: 214). Instruction, he fears, can lead individuals to believe that "phenomena inaccessible to experience [such as the state] are nonetheless part of common sense" (Lindenberg 1987: 214), and in this manner eradicate the line between common sense and esoteric knowledge, and common sense that is, in principle, available to all. Education can, in effect, teach objectification. Where common sense is active and critical, on this view, it proceeds from practical experience and is not distracted or tempted into fetishism. As each of the above authors observe, common sense that is truly grounded in an understanding of practical experience is critical of those attempts to objectify social reality that render institutions detached from social reality, however understood.

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[16] Lindenberg's argument in defence of common sense appears to be internally contradictory. The weakening of solidarity within groups, which purportedly promotes the development and exercise of critical common sense, also raises the prospect of a further differentiation of socially relevant knowledge. As noted earlier, with this separation comes unevenness in the social distribution of knowledge and resultant immediate possibility of conflict and asymmetric power relations between social groups.

Whilst Lindenberg aims to enhance the critical capacities of common sense largely for the purposes of more effective social integration and communality, Edmund Sullivan stresses the potential role to be played by a critical form of common sense in contesting (and reconciling) asymmetric power relations, and enhancing the autonomy of non-experts. Historically speaking,[17] common sense has stood in opposition to different forms of expertise and hegemony and, in the current historical epoche, Sullivan defends the need for the development of a critical common sense to serve as a corrective to the monopolisation of expertise, money and power (1987: 218). The ascendence of scientific specialism and attendant increased institutionalisation of expertise of recent years at the expense of common sense knowledge has, Sullivan argues, had profound environmental, political and economic consequences.

These consequences, he feels, stem largely from the technological rationality of scientific knowledge which divides theory from practice - locating the value neutrality of theory in the specialism of expert knowledge, and practice in common sense knowledge. In the first instance, the value neutrality of specialised knowledge has led to "the inability of technology to normatively monitor itself" (1987: 229), whilst in the second, the particularity of expert knowledge has led to "the bureaucratisation of knowledge at the expense of any general principle of theoretical synthesis" (1987: 229). Critics are thus able to accuse technological specialism of "technocratic madness, ecological crisis and massive alienation" (1987: 229). Moreover, the institutionalisation of expertise has enabled economic inequality to continue apace, with experts (of whatever ilk) typically enjoying substantially greater levels of remuneration than non-experts. Technological rationality detached from normative constraints, Sullivan argues, "manipulates common sense in order to solidify a particular social order, capitalism, and a particular social class, the middle class" (1987: 227).

Sullivan argues that the critique of specialisation and expertise cannot be left to experts, and that common sense, incorporating as it does through its universality a principle of synthesis, should instead fulfil this role.[18] He insists, however, that this must not be a

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[17] The specialisation of knowledge and its atomising and alienating dangers were, for example, a source of some disquiet for the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment (see Davie, G. E. 1973. *The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*. Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable.).

[18] Sullivan's position may be contrasted with that of Daniel Boorstin (1994) whose comparatively optimistic and benign view of science and technology leads him to an altogether different appreciation of the breach between common sense and scientific knowledge, and view of what the appropriate separation of powers between the two should be. Boorstin argues that at the same time that advances of science and technology permeate our consciousness with paradox (going beyond common opinion), the progress of common sense in government grows exponentially with the development of modern political technology. The divide between what he sees as the 'complacent dogmatism' of common sense and the progressive realm of paradox becomes wider. For Boorstin (who has apparently written off the possibility of progress and innovation in political institutions due to the imperatives of popular government), 'progress' may

nostalgic, residual, pre-industrial common sense but rather, a critical form that "synthesise[s] the polarities which formerly separated it from expert knowledge, namely the universal with the particular and the theoretical with the practical" (1987: 230) and thereby assimilates expertise critically, including its progressive impulses. Sullivan recognises impediments to the development of a critical common sense that would serve in the development of a further democratisation of knowledge through the de-mystification of technological expertise and bureaucratically elite knowledge, posing the question "does the bureaucrat have the vision to believe in democracy when the exclusive possession of knowledge serves his own interests?" (1987: 230) He proceeds to answer his own question, "probably not" (1987: 230), yet still suggests that the only escape from the knowledge and power of self-serving elites is an enlightened, critical common sense.

Sullivan expands upon Howard's and Finkel's respective critiques of functional rationalisation to include related questions of power. He also extends Lindenberg's discussion of power relations and their impact upon common sense through reference to common sense's opposition to asymmetric power relations. In doing so, he follows closely Antonio Gramsci's prescription for the development of an enlightened, critical common sense as a means to autonomy. Gramsci felt that if Marxism was to become a critical force - to act upon and shift people's common sense conceptions of the world, giving them a critical understanding of their situation - it must engage with what the mass actually think. For him, this necessitated adopting as a starting point "that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude (and which has to be made ideologically coherent)" (1971: 345). Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' thus seeks to critique common sense, having based itself on common sense in order to undercut the notion of philosophy as something specialised, remote and abstract - demonstrating that "'everyone' is a philosopher", and that "it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity" (1971: 332).

For Gramsci, the common sense of the mass is composed of several conceptions of the world. These include people's own conception of the world that manifests itself in action, or practical activity (1971: 328), and a number of other conceptions that are

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hinge upon our ontological power to accommodate a schizophrenic consciousness - allowing the advancement of paradox in science, whilst deferring to common sense in society. In his critique of common sense, Boorstin draws upon the word paradox's etymological source in Greek: *para* + *doxa* - opposed to existing notions or an opinion that conflicts with common belief. Boorstin might equally have emphasised an alternative definition of paradox: a person or thing exhibiting apparently contradictory characteristics. It is this sense that Sullivan has in mind when he speaks of common sense as furnishing a unifying characteristic or principle of synthesis that might resolve the seemingly intractable contradiction between experts and lay people.

inherited uncritically from the past, imposed, or 'borrowed' from other groups (1971: 333). These conceptions influence "moral conduct and the direction of the will of the people" (1971: 333) with varying degrees of efficacy, but their overall effect is to make situations of inequality and oppression appear natural and unchangeable, and thereby contribute to the subaltern's continuing subordination. Furthermore, so long as the common sense thought of 'the people' remains a fragmented body of precepts, and does not progress to the level of a systematic body of thought, or philosophy, which can be espoused coherently and thereby facilitate independent and autonomous conduct, these people's social and cultural standing is destined to remain subordinate. They are liable to remain in a supine moral and political state, for the uncritical, explicit or verbal inherited conception of the world produces a situation in which "the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice" (1971: 333).[19] Gramsci stresses that it is not his intention to restrict scientific activity and reduce intellectual thought to a level accessible to the masses, but instead to "construct an intellectual-moral bloc that can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups" (Forgacs 1988: 333). Gramsci's philosophy of praxis aims to make the subaltern's common sense ideologically coherent and self-critical through a dialectic between the common sense of the people and the philosophy of (Marxist) intellectuals.

Both Sullivan's plans for the development of a critical common sense and Gramsci's procedure calculated to form an intellectual unity and ethic that has progressed beyond common sense are reliant upon interaction between common sense and more sophisticated traditions of thought, lay-people and experts. Sullivan is aware of the likely recalcitrance of experts, but devotes little consideration to the question of how to mediate between expert and lay knowledges, or to what the implications of his programme for common sense might be. This may be seen as an important omission given expertise's capacity for 'damage' through procedures of instrumental rationality and the frequent self-interest of experts. John O'Neill (1995) shares a similar view to

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[19] It is important to note, however, that whilst Gramsci variously describes the common sense thought of the mass as "limited, provincial, fossilised and anachronistic" (1971: 326), "fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential" (1971: 343), and "crudely neophobe ... conservative and opposed to novelty" (1971: 346), he does not view common sense in an entirely negative light - as simply false consciousness or ideology (see also Barrett 1991, Landy 1994: 83). Common sense is contradictory and, as such, contains elements of truth as well as elements of misrepresentation. Gramsci feels that it is upon these contradictions that leverage may be obtained in a "struggle of political hegemonies" (Forgacs 1988: 421). Gramsci also writes appreciatively of common sense's - albeit empirical and limited - "experimentalism" and "direct observation of reality" (1971: 348), which allow it to identify in a whole range of judgements "the exact cause, simple and to hand", without letting itself "be distracted by fancy quibbles and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo-jumbo" (1971: 348). In this regard, however, he feels that the common sense of today, as opposed to that of the era pre- modern science, "has a much more limited intrinsic merit" (1971: 348).

that of Sullivan concerning the need for a critical common sense to counter disempowering, instrumentally-rationalist doctrines. He is, however, more attentive to the tensions between sociology and its subject matter, and between expert and lay discourses in general, largely as a result of his conviction that common sense retains a reasonable degree of integrity. He argues that although common sense is not as enlightened or critical as it might ideally be, it is more coherent and self-critical than many social theorists give it credit for.

O'Neill seeks to develop a synthesis between phenomenology and critical theory in what he conceives of as the battle against post rationalism. Post rationalism may be described as

> the state of Western knowledge in which it has become possible for the physical and social sciences to, through a method of objectifying, specialising and technifying, proceed without raising any radical questions about the foundations of their knowledge and the consequences of such scientific and technical rationality for civilised reason and humanity. (1995: 65)

O'Neill sees the social sciences, including sociology, as complicit both in the de-politicisation of the public realm and in its justification, through their reference to elitist theories of the democratic process or technocratic practices that rationalise administrative power. The combined effect of administrative processes and the ability of administered society to command allegiance in exchange for goods and services diminishes political participation and, more importantly for O'Neill, impinges upon and reduces the communicative competence of citizens by convincing them that discourse about the ideal values of political, economic and social life is irrelevant to the management of modern states (1995: 187). O'Neill is particularly vehement in his censure of postmodernist readings of theory and culture. These, he argues, ignore common sense values such as truth, freedom and justice, as well as the qualities of mutual obligation and embodied rationality that are embedded in the historically-constituted life-world and, thus, key constitutive elements of everyday life. Detached as it is from such traditions, post-modern thought offers little, as he sees it, in the way of plans for political action. Instead, having deconstructed the grand narratives of modernity, it represents 'post-modern reality' as composed of fragmented, incommensurable and irreconcilable discourses. Postmodernism, with its atomistic accounts, ironical abstractions and intellectualist parodies, O'Neill argues, threatens to undermine common sense rationality, communal ethics and civic capacities.

O'Neill bases his proposal for the development of a critical common sense capable of opposing post rationalism largely upon a critique of Anthony Giddens, whose double hermeneutic of the social sciences "whilst attempting to refurbish the grounds of the mutuality of common sense and sociological knowledge betrays a fundamental ambivalence towards common sense knowledge ... thereby miss[ing] a serious communication issue in the power relations of political democracies" (1995: 158). Although Giddens endorses, to a degree, the critique of positivism from the perspective of the natural attitude, O'Neill alleges that because he suspects idealism in this turn, Giddens introduces further propositions for a constructivist critical sociology whose central concepts of structure, power and change might render common sense more rational (1995: 159). Giddens sees interpretive sociology and, in particular, the Schutzian postulate of adequacy as idealistic limits to sociology's development of a critical social science necessary for social and political change. This, O'Neill argues, is to overstate the degree to which science can and should serve as a critique of peoples' common sense knowledge. He feels that along with many other social theorists Giddens misunderstands and limits common sense's extant qualities, including its moral, critical and political properties, a misconception that leads him to paint it as impervious to expert knowledge and improvement. As a logical consequence, O'Neill argues, Giddens underestimates the threat posed by the bureaucratic ethos to civic competence and, thus, democracy (1995: 167). To counter the threat of post-rationalism whilst developing a more (self)critical common sense, O'Neill conceives of Schutz's postulate of adequacy as a mediatory mechanism and ethical principle: "[t]he postulate of adequacy may be seen to require *the institutionalisation of the translatability and therefore accountability of expert knowledge* in order to raise the level of the well-informed citizen" (1995: 170, emphasis in original). Moreover, in defence of Peter Winch (1976) whose much maligned relativism, he argues, may be seen as a recognition of the need for ethics in social science, O'Neill maintains that there is nothing in principle that prevents the social scientist from translating first-order accounts into the language of laypersons.

Like Gramsci and Sullivan, O'Neill requires the parallel development of experts and lay-people through mutual interaction between common sense and expert knowledge. He and Sullivan share the assumption that this synthesis might address, or at least temper, the deficiencies of each. O'Neill is, however, more conscious of the potential threat posed by experts and expertise to civic competence, both in the sense of individuals' commitment to others and capacity to defend against the bureaucratic ethos. With the exception of Gramsci's, each of the above theorists' and commentator's theses concerning common sense appears to be informed, to a greater or lesser degree, by the Weberian conception of rationalisation that underlies the transformation of the

economic, political and legal institutions of Western societies. On this view, instrumental rationalisation and processes of bureaucratisation are seen to constrain the freedom of action and choice necessary for substantive rationality, in which the rationality of outcomes is appraised in terms of wider human objectives. Thus, O'Neill can speak of people's civic competence as being undermined by 'post-rationalism', which may itself be considered a logical extension of the Weberian conception of rationalisation. Common sense is seen to comprise, through its insistent universality, subjectivity and practicality, an inherent critique of distorted, contradictory and non-self critical instrumental rationality. Where common sense is open (and, to some extent, critical) it opposes those forms of expertise and hegemony that are underpinned by instrumental rather than substantive rationality. However, if the common sense-based or imbued critique is to be truly effective and contribute to the realisation of more equitable, sustainable and democratic arrangements, theorists like Sullivan, Gramsci and O'Neill argue common sense itself must be made (more) ideologically coherent. The contradictory character of common sense and its 'incoherent' conception of social reality must be progressively eliminated so as to facilitate a unified consciousness of the sources of domination and oppression, and a systematic and articulate critique of this social order. This necessitates some form of interaction between elites and lay-people and, in O'Neill's view, the institutionalisation of a means of translation to ensure that common sense's civic values and political qualities are not undermined or diminished.

From this review, we have established the perceived importance of the common sense of ordinary people as a socio-political resource, according to a number of theorists. For them, common sense is seen (to varying degrees) both as a means for enhancing opportunities for the exercise of choice and responsibility, and as a form of defence against experts and expertise that would diminish people's moral autonomy. Indeed, common sense is viewed by those of a more critical bent as a potential resource with which to sustain a truly comprehensive critique of what is an inequitable socio-political order. Clearly, for the above thinkers, the common sense of ordinary people should be treated not as a residual, but as a domain of, and more or less useful resource in, socio-political struggle. According to Zygmunt Bauman (1976; 1988), however, common sense entails a struggle of an altogether different kind.

Critical theory and common sense

Zygmunt Bauman's more radical critical theory and its account of common sense and autonomy will have none of the above. As far as he is concerned, common sense has no such socio-political caché. In the following section, I dwell on Bauman's position in some detail. I do so because Bauman's is perhaps the most sustained attempt to

conceptualise the relationship between sociology, common sense and lay-people's autonomy. It is, therefore, largely through a synthesis of Bauman's critique of common sense that I crafted aspects of the case study research, described in the next chapter. Although Bauman would concur with O'Neill regarding the role played by scientific sociology in de-politicising the public realm and disempowering ordinary citizens, for him the solution lies not in common sense's improvement, but instead in its radical undermining. Whereas Gramsci sees this as being of necessity something of an organic and processual task, Bauman posits a more rationalistic and confrontational treatment - a 'short sharp shock'.[20] For Bauman, common sense is *the* major impediment to the envisioning and realisation of an alternative, truly emancipatory, social reality. Because it accepts and defends the predominant conditions of society as natural and ahistorical, rather than as historically contingent products of human activity - and thus subject to human intervention and control - common sense, Bauman argues, must be systematically discredited and undermined. In Bauman's opinion, only by weakening common sense may we create a non-deterministic conception of social reality and an environment of genuinely open choices, thereby exposing people to the possibility of real freedom and moral responsibility. Zygmunt Bauman is highly critical of scientific (or what he dubs 'Durksonian' based upon an amalgam of the names of luminaries, Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons) sociology, for its apparent failure and unwillingness to transcend the social reality it describes and petrifies, and its related decision to recognise as valid and worthy only such knowledge as can be checked against this reality, here and now (1976: 36).[21] Through this methodological decision, Bauman argues, scientific sociology perpetuates the common sense belief in the objective and 'natural', rather than historically contingent, nature of social reality - rendering it, in Bauman's view, 'the science of unfreedom'.

Throughout his exposition Bauman portrays the relationship between scientific sociology and common sense as something of a complicitous arrangement, wherein scientific sociology, whilst portraying itself as fundamentally opposed to common sense and oriented to correcting the misconceptions that derive from it, never goes so far as to

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[20] Pierre Bourdieu speaks in similar terms of the need for an 'epistemic rupture' with common sense as a precondition for the development of 'heterodoxy', or, a critical consciousness (1977).

[21] Many writers have criticised Durkheim's sociology for its conservatism, including Lewis A. Coser (1960) who argues these criticisms share a limited number of common themes. Coser isolates these themes as follows: Durkheim's fascination with the study of cohesion led him to neglect to study the phenomena of conflict; in his concern to study society as a whole Durkheim did not deal adequately with the subgroups and subdivisions which make up society; Durkheim overlooked the individual and her or his claims through a concentration upon society and its claims; he stressed the cohesive function of religion without considering its divisive features; through his preoccupation with social order and equilibrium, Durkheim did not fully appreciate the import of social innovation and social change; and, that he neglected to analyse power and violence in the body politic because he was overly concerned with the factors which make for agreement (1960: 211-12).

call into question its own shared basis in naive philosophical realism. This is not to say that scientific sociology does not (somewhat reluctantly) recognise its reliance upon, and indissoluble relationship with, common sense. Like all other bodies of systematised knowledge of humans, sociology perceives itself to be "an attempt to lend intelligibility and cohesion to unorganised, disparate commonsensical experience [a] theoretical refinement of the directly given" (Bauman 1976: 28). Therefore, although scientific sociology may be sceptical and critical of the naive beliefs of common sense - a task in which it takes no little pride - common sense will always remain the ultimate object of sociological exploration, as well as the crucible in which sociological concepts and queries are gestated. In all this, Bauman sees no real problem. The dilemma, he argues, derives from scientific sociology's 'fateful decision' to focus solely on the nature and sources of unfreedom, to the exclusion of a systematic description and analysis of its counterpart. The area in which sociology most clearly parts ways with common sense is with respect to the pre-predicative experience of freedom for, in this regard, commonsensical evidence is "equivocal" (1976: 28); it "does not contain information about the external determination of human fate and conduct" (1976: 28).[22] The only pre-predicative experience of unfreedom available is "the thwarting of a project impelled by human will". It remains to be shown, Bauman argues, "in disagreement with common sense, that what appears to the pristine, pre-predicative experience as a free act, stemming from reasoning and choice, is an inevitability concealed and invisible to the naked eye" (1976: 28). And this, according to Bauman, is precisely what humans most desire. It is an essential task that stems from the poignant needs constantly generated by the lived-through human experience. The first of these is the cognitive need to explain the incomprehensible resistance to free will that does not derive from impenetrable, tangible objects - those objects immediately available to common sense experience. The significance of this requirement, however, pales in comparison to its companion need: the requisite to alleviate the fear of freedom and responsibility for choice.

In Bauman's view, humans do not, on the whole, seek knowledge paving the way for free action but, on the contrary:

> a powerful authority contradicting the evidence [of the experience of free will], exposing its frailty and undependability. What is wanted above everything else is the removal of the burden of responsibility. Free will in itself is an un-fathomable well of anxiety. Free will, conceived as the only cause of constraint, irrevocability and finality in human fate, is a nightmare. (1976: 30)

[22] Berger and Luckmann refer to this state as the "biologically intrinsic world-openness of human existence" (1966: 51-2).

Whereas in pre-secular society, religion fulfilled this emotional need - making people comfortable in the world by eliminating the free-will doctrine and reconciling humans to their 'unfree' fate by reassuring them that, since Man's fall, 'the good' lay in embracing God's will - deified Durkheimian society was to take over the task of satisfying these cognitive and emotional needs. Society, Bauman argues, replaced God in the role of the source of necessity, with 'the good' now located in adhering to its dictates. Socialisation providentially proved itself "a natural substitute for the God-operated springs of human deeds" (Bauman 1976: 32). Thus armed, scientific sociology fought vigorously in the name of rationality and reason 'the illusion of free-will', simultaneously answering people's cognitive and emotional needs by assuring them that the nature-like resistances they encountered in the social setting as 'things' were, in fact, socially-supported moral ideas, and easing people's emotional anxiety arising from the experience of free will by declaring it an illusion, given that people's actions and behaviours are an inevitability determined by ideas inculcated by an omnipotent and omnipresent society.[23]

Scientific sociology, Bauman maintains, owes much of its resounding success in fulfilling this task not only to its answering fundamental human needs, but also to its being "based on those objectifications of reality which we undertake daily" (1976: 34). Scientific sociology merely extends the everyday procedure of objectifying reality, supporting and explaining the pre-predicative experience of the life process as essentially unfree - calming, at the expense of true human emancipation, the anxiety generated by freedom.[24] It is this refusal to transcend social reality, and decision to develop and ratify only such knowledge as will serve the immediate technical-

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[23] Erich Fromm likewise contends in *The Fear of Freedom* (1984) that individuals in Western capitalist societies generally fear personal freedom, rather craving external leadership and the regulation of their day-to-day lives and activities by others.

[24] Whilst 'normal' sociology, through its reification of 'culture' and of 'society' as object-things and concomitant enhancement of the ordinary person's sense of being at home in the world misses the problem of alienation, Alvin Gouldner (1975) insists Marxists are equally remiss in their systematic neglect of the problem of anomie. Marxists, he argues, do not account for the fact that "there is a degree to which alienation, or *some measure* of alienation, derives from the inevitable task of world constitution" (1975: 430, emphasis in original). Without some things that humans see as alien, or reality other than themselves, there can be no stable points of reference, either for the practical purposes of orientation, or for ontological security. As a result, Gouldner feels that sociology's ambition to create a world in which people can be at home is not misplaced. What is at issue is that it should, indeed, be *people* that are made to feel at home and not *things*. The task for sociology, therefore, as Gouldner sees it, is to ensure that in speaking about the world, sociologists are conscious of this problem. Paradoxically, though, Gouldner does not see sociology's continual discussion of the reality of the social world as necessarily posing a problem in terms of further enhancing people's sense of alienation. Indeed, he argues that where the objectivity and reality of the social world are constantly spoken about and repeatedly affirmed, this serves to simultaneously make that reality and objectivity problematic, casting doubt upon it. What Gouldner *does* consider problematic is the 'impersonal treatise', which surreptitiously "insinuate[s] the reality of the social world, without responsibly affirming it - thereby establishing it all the more firmly as real" (1975: 431).

instrumental interests of society, rather than the supposed partisan, ideological function of sociology, that concerns Bauman. Indeed, he argues that proponents of such views are, on the whole, mistaken. So long as sociology remains on the grounds of the reality it posits as nature-like and subject to processes described as laws, its claims to value-freedom and impartiality are, in a sense, valid. As a result, whilst he acknowledges that the exclusivity of knowledge attained in the service of the technical-instrumental interests of scientific sociology reinforces the split between subjects and objects of action, and that its value-neutrality contributes to the perception of the life-process as a set of technical problems, rather than questions the answer to which require communication and discourse (1976: 42), this is, for Bauman, of peripheral interest. Bauman is far more concerned with what he sees as the underlying problem that informs such actions and orientations; that is, the essentially conservative role played by sociology in culture through its suppression of alternative forms of existence, and its identification of the historically-created social situation with nature-like reality. In his critique of sociology as the science of unfreedom, Bauman does not, however, reserve his stricture entirely for scientific sociology. He is almost as trenchant in his assessment of Alfred Schutz's phenomenological sociology. Bauman sees Schutz's account as a devastating critique of scientific sociology, but one that, despite its humanistic intent, offers little in the way of emancipation - not differing a great deal, in this regard, from the scientific sociology it criticises.

Bauman argues that Schutz's failure to develop an adequate critique of scientific sociology and a truly emancipatory sociology derives from his neglecting to demand that sociology be critical of its object, rather than simply its knowledge of that object, and how that knowledge is arrived at. Furthermore, Bauman holds that by analytically reducing social reality to typifications - or the reification of meanings - and representing this as an anthropologically universal and inevitable activity, Schutz further conceptually entrenches 'unfreedom', admitting no circumstances or situations (other than consociate interaction) in which reification might be perceived and avoided (by lay-people). Positing the activity of typification as a universal propensity, Bauman maintains, "allows no conceptual standpoint from which a critique of social reality (as opposite to the critique of its image), could be launched" (1976: 64). As a result, whilst Schutzian sociology can, unlike its scientific sociology counterpart, fundamentally criticise commonsensical knowledge, it cannot critique society or the human condition itself.

For Bauman, Berger and Luckmann's attempt to transcend the unilateral reductionism of self and society, of which scientific sociology and its Schutzian phenomenological

critique stand accused, goes a long way towards "disentangl[ing] the dialectics of freedom and unfreedom, the acting self and the limits to his action" (1976: 67). In Berger and Luckmann's account, actors are introduced to social reality as a constant environment, the regularity of which permits the habituation of behavioural programmes. This habituation renders everyday actions unproblematic; they become taken-for-granted, objective reality. Habituated actions become habituated behaviour and, when attached to typical situations, become typified. These typifications, when selected as relevant to all actors who share a given situation, in turn, become institutionalised. As institutions, typified actions gain an objective character and are perceived as such by social actors. The social construction of reality, and knowledge of society, is thus represented by Berger and Luckmann as a dialectical process, in which social actors simultaneously apprehend social reality as 'reality' *and* produce this reality to the extent that, taking the objective nature of reality for granted, they "act toward perpetuating and continually re-creating its objectivity" (Bauman 1976: 68).

Bauman perceives this to be a revealing and emancipatory insight, for "the idea that there is only as much of the social order as there is of repetitious, routinised human action, and that there is no more 'necessity' in such an order than that on-goingly generated by routinised action and the knowledge which accompanies it" constitutes a "decisive step on the road leading from the critique of sociology to the critique of society" (1976: 68).[25] Berger and Luckmann's demonstration of the partisan nature of social knowledge, which suppresses alternative information, values and realities so as to endow the current social reality with "cognitive validity and normative dignity" (1976: 68), further augments the critical and liberatory potential of their thesis, in Bauman's opinion. However, Bauman then argues that this critique cannot fulfil its emancipatory promise because, as it stands, Berger and Luckmann's thesis "reduces the task of criticising social reality to the critique of social knowledge" (1976: 69).[26]

Bauman argues that any reason that purports to be critical, and thus to enhance emancipation, must confront once again, as in the times of the Enlightenment, common sense as its most implacable foe (1976: 75). Because common sense reflects and rigorously defends an existence that belies genuine human potential - belittling and

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[25] To quote Berger and Luckmann themselves: "Social order is not part of the 'nature of things', and it cannot be derived from the 'laws of nature'. Social order exists *only* as a product of human activity. No other ontological status may be ascribed to it without hopelessly obfuscating its empirical manifestations. Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and in so far as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product" (1966: 70, emphasis in original).

[26] This is, of course, a similar criticism to that leveled at the Young Hegelians by Marx, and the spur to his development of the theory of historical materialism.

refuting (along with natural science) on the grounds of evidence alternative realities - Bauman argues that emancipatory reason cannot stop at a mere epistemological critique of common sense. Emancipatory reason cannot be satisfied with either correcting common sense or enhancing its theoretical sophistication, as is scientific sociology; nor can it simply explore, like Schutzian sociology, common sense's composition. These strategies, Bauman maintains, seek only to illuminate common sense without questioning its self-determination and, in so restricting themselves, simply replicate common sense's limitations. Instead, emancipatory reason must reach beyond common sense to critique the social reality that underlies it and renders it "placidly, if not fatuously, assured of its righteousness" (Bauman 1976: 75). A truly emancipatory critique of common sense must proceed by such means, Bauman argues, because its struggle is not with common sense consciousness itself, which need not necessarily be untrue, for it may result from faithful reflection. Rather, Bauman maintains, it is the social reality which underlies it that is false.

Bauman thus summarily dismisses the preceding accounts of common sense, and various attempts to make this knowledge critical as a means of realising emancipation. Although common sense itself may, like scientific sociology, criticise aspects of social reality and endeavour to enhance people's autonomy, so long as this critique is governed by the perception of social reality as natural and ahistorical, and refuses to interrogate or to transcend this perception, people's choice, responsibility and freedom will remain drastically delimited, and human potential go unrealised. For example, Finkel suggests that jurists' common sense aims to perfect and complete, rather than undermine or fundamentally question, the law. In doing so, Bauman argues, even this more critical form of common sense objectifies and legitimates this institution, and further solidifies social reality. Neither does Howard's commonsensical call for an environment of increased institutional uncertainty satisfy Bauman, for this uncertainty is still severely circumscribed by the objectification of social reality which inevitably accompanies such a partial critique. Lindenberg fares worse still in the terms of Bauman's critique, due to his Durkheimian conception of society. In suggesting that the social sciences should enhance common sense's critical capacity by 'demonstrating' the commonality of human nature and experience, Lindenberg reduces difference - and with it the possibility and legitimacy of alternative forms of social reality - further entrenching unfreedom. For Lindenberg, common sense is critical where it incorporates a number of different interpretations of reality; but to pass the common sense test and thus be ratified as legitimate knowledge these interpretations must refer to the conception of a sole reality and, thereby, objectify that reality. Bauman also appears disinterested in Gramsci's approach to Marxist theory. Gramsci, as we have seen,

attends to the content and nature of common sense. This is because he considers common sense to be both a necessary and potentially useful starting point and basis for the development of emancipatory reason. Bauman, however, insists on a more dogmatic reading of Marx's dialectical method.

Bauman's refusal to engage in a more systematic analysis of phenomenological sociology's conception of common sense (or to refer to empirical evidence in the development of his argument) and his dismissal of the epistemological critique of common sense as irrelevant to the development of emancipatory reason has, I suggest, led him to proceed from a deficient conception of common sense and, as a result, to fail to apprehend certain political implications of his project. Bauman's critique of common sense as fundamentally antithetical to emancipatory reason and freedom is based upon two main premises. The first and most crucial for his argument is the notion that common sense believes social reality and its predominant conditions to be objective and natural, rather than historically contingent. Whilst Bauman is prepared to concede that common sense consciousness may be 'true', in that it may result from faithful reflection, he maintains that this reflection is of a false social reality, the deceptive nature of which common sense (being, in his view - after Schutz, Berger and Luckmann - simply the perception of reality) cannot grasp. The second, related, premise holds that common sense is essentially opposed to alternative realities that threaten the current, dominant social order. In the following section, I demonstrate, in order, the equivovality of these premises. Before doing so, though, it is first necessary to qualify Bauman's rigid posture towards reification through reference to Burke Thomason's (1982) critique of the notion.

Common sense and the problem of reification

Typically, 'reification' is associated with critical connotations by both philosophers and social scientists. In the guise of Whitehead's 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness', reification refers to "the 'errors' of intellectuals that might be eliminated by philosophers", whereas in its original Marxist usage, the term describes the distorted or false consciousness of oppressed individuals, "who might be freed through radical social action" (Thomason 1982: 114). Drawing on the work of Alfred Schutz, Thomason defends an alternative, purely methodological constructionist conception of reification as a means to free this idea from its 'ontological pretensions' and consequent dogmatic character. By adopting an "ontologically negative (bracketing/suspending)" Schutzian stance, Thomason argues that it is possible to reconcile constructionist and realist schools of thought - whose conflict, he maintains, only arises at the level of social ontology - and to undercut what he sees as arrogant condemnations of ordinary

social actors for their passivity, "'blindness', 'ignorance', 'inauthenticity' and various other forms of essential misguidedness" (1982: 6).

Although Schutz's approach to reification is broadly constructionist, assuming that "the 'things' that are reified are 'really' not 'things' but are instead constituted and constructed realities that depend upon *us* for their status as objects" (Thomason 1982: 89), he "ventures no judgement regarding this behaviour and its social consequences". In part, Thomason attributes Schutz's agnosticism to his general humanistic outlook, but distinguishes Schutz's commitment to a methodological perspective as being of more consequence in this regard. Whilst it is true that Schutz subscribes to the Weberian separation of values and political action from social analysis, Thomason points out that he also feels unable to make any claim about the ultimate *real* status of objective experiences, given that "along with the greatest philosophers of all time" he "does not know exactly what reality is" (1982: 110). However, Thomason argues that this 'admission' should not be interpreted as a denial of the objective nature of social reality on Schutz's part, since he also "makes no claim that social reality is *only* a complex of humanly constituted objectivations and typifications" (1982: 126). In Thomason's view, through his refusal to privilege either the objective or subjective reality of social life, Schutz provides no purchase for either realist or constructionist ontological claims regarding reification. And, without such a basis, Thomason believes it is not possible to label forms of realism or reification as 'distortion', 'error' or 'false consciousness' or, indeed, to belittle anyone who lives simply and naively inside her or his world (1982: 110). Moreover, because Schutz sees reification as an anthropological feature and an indispensable part of human existence, from his perspective, it makes no sense to berate social actors for what is "an entirely natural, and even necessary, feature of mundane awareness" (1982: 114). For Schutz, objective interpretation - a form of reification - is essential. This behaviour provides a world of stable meanings required by social actors for the purposes of orientation, in order to establish communication with others, and, to have things to react against. People's denial of the constructedness of social reality is, therefore, as Schutz sees it, in a sense, simply 'realistic'.

Whilst the constructivist accounts of reification exemplified in the work of Berger and Pullberg (1966) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) are closer to Thomason's preferred version than the 'realist' Marxist conception, to the extent that these depart from Schutz's purely methodological stance, Thomason deems these accounts unsatisfactory. For example, Berger and Pullberg refuse to concede that reification and alienation, as distinct from processes of objectification and objectivation, are a priori anthropological necessities. They thus retain some of the critical weight of 'reification', viewing this as a

form of cognitive distortion, but not attributing it to 'real' causal factors. Thomason rejects this stance on the grounds that "objective meanings, objective modes of interpretation, typification and taken-for-grantedness all imply reification just insofar as they involve a degree of autonomisation and passive submission to presumed thing like externalities" (1982: 125). And, were Berger and Pullberg to reject this assessment, Thomason argues that they "must be claiming that people could objectify and yet still remain aware that *they* are doing so" (1982: 125, emphasis in original) - in Thomason's view, a practical impossibility for people in everyday life. After Schutz, Thomason does not deny the possibility of de-reifying experiences. However, he sees this as primarily an intellectual or philosophical option: firstly, because this is not considered relevant by the person in everyday life because not germane to practical tasks at hand, and secondly because "we cannot live meaningfully, consciously, in a world of pure becoming. The flux must be ordered and the uniqueness and diversity of life must be suppressed" (Thomason 1982: 94). Thomason also dismisses Berger's and Luckmann's attempt to draw a contrast between objectification and reification on the basis of whether or not actors recognise that they construct the social world. He argues that the practical contingencies of social life dictate that the social world *must* be grasped as "relatively inflexible and, hence, to that degree, 'thing-like'" (Thomason 1982: 130). By doing so, Thomason discounts the possibility of 'degree of autonomy of human existence' (which is variable rather than clearly dichotomous) serving as a defining characteristic of reification. Thomason does not deny the importance of people's acknowledgement of the human constructedness of the social world, and the relationship of this variable to the degree of passivity adopted in relation to the social world. However, he does question the notion that such an awareness necessarily entails the elimination of institutions' objective, thing-like status.

In response to Thomason's indirect critique of his work and, in particular, his final concession, Bauman would assert that were people exposed to the human constructedness of the social world and their own reifying practices, then at least a choice would have to be made. Faced with truly open choices, people are able, and obliged, to exercise real moral responsibility. For Bauman, we must be able to decide, collectively, those practices and institutions we want to reify, and to what degree, and those we do not. The dialectic as a methodological device may very well free the sociologist from reification, and thereby improve sociological practice, but, for Bauman, this leaves lay-people enmeshed in unfreedom. But these arguments are, in a sense, academic, as Bauman will not accept Thomason's (and before him, Schutz's) assessment of reification as 'natural and necessary', arguing, after Marx, that the only constant in human nature is the creation of new needs. Despite this avowed stance, and in support

of his criticism of scientific sociology and the deficient consciousness of lay people, though, he constantly emphasises humans' fear of freedom and compulsion to convert an open world to a closed and manageable one. Similarly, at no point does Bauman either question the profound weight placed upon humans' need for social order in Berger and Luckmann's work, or problematise their grounding of this in humans' biological constitution: "although no existing social order can be derived from biological *data*, the necessity for social order as such stems from man's biological equipment" (1966: 51-2, emphasis in original). Most importantly for our purposes, with his gaze set firmly on the realisation of freedom and autonomy for all, and the essential means for their achievement, Bauman does not stop to consider either the assumptions on which his radical stance is premised, or the implications of these for his 'new world order'. These, I consider in Chapter Six. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that the link drawn between objectification and reification and unfreedom is not so unproblematic as Bauman portrays it. Nor, I argue, is the association between common sense and objectification as straightforward as Bauman makes it out to be.

Common sense and the objectification of social reality

Bauman argues that the first task in the development of emancipatory reason must be the undermining of common sense's "most crucial cognitive principle", that is, its "positing the historical as the natural" (1976: 80). Common sense is held, without qualification, to objectify - or, more precisely, to reify - social reality. Once again, Bauman emphasises the universal character of common sense at the expense of its anthropological opposite number. This stance contributes to the neglect of those aspects of common sense that preclude objectification, and obscures (or ignores) instances in which this resistance occurs.

De-reifying processes do, indeed, operate in people's common sense thinking, and there is leeway as to how particular schemes of typification may be applied. Common sense is *more-or-less* thinking: it permits and seeks ambiguity and vagueness - freedom within limits. For example, James Scott's research on peasant resistances indicates that common sense does not objectify social reality where this thought is based upon the perception of practical experience. In *Weapons of the Weak* (1986), Scott examines the war of symbols between the rich and poor of Sedaka. He maintains that this constitutes a 'cold war' chiefly because the poor employ their weapons of 'words, feints, counter-feints and propaganda' judiciously, avoiding direct assaults, the results of which they are under no illusions about. Through false deference and forms of reluctant compliance that conform to the minimal standards of politeness required by the rich, the poor stop short of either overt defiance or a direct symbolic confrontation with authority and elite

norms that might incur punitive sanctions (1986: 26). Instead, they concern themselves with the "immediate, de-facto gains" (1986: 33) that institutionally invisible forms of resistance make possible.[27]

On the basis of his detailed ethnographic research of everyday forms of resistance in Sedaka, Scott is critical of representations of subordinate classes that hold that elites are able to impose their own image of a just social order not only on these people's behaviour, but also their consciousness. According to such Marxist interpretations, the passivity of an exploited group may be explained (at least in part) by its acceptance of its situation as normal - a natural or even justifiable part of the social order - due to the influence of a symbolic hegemony which is so all-encompassing as to allow elites to control "the very standards by which their rule is evaluated" (1986: 39). This explanation of passivity "assumes at least a fatalistic acceptance of that social order and perhaps even an active complicity - both of which Marxists might call 'mystification' or 'false-consciousness'" (Scott 1986: 39). Scott prefers an alternative interpretation of the poor's quiescence, arguing that this order is better explained by relations of force and repression than through reference to the beliefs and values of the poor themselves.

Employing an at times Goffmanesque, symbolic-interactionist approach, Scott demonstrates that the poor people of Sedaka's everyday resistances belie their supposed passivity, false consciousness and mystification. Although their resistances make no headlines, are largely institutionally invisible and fail to pose a significant symbolic threat to the dominant social order, they are, nevertheless, the result of conscious, strategic decisions. Scott argues that where the terms used by the poor to describe the

[27] Ivan Szelenyi (1988) identifies similar forms of passive resistance in Hungary, and reaches corresponding conclusions regarding their merits. By means of a longitudinal, empirical study of rural-urban relations, and the considered advantages and disadvantages of peasant-worker existence in Hungary, Szelenyi simultaneously seeks to demonstrate the limits of bureaucratic domination and attempts to impose social change from above, and the effectiveness of Hungarian rural peasants' resistance to the "proletarianisation process" (1988: 11). Through mainly silent, passive resistance, Szelenyi argues, Hungarian semi-proletarians have not 'overthrown' the 'bureaucratic class' but instead forced it into lasting, strategically important concessions. Guided by their own goals of economic autonomy and citizenship, and in the course of their everyday practices, Hungarian semi-proletarians are able to adapt to changing structures and "live their lives basically the way they wanted to anyway, regardless of what their rulers want" (Szelenyi 1988: 22). In Szelenyi's view, these peoples' intransigence is not merely adaptive, but has contributed (along with the roles played by the enlightened cadre elite, the wisdom of Hungarian reform intellectuals and the dissenting intelligentsia) to the development of a new socialist social formation in Hungary - a societal structure complex enough to enable the achievement of living conditions acceptable to Hungarian semi-proletarians themselves. On the basis of his analysis of the countervailing powers of Hungary's subordinated classes, Szelenyi concludes that orthodox Marxist's historical-materialist theories of social change and, more specifically, their tendency to conceptualise class struggle as a zero-sum game, fail to recognise that proletarians can make genuine and lasting gains without any revolutionary break in the social structure, and that a pragmatic politics of compromise can result in viable, and acceptable, structural mixes.

exploitative sharecropping relationship in which they are enmeshed are cynical and mocking, and their forms of outward deference similarly derisory and deceptive, this provides compelling evidence that these people are anything but mystified, or caught "in the thrall of a naturally ordained social order" (1986: 40). The poor's preference for certain forms of interpretation of their distress, in Scott's view, further attests to the comparative autonomy of their consciousness. Sedaka's poor employ a calculus of blame that finds its target close to home. More distant and impersonal causes are passed over in favour of a local, social perspective. The poor dwell on these local, personal causes of distress "not because they are particularly 'mystified' or ignorant of the larger context of agrarian capitalism in which they live" (indeed, Scott argues that within the ambit of their local experience, the poor understand the workings of capitalism (1986: 181)), but for reasons of convenience and strategy. The poor fasten on the more immediate sources of their difficulties because they do not *directly* observe the syndicates or government policies that make possible their exploitation, but they do observe, and can plausibly influence, those human agents (such as landlords and farmers) whose decisions influence their fate. Despite the fact that where the larger, 'objective' view prevails it is likely to reduce conflict, and thereby help to preserve existing structures of inequality, the 'personal' view, as Scott sees it, "however narrow, has the merit of recognising that processes like the market and technological innovations are social constructions" (1986: 182).

The main implication of Scott's findings is that one cannot assume in the absence of overt forms of resistance or the defence of alternative forms of social order that oppressed peoples necessarily objectify social reality or aspects thereof. No matter how vexing the apparent passivity and institutional silence of subjugated peoples may prove for critical social and political theorists, this can not simply be attributed to their common sense's objectification of social reality. Indeed, in Scott's view, it is because the resistances of Sedaka's poor are informed by common sense that their oppression and alienation is not further compounded by the experience of false consciousness (and more prescriptive sanctions).[28]

Taking up from Schutz's general principle of typification, it might be argued that differences between Sedaka and the modern West militate against similar perceptions of social reality, free from objectification, in the West. Whereas in Sedaka and other 'pre'-

[28] Scott's observation that common sense resists the objectification of social reality where this thought is confined to the local, personal setting finds some support and rationale in Schutz's analysis of common sense and assessment of the phenomenon of typification. In Schutz's account, the greater the degree of anonymity in social relations, the more people's common sense knowledge of social reality is likely to be composed of typifications and objectified (1962: 62-3).

capitalist or 'developing' societies relations between consociates are the norm, the modern West is characterised by relations between contemporaries - relations that are, moreover, mediated by institutions - and chief of which, according to many theorists, is the capitalist economy.[29] For Marxist theorists such as Michael Taussig, the experience of objectification is qualitatively different in 'advanced' capitalist societies.[30] Although all cultures tend to present categories such as time, space, human nature and society itself as "not social products but elemental and immutable things" (Taussig 1980: 4), or, fetishes, Taussig sees capitalist forms of 'commodity fetishism' as particularly alienating and oppressive. He argues that whilst in pre-capitalist societies products may indeed become fetishes, this form of fetishism "arises from a sense of organic unity between persons and their products" (Taussig 1980: 37). Products may appear animated or life-endowed, but their connection to the social system is not obscured. As a result, the sources of domination and inequality are not mysterious, but directly attributable to specific individuals. The commodity fetishism of capitalist societies, on the other hand, is characterised by a split between people and the products they produce and exchange, a divide which results in the "subordination of men to the things they produce, which appear to be independent and self-empowered" (1980: 37). This dominance of 'thing-hood' reduces people's capacities to grasp and to evaluate morally the logic of relationships and processes - in particular, those that are socio-economically related.[31]

But, Chamberlain's (1983) research seems to refute this argument. His analysis indicates that Australian working class people's own observations and experiences permit what he perceives to be an adequate grasp of social reality in its totality. Working class people deduce from their direct experience general principles critical of present societal arrangements, whilst also bypassing or selectively interpreting ruling messages within wider frames of reference. Clearly, contra Bauman, the jury is still out concerning the question of whether or not and to what extent common sense in the modern West objectifies social reality.

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[29] For a contrary perspective, see Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

[30] See also György Lukács (1971), for whom the effects of commodity fetishism are not confined to the sphere of production but permeate every sphere of social life. Reification is, for him, the more general category of commodity fetishism. It is important to note that Lukács, like Schutz and Thomason, considers the phenomenon of objectification to be neutral, and only a problem when alienating.

[31] Taussig presents as an example of common manifestations of commodity fetishism in developed capitalist culture the capitalist folklore that adorns the financial section of the *New York Times*. This folklore speaks about economic facts - capital and worker's products - in terms normally used for people and animate beings, thereby depriving them of their social meaning and enhancing the dominance of things over people.

Common sense as apolitical

Guided as he is by a zero-sum interpretation of emancipatory reason and freedom, Bauman is not concerned to provide a fine-grained analysis of common sense. He is content to follow and reproduce in all its essentials Schutz's version, including its universal rather than anthropological emphasis, and its characterisation of common sense as simply the apprehension of reality. In this respect, Bauman is surprisingly unreflexive. Bauman appreciates (indeed, it is fundamental to his criticism of scientific sociology and call for a new, critical form of sociology) that it is in scientific sociology's interests to perpetuate the assumed common sense belief in the objective and natural, rather than historically contingent, character of social reality, both as a part of its 'humane' project to make people comfortable in the world, and in order to sustain its subject matter and the objectivity of its methods and findings. As Schutz observes, the greater the degree to which intersubjective behaviour patterns are standardised and institutionalised, "the greater is their usefulness in common sense and scientific thinking as a scheme of interpretation of human behaviour" (1962: 61). Scientific sociologists frequently neglect the non-rational aspects of human experience, certainly; but they also actively attempt to 'eliminate' or render these 'innocuous', a process which common sense, at times, resists (Dumm 1999; Gouldner 1975). Moreover, social actors themselves regularly construct their behaviours and associated common sense reasoning as orderly and rule-based (Garfinkel 1967; Schutz 1962, 1964).[32] However, having

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[32] Shearing's and Ericson's work (1991) perhaps best encapsulates this and the previous point. In "Culture as figurative action", Shearing and Ericson conduct a critique of the conception of culture as a set of rules that generate action. They argue that the conventional sociological view that rules guide or direct action retains a degree of hegemony largely for the "analytical power of rules in providing a solution to the problem of social order and because action is frequently presented as rule-following by those who produce and observe it" (Shearing and Ericson 1991: 481). This is despite the fact that, in the absence of empirically-locatable rules that generate or predict action, theorists working within the rule-based paradigm have been obliged to invent implicit rules that are forced upon people in a process of tautological reasoning to preserve this model's 'integrity' and analytical power. Interpretive theorists' reconceptualisations of the 'cultural steering function' rules are used to model attempt to avoid such tautological reasoning by re-introducing the strategic actor and viewing culture as influencing action through a process of analogous, rather than rule-governed, reasoning. Shearing and Ericson are dissatisfied with both of these modes of analysis that present action as either rule-based, and thus orderly (although deterministic), or improvisational, and therefore ephemeral and empirically elusive. Neither are these authors entirely satisfied with ethnomethodologists' alternative to the rule-based conception, for while this position demonstrates that actors themselves construct their activities as orderly and rule-based and thereby does not reify culture as a force that determines order, it fails to describe the production of activity as an accomplishment that is not reliant on *some* rules. Shearing and Ericson pose the question: How do people forge a course of action "in light of what they see, that allows them to go from one space-time moment to the next, to enact activity that will be ordered, in an 'indefinitely revisable' way so that it both constitutes the game being played and is available as a move in that game; that is, the question of how the games people constitute through a way of seeing are played?" (1991: 486). Using as an example the craft of policing, Shearing and Ericson argue that the rule-based perspective does not, and cannot, adequately explain how police work is done by competent officers. Police work, they found, is not conducted and cannot be explained or re-constructed by a rule-based explanation. Instead, police stories function as *general* sense makers that can be used in myriad settings they face; these stories function not only as accounts that constitute a social world, they also establish a way of seeing that makes available

isolated scientific sociology's 'vested interest', Bauman is then unable to follow this insight to its logical conclusion. He cannot question the extent to which scientific sociology constructs, rather than finds or follows, actors' knowledge of social reality as objective and natural, due to the circumscribed nature of his account of common sense. Nor, as a corollary, can Bauman discern those political elements intrinsic to ordinary people's common sense. A domain of socio-political possibilities thus escapes - or, to be more precise - is rejected by him.

Bauman is not alone in conceptualising common sense as both uncritical and apolitical. Stuart Clarke (1997), for example, characterises common sense as being comprised of "naturalised and consensual definitions" (1997: 268). The process of constructing naturalised definitions, he argues, involves co-opting conclusions and ignoring analyses, whilst the forging of common sense-informed consensus entails "overwhelm[ing] careful and considered judgements with casual and colourful assertions" (Clarke 1997: 268). These attributes of common sense, Clarke feels, contribute to a problematic relationship between common sense and more critical discourses, and the adoption of an ambivalent, dismissive attitude towards common sense by intellectuals. Clarke sees such a stance as impolitic. He argues that critical thinkers must take common sense seriously and not simply dismiss it as a debased form of knowledge, for common sense is "the starting point for political calculation, and its construction must be taken into account in any effort to develop a politically effective critical perspective" (1997: 268) - in the case of Clarke's project, a critical perspective on identity politics.

As Clarke sees it, the most powerful constructions of identity politics in the US, that is, the ones with mass media backing, are based upon common sense understandings of race. This 'dominant common sense' suggests that identity politics

> most clearly evidenced in political mobilisations around race, are part of a fundamental attack on the core values of [US] political culture. In this manner identity politics are positioned so as to starkly reflect the need for a reassertion of 'traditional' liberal values of individualism, privatism, and authoritarian nationalism. (1997: 267)

Neoconservative common sense conceptions of identity politics, so positioned, tend to dismiss social discourses with less power, like rap music and multiculturalism as, respectively, "nihilistic garbage ... blues with a lobotomy", and "portending social decay" (Clarke 1997: 287). Clarke argues, rather, that these discourses should be

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future interactional possibilities and help shape a subjectivity out of which action will flow - a consciousness and way of being out of which action will flow naturally, without recourse to rules.

understood as, in the first instance, "a legitimate and important social protest" and, in the second, "an important and sophisticated pedagogical advance" (1997: 287).

In a recent analysis of 'the meaning of populism', based upon the character(istics) of the populist politics of Canada's Reform Party, Steve Patten (1996) asserts that ideas and mediating institutions, including (in fact, especially) political parties, influence how 'objective' social conditions are understood and transformed into interests. Populist politics, he argues, aims to construct "a 'common sense' that challenges the power relations inherent to its conception of the people/powerful interests antagonism" (Patten 1996: 100). Thus, both the identities and interests of 'the people' are rooted in a common sense that 'belongs' to the dominant 'classes' - in the case of Canada, the neo-Liberal Right.

According to the populist formulation, Patten argues, 'the common people' - ordinary working-class taxpayers - are pitted against "the bureaucracy and a range of minority special interest groups which supposedly dominate decision-making processes within the modern welfare state" (1996: 96). Increased interventions of the state in the private realm and the politicisation of social relations formerly considered private are represented as driven by organised, minority interest pressure groups, and supported by bureaucracies with a vested interest in expansion. Multiculturalism is also epitomised as undermining the notion of Canadians as a single, united political community, through its supposed emphasising of the Canadian community's differences and the down-playing of its common ground.

The combined effect of Reform's (and, by implication, populism's) ideological and political interventions, Patten argues, is to redefine common sense in a manner that marginalises and deconstructs minority and oppositional movements as unrepresentative and self-interested lobby groups without concern for the general interest, simultaneously limiting the range of acceptable political positions and interests, and, "further entrench[ing] New Right politics as the Canadian mainstream" (1996: 96).

Clarke and Patten depict common sense as a corpus of knowledge that accepts the predominant conditions of society as natural and beyond everyday political controversy - as hegemonic. In their account, 'the people' uncritically assimilate racist ideologies that are disguised as common sense by dominant interests and particular social groups. Common sense, they maintain, reduces difference to uniformity and blames victims for their plight, thereby eliminating a range of political positions and interests and, at the same time, the possibility of more progressive forms of politics. It is the task of other,

critical bodies of thought and social movements to draw attention to the social and historical forces at work in the construction of the dominant common sense, and to develop more complex and progressive perspectives. Common sense indeed represents a struggle for these authors. But this is a struggle of an altogether different kind from that identified earlier in this chapter. The common sense of ordinary people is simply a struggle to retain the status quo and, thus, one *against* critical thought and enlightened and radical socio-political change.

Clarke's suggestion that critical theorists should pay closer attention to the relationship between common sense and discourses that are more critical effectively summarises the focus of much of social psychologist Michael Billig's (1995; 1996) more recent work. In this, Billig problematises the notion of common sense as simply constructed by dominant interests, and the rigid separation frequently drawn between common sense and critical thought.

Billig is critical of social scientists' typical representation of common sense as hegemonic and apolitical. Adopting a rhetorical approach to common sense, Billig evinces this mode of knowing's contrary composition. He argues that both *logoi* and anti-*logoi*, or opposing principles, co-exist within common sense, rendering it "not a harmonious system of interlocking beliefs but ... composed of contraries" (1996: 235). It is these opposing principles and their "undefined borders" (1996: 235) that provide us with dilemmas to think and argue about and without which discourse loses its moral quality.[33] In its relations with argumentation, common sense possesses two contrary aspects. The first is the feature of common sense that appears to close off arguments, representing matters as natural and 'common sense' to accept unquestioningly. The second facet is one that seems to open up arguments, providing, through the common places that comprise common sense, both "the seeds of rhetorical argument" and the "weaponry with which arguments can be conducted" (Billig 1996: 238). Indeed, according to Billig, common sense actively invites argumentation and controversy. Despite the (to him) obviously dichotomous and conflictual nature of common sense, Billig argues that social scientists, such as Peter Berger (1970), tend to emphasise the former of the above features. They accentuate the aspect of common sense which

[33] In defending common sense's contribution to the moral quality of discourse, Billig rejects the notion that the contrary tendencies of common sense represent an unstable state that must progress towards consistent uniformity. He does so on the grounds that rhetorical disagreements are often between two points of view that are both, to a certain extent, reasonable. Choosing between the two, therefore, need not imply that the one view is totally correct and the other is to be rejected as erroneous, as common sense is contextual, and for most social actions there will be a complexity of (competing) principles "pushing and tugging in different directions" (Billig 1996: 241). Furthermore, a proliferation of countervailing principles affords necessary exceptions and qualifications to ensure that no particular absolute principle may "overstep the bounds of reality" (Billig 1996: 241; on this point, see also Arendt 1958).

"closes off arguments ... as non-controversial [removing] dilemmas of interpetation and [making] social life [and the] social customs of a community ... appear natural, and thereby non-controversial, to its members" (Billig 1996: 238).

Neither is Billig comfortable with the unqualified contrasting of common sense and critical thought. Billig argues that the tendency among orthodox social psychologists to treat "'attitudinal' systems and cognitive processes as static, reified entities" (1995: 65) leads them to 'bracket off' members of new social movements, neglecting the extent to which their collective identities and cognitive interpretations are socially constructed. If one rejects this approach, though, instead taking seriously the rhetorical and argumentative nature of thinking, it becomes apparent that the rigid separation between common sense ideology and the ideology of social movements on the basis of "totally separate cognitive frameworks" (Billig 1995: 79) is flawed, as is the representation of common sense or widespread ideology as systematic, unitary and unproblematic.

The ideologies of critique developed by social movements are "typically produced as arguments against prevailing patterns of common sense, which are presented as being 'natural'" (Billig 1995: 66). Thus, they are reliant upon common sense: in the obvious sense as a foil, but also as a resource, given that critics must use common sense to construct critiques and argue against common sense. Moreover, Billig argues that common sense, due to its conflictual nature, lends itself to just such an application. Common sense, which at one level represents a particular social order as 'natural' and thus acts as a force for conservatism, also contains ideological resources, "resources that could be rhetorically mobilised by future social movements of critique" (Billig 1995: 77), and the possibilities of argumentative critique *against itself*. Billig provides examples from a research project that investigates the way English families talk about the British monarchy to demonstrate that members of a community who employ their society's common sense do not find the social world portrayed in a straightforward, unproblematic manner that precludes the necessity for further thought. Rather, they discover that the themes of common sense pull in contrary directions, demanding their (more or less critical) reflection (Billig 1995: 73). The main point to be made here, after Billig, is that where common sense *is* represented as a struggle in critical social thought, this is invariably in only a limited, or one-sided, sense. It is portrayed, for the most part, as a force for socio-political conservatism.

* * *

In analysing the sociological debates concerning common sense, we are clearly confronted with the tension that lies at the heart of the discipline, and identified at the outset of this chapter. If sociology is to perform an emancipatory role, it must engage with people's common sense, either to improve or to undermine it. But if this project is to prove truly successful, it demands an adequate conception of common sense. This, I have argued, is precluded through the treatment of common sense simply as a residual (as is the case in political thought), and through a radical critical theory stance, such as Bauman's. I have suggested, instead, that it requires a conception that accounts for the common sense of ordinary people as a more or less critical and politically effective resource; that is, common sense as a struggle in a wider sense than is characteristically countenanced in social thought. My focus, then, is on how we might privilege the common sense of ordinary people, as such, in a modern socio-political context.

As I have noted, James Scott's research reveals that common sense, where this is based on people's practical experience, serves as an essential defence against certain forms of reification and a measure of alienation and oppression. However, Michael Taussig's argument that the experience of objectification is qualitatively different and fetishism far more insidious in 'capitalist' societies appears to call into question common sense's possible capacity to perform a similar critical function in modern Western societies. Antonio Gramsci's argument that the developments of modernity have reduced the intrinsic worth of common sense's critical capacity only adds to this doubt. With modernity's fragmentation, individualisation and growth in regimes of expertise, common sense is, this argument has it, less able to see through cant and obfuscation and, in the process, isolate 'the truth of the matter'. But while the conditions of modernity do, indeed, ensure that common sense is increasingly challenged, they also, according to Lindenberg, give rise to the possibility of the development of new, more reflexive and critical forms. As a "great many 'universal' assumptions [turn] out to be nothing more than parochial biases" (Joseph 1994: 6; see also Hertzfeld 2001), the critical baseline and political repertoire of common sense is potentially expanded. This mode of knowing's anti-hegemonic properties and possibilities, that aspect defended by Gramsci, may come to the fore.

In the remainder of this study I am concerned to tease out, largely through an illustrative case study of a group of ordinary people's response to a particular government policy, the critical and political nature and aspects of their common sense. In doing so, I seek not only to further address the central research problem, but also the question: *How* might their common sense be said to be critical, in relation to this specific instance of

struggle? The means by which I conducted this research, along with a critical assessment of their efficacy, are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
METHOD

In this chapter, I develop a methodological approach that is appropriate to my research problem. I begin by briefly restating the nature of my research problem and its parameters. I then turn to a discussion of the type of methodology required to adequately account for the political aspects of common sense, drawing on my findings of the previous chapter. This is followed by a consideration of epistemological questions to do with the appropriate relationship between the social researcher and the researched, in which I point out the political nature of such questions. The methods employed to collect data relevant to the research problem and to elaborate the theoretical arguments developed in the previous two chapters are then outlined. Following a description of the fieldwork itself, the final section of the chapter is devoted to problems of analysis and representation related to the forms of data used in this research.

The research problem

As intimated in the previous chapter, this study is, to a degree, framed by the structure and agency debates in sociological theory.[1] In recent years there has been an increased emphasis on breaking down the dichotomy between structure and agency, with both now generally seen as mutually constitutive, existing in a dialectical relationship (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; 1984; 1993).[2] Structures are, in this now-predominant view, regarded as constraining *and* enabling, providing rules and resources for social action (Giddens 1993). Social reality is thus viewed as a complex of more or less determining and 'autonomous' internal and external humanly constituted objectivations and typifications (Berger and Luckmann 1966). External structures, or institutions, define to varying degrees what is open to change, whereas internal structures, acquired

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[1] Margaret Archer describes the problem of structure and agency as having "rightly come to be seem as the basic issue in modern social theory" (1996: xi). The problem of structure and agency, she points out, is an enduring central dilemma in social theory (arguably stemming from notions of free will versus predetermination), precisely because it forms "the most pressing social problem of the human condition" (1996: xii). Reflection upon this dilemma is incumbent on all human beings who would defend their moral autonomy and the efficacy of their 'political' action.

[2] Debate centres largely around "the appropriate contextualisation of relations between the two" (Archer 1996: xii), in theory, and in practice.

through ongoing processes of socialisation, and potentially as opaque (and thus, autonomous) as external structures, are seen to delineate what agents seek to change.[3]

I am concerned in this study to question the treatment of ordinary people's common sense as a more or less absolute - or, structural - constraint on their moral autonomy and 'political' action. To be sure, common sense is what people 'know' as reality in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. It is shared knowledge about the perception of reality and, to some degree, an objective structure that helps to "define the external constraints bearing on interactions and representations" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 11). Moreover, where people's common sense is largely 'uncritical', failing or refusing to recognise the dialectical nature of social reality, and unreflexive, neglecting to monitor and question its own categories and assumptions, including the basis from whence these derive, this mode of thought may itself be reified, and take on an objective, hegemonic character. It can become, in the process, an impediment to the perception of, and struggle against, a system of structured inequality and symbolic violence. It can usurp people's taking control of their lives, and exercising moral autonomy.

But ordinary people's common sense, I have argued, is more than this. It is not simply residual, 'second nature', 'doxa', or 'objectivity of the second order'. Nor is it just a force for conservatism, a struggle against progressive socio-political change and innovation. Where it is treated as such, I have argued that its critical qualities and potential as a socio-political resource may go unrecognised, or be unduly limited. Possibilities for progressive socio-political change may be unnecessarily restricted solely to 'consciousness-raising elites', such as, for example, the membership of new social movements. Through an essentialist characterisation of ordinary people's common sense, and/or autonomy, theorists dealing with the structure and agency question, in whatever guise, may preserve an undue emphasis on 'structure'.

I have thus pointed to the need for a study that explores the common sense of ordinary people as a resource in socio-political struggle. In order to address this primary research problem, though, I must consider several subsidiary questions, which serve as something of a framework for the study. These are: What do ordinary people's common sense conceptions of their socio-political reality look like? How do these influence their understanding and exercise of moral autonomy? (or, alternatively, What actions do their common sense understandings of their socio-political reality make possible and restrict?); and, *How* might ordinary people's common sense be considered critical? This

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[3] Using as a means of illustration Foucault's concept of discipline, Bourdieu argues that internalised structures - or, 'symbolic domination' - are far more difficult to discern and, therefore, resist (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

last question itself begs the further question: what criteria are to be used to judge whether or not ordinary people's common sense is critical? As I noted in the previous chapter, attempts to discern common sense's veracity, and critical quality, on the grounds of whether or not it provides an accurate representation of reality are futile. They are also irrelevant to my research problem. In keeping with Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, I focus on ordinary people's common sense as a struggle. The 'truth' value, and measure of critical quality I employ, then, is related to whether or not, and the degree to which, ordinary people's common sense refers to their perceptions of their practical experience, and reifies social reality, in a specific instance of struggle.

As I stressed in the introduction to the thesis, it is not my intention to *test* in any definitive sense the critical capacity of ordinary people's common sense. I neither want to 'establish', nor comment upon, common sense as a resource in an authoritative manner. To do so would have required my examining the common sense of ordinary people in relation to an issue on which there was disagreement, as well as one on which there was more-or-less uniform concord. This was, as it happened, beyond the scope of the study. No such single contentious issue arose during my stint of fieldwork. This is not to say that there was no discord among the people in the community I researched, and where this influenced the character of these people's common sense, I report on this. But, as I have mentioned, not only did such 'strong hypothesis testing' fall outside my study's ambit, it was also outside its ambitions. Frank Lewins (1992a) distinguishes between theory-testing and theory-constructing forms of enquiry - whilst also pointing out that many enquiries have elements of both. Whilst this is indeed the case for my study, my emphasis is *not* on hypothesis-testing, but on theory-construction. Mine is an illustrative case study that does not yield generalisations but insights and spaces for further questions and debate.

Accounting for common sense as a struggle

My research problem demands a focus on the perceived lived experience of ordinary social actors, their "perceptual and evaluative schema used in everyday life" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 11), and related socio-political action. Such a focus clearly entails the primary use of qualitative research techniques. Unlike quantitative methods such as the structured questionnaire that, when used in isolation, produce data that are detached from the informant's perceived world, qualitative methods assume social context to be integral, rather than peripheral, to people's thought and action. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the study of common sense in its social context is crucial to an adequate understanding of this phenomenon. Because common sense is, first and foremost, knowledge related to the perception of practical experience, if one is to

capture its specificity, and, with it, its political character, it must be investigated *in situ*.[4] To employ as a heuristic device Giddens's characterisation of common sense as made up of 'mutual knowledge' and 'common sense', I therefore needed to gain an understanding of people's mutual or 'insider' knowledge so as to explore the nature of its relationship to the more universal beliefs or assumed certitudes said to make up 'common sense', generically speaking. Indissociable from the necessity to study common sense in context was the need to preserve its internal logic.

Given that I wanted to grasp (as best I could) people's understandings of social reality and their socio-political action in their own (emic) terms, rather than through rigidly imposed pre-formed hypotheses, my research was, to an extent, influenced by the grounded theory mode of carrying out qualitative research. Grounded theory methodology, originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), is perhaps the qualitative analytic approach most frequently employed where the social researcher is attempting to capture the world of individuals or groups as they see it. However, the fact that I embarked upon my research with certain - albeit relatively general and 'open' - theoretical orientations and hypotheses would appear to pose some problems from the perspective of grounded theory in its initial formulation. In opposition to the dominant positivist position of the time, Glaser and Strauss (1967) stressed that hypotheses should be suggested from data, rather than data simply used to test hypotheses. Theory, they held, should be grounded in interplay - or "constant comparison" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: vii) - with data, and developed through the course of research. Failure to do so, instead collecting data "according to a preplanned routine" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 48), not only restricts the analyst, thereby leading to the loss of potentially rich insights, but also introduces to the research a prospective element of bias. This argument has it that the rigid hypothesis-testing researcher could select, consciously or unconsciously, evidence to support one outcome rather than another (Sapsford and Jupp 1996: 295).

Subsequently, Glaser and Strauss were to qualify this stance somewhat. The reactive nature of their original formulation, they acknowledged, led them to overemphasise "the inductive aspects of grounded theory and correspondingly greatly underplay ... both the potential role of extant (grounded) theories and the unquestionable fact (and advantage) that trained researchers are theoretically sensitized" (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 166-7). This 'revision' of grounded theory methodology along more pragmatic lines has brought it into correspondence with what appears to be the current fallibilistic qualitative

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[4] Unlike the phenomenological sociology of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann that, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, demands distanciation from the detail and particular or anthropological character of common sense, I am concerned to explicate common sense as *particular*, as well as universal.

methodology orthodoxy. Qualitative social researchers agree that the research process is "inevitably selective" (Miles and Hubermann 1994: 56), from the conceptual framework and research question adopted, to what is and is not observed, and the reporting of results. Not only is the research process selective, they appreciate, but so too are informants, whether intentionally, unwittingly, or both (Miles and Hubermann 1994: 56). The challenge, it is argued, lies in being at all times aware of the purposes of the study and conceptual lenses training on it, whilst remaining open to the possibility of 'contrary' or unexpected findings (Miles and Hubermann 1994: 56). This bespeaks the need for an iterative, reflexive approach to the research process - one that is committed to the interrogation of its methods "simultaneously with, and as an integral part of, the investigation of the object" (Woolgar 1988). But it also begs the question briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, that is, Just how exhaustive should this process be?

Reflexivity, Steve Woolgar (1988) points out, can vary substantially in degree along a scale. At one end of this continuum lies the radical constitutive reflexivity of foundational ethnomethodology, which holds that social actors' accounts cannot be dissociated from their underlying reality. Reflexivity, in this instance, extends to the questioning of the assumptions implicit in the very notion of social scientific methods and the assumed status of 'the object'. At the other extreme is the "benign introspection" (Woolgar 1988: 22) of positivism, which is premised on the distinction between representation and studied object on the grounds that these are two separate things.[5] Although most social scientists acknowledge the relevance of reflexivity "in general terms", Woolgar goes on to argue that they "tend to steer well clear of any sustained examination of [its] significance" (1988: 17). In practice, then, social scientists typically fall somewhere near the middle, or latter end, of the above continuum. For example, like most qualitative researchers, Uwe Flick (1998) proposes a "fallibilistic" method of research, in which reflexivity is interpreted as "no more or less than the conventional scientific virtue of giving a full explanation of the methodological procedures used to generate a set of findings, done in the interests of potential replications and for the benefit of readers wishing to assess credibility" (1998: 162).[6] This procedure of reflexive methodological accounting is laudable for the fact that it may expose some of the researcher's assumptions and improve her or his representations. However, it says little about the relations between the researcher and the researched - or, 'the construction

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[5] On this variation in forms of reflexivity, see Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 36-9).

[6] See also Hammersley and Atkinson (1991), for whom reflexivity entails an awareness on the part of the researcher of the process of research, her or his role in it and the implications of this for the analysis.

of the object'. In doing so, it preserves an analytic distance that privileges and sets apart the method of the observer.[7]

In the course of his own efforts to highlight the importance of reflexivity in social research, Woolgar points out the ways in which this practice is resisted by social researchers.[8] The most prevalent of these, he argues, is the "management of the postulates of distinctiveness and similarity" (Woolgar 1988: 31). By exoticising the observed, and assuming rather than arguing for difference, Woolgar contends, researchers avoid the practice of reflexivity and, along with it, the questioning of their method. If we are to develop an adequate critique of representation and the relationship with our subjects/objects, therefore, we should downplay their exoticism and highlight their familiarity, "at least as a heuristic, thereby making our own methods seem less distinctly privileged" (Woolgar 1988: 28). Woolgar's methodological principle is a useful one in the sense that it may serve as a means of "objectivising [the] objectivising distance [of the researcher] and the social conditions which make it possible, such as the externality of the observer, the techniques of objectivation he uses, etc." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 42). However, it is a method that, arguably, should not need to be so calculated. Woolgar contends that subjects'/objects' interpretive activities are essentially similar to those of researchers. This aligns him closely with Jurgen Habermas's conception of the relationship between researchers and researched. Habermas argues that because social actors share the same interpretive capacities as social scientific interpreters, "the latter cannot claim for themselves the status of neutral, extramundane observers in their definitions of actors' situations" (1984: xiii). In his view, the social scientist is - consciously or otherwise - inevitably and inextricably a part of the world that he or she studies. The 'similarity postulate' is not, therefore, the result of methodological choice, but a given. As a "virtual participant", the social scientist's "only plausible claim to objectivity derives from the reflective quality of their participation" (Habermas 1984: xiii). It is this reflection that enables the researcher to preserve the constructivist undertones of constitutive reflexivity (and with it, the notion of the social world as the work of skilled, active human subjects), without jettisoning or disowning the possibility of producing a critical social scientific account.

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[7] In the absence of evidence to the contrary, one assumes that the task of assessing the credibility of the research will be confined to the social scientific/academic community.

[8] Whereas Woolgar assumes that reflexivity is avoided by social researchers for largely epistemological reasons, Bourdieu attributes social sources of resistance. Epistemic reflexivity, Bourdieu argues, represents an attack on the sacred Western sense of individuality and, in particular, "the charismatic self-conception of intellectuals who like to think of themselves as undetermined, 'free-floating' and endowed with a symbolic form of grace" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 43-4).

The similarity postulate finds further support (through logical extension) in Pierre Bourdieu's conception of reflexivity. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992),[9] Bourdieu consistently emphasises the point that social researchers, like ordinary social actors, are not themselves undetermined. They are neither free from, nor inoculated against, the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 40). Moreover, despite frequent delusions to the contrary, no amount of what Bourdieu terms methodologism or theoreticism will render them so. Instead, Bourdieu sees this as the task of the idea of reflexivity, which should, he argues, be adopted as a "requirement and form of sociological work, that is, as an epistemological program in action for social science" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 38). It is with respect to his emphasis on the importance of reflexivity as a transformative *institutional practice* that Bourdieu parts company with fellow advocates of more reflexive social science. Where Gouldner (1979), Berger (1981; 1991) and O'Neill (1975) focus on the sociologist her- or himself as the "pivot of reflexivity - both its object (or target) and its carrier" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 38), Bourdieu insists that this is insufficient (see footnote 13). In his view, such a stance "ignores those limits of knowledge specifically associated with the analyst's membership and position in the intellectual field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 39). For Bourdieu, we should be less concerned with the researcher's social origins and position in the academic field than with sociology's intellectualist bias, or tendency to construct the world as a theoretical, rather than practical, problem. This bias enables social researchers to (continue to) avoid "subjecting the *position* of the observer [rather than simply the observer her or himself] to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 41, emphasis in original). At the same time, it preserves the notion of the social researcher as relatively free-floating, and the power relations associated with this distance. As Bourdieu notes elsewhere, "all objectivist knowledge", such as that produced by the independent social researcher, "contains a claim to legitimate domination" (1990b: 28). On this point, and the questions it raises, though, Bourdieu himself proves surprisingly unreflexive.

There is much to be said in favour of Bourdieu's strong programme for reflexivity in the social sciences.[10] His argument that reflexivity may strengthen the epistemological

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[9] See also Bourdieu, P. (translated by M. Adamson) 1990a. *In Other Words: Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. California: Stanford University Press.

[10] His attempt to 'correct' the intellectualist bias of the social sciences through the (re)introduction of a critical practical logic is also to be commended. One problem with Bourdieu's account, though, is that it induces the "tension at the heart of social science" (Woolgar 1988: 28; see also Giddens 1993), by raising the question of what counts as an adequate demonstration of reflexivity (Woolgar 1988: 32), without attempting to answer it. Reflexivity can, as Woolgar (1988) and Flick (1998) observe, extend to unlimited questioning of the authority of the text on the basis of the adequacy of the researcher's observations and interpretations. In this extreme form, it runs the risk of being reduced to "an endless discourse of self-

moorings of research is a compelling one. This is especially so where the focus *is* epistemic and primarily concerned with the reflexivity of social scientific practice, rather than that of social scientific discourse or the individual researcher.[11] However, Bourdieu does not follow through with his observation that social researchers appear loathe to practice epistemic reflexivity, and in so doing relinquish their theoreticist standpoint, along with all that this entails.[12] To the extent that sociology does not make good its promise as "an eminently political science" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 50), one that works to expose all strategies and mechanisms of symbolic domination, *including those practiced by itself*, it is a potential - if unwitting or well-intentioned - source of domination.[13] Epistemic questions are questions of political relevance not just for social science, but for the 'objects' of its research as well. Yet Bourdieu does not adequately consider in his reflexive project the implications of this detail for ordinary people's knowledge and practice, and for his interpretations and assessments of these. Whilst researchers (and experts in general) and researched share interpretive capacities, they do not necessarily hold in common a hermeneutic intent. In Alfred Schutz's (1962) lexis, they have different - and arguably, frequently competing - 'systems of relevance'. The concerns of lay-people are largely practical. One of the most fundamental of these is the task of defending themselves against *all* people and practices that would objectify and subjectify them. Due to the totalising nature of his general theory of practice, though, Bourdieu is ill-equipped to recognise or conceptualise lay-people's 'ordinary' knowledge and practices *as* (potential) strategies of resistance.

In conceptualising the relationship between structure and agency (and simultaneously attempting to transcend this "false antinomy"), Bourdieu employs as a mediating concept, or link between the two, the *habitus*. This, he describes as follows:

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referentiality" (Flick 1998: 249) and (rightly) labelled a self-indulgent luxury or self-conscious cleverness. On the other hand, reflexivity proceeding from the assumption of difference between the researcher and the researched can be interpreted as basically irrelevant to the practice of social scientific research.

[11] And thereby avoids to some degree the claims of narcissm and solipsism directed at the idea of reflexivity. See, for example, footnotes 9 and 11.

[12] Bourdieu states in *The Logic of Practice* that "the most formidable barrier to the construction of an adequate science of practice no doubt lies in the fact that the solidarity that binds scientists to their science (and to the social privilege which makes it possible and which it justifies or procures) predisposes them to profess the superiority of their knowledge, often won through enormous efforts, against common sense, and even to find in that superiority a justification for their privilege, rather than to produce a scientific knowledge of the practical mode of knowledge and of the limits that scientific knowledge owes to the fact that it is based on a privilege" (1990b: 28).

[13] See the previous chapter and the question posed by Sullivan (1987) concerning the democratisation of knowledge and self-interest of experts and expertise. See also my critique of Bauman for similar reasons in the same chapter.

> [t]he conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (1990b: 53)

The *habitus* is hence a product of structure that serves to reproduce that structure by means of practices that are also products of structure. In the process of socialisation, the actor internalises the dispositions allied with her or his 'place' in the field of relationships of a society (or, structure). Since the *habitus* makes possible only those "thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production", the actor is effectively the embodiment of structure (Bourdieu 1990b: 55). Not only is the actor confined within structure through the operations of the *habitus*, but so, too, is history. By shaping the present in line with the past and the future according to the present, in which the past plays a determining role, the *habitus* ensures the continual reproduction of structure:

> The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices - more history - in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. This system of dispositions - a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted - is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it. (1990b: 54)

The actor, and society as a whole, is, then, basically fated to reproduce itself and all its essentials in perpetuity:

> Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions - whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. (Bourdieu 1990b: 55).

The implications of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* for ordinary practices are clear. Bourdieu holds that structures are internalised through learning and exteriorised as achievements through practices. However, if they are to correspond adequately to situations (that are manifestations of structures), practices can neither precede, nor proceed beyond, structures (see, for example, Bourdieu 1977: 72). Achievements and practices are effectively reliant upon structures for their movement and, because they have been thus hypostatised, they simply serve to ensure the faithful reproduction of structures (Certeau 1988).

But what of those practices that do not conform to the dictates of internalised structure, those whose 'correctness' has not been realised through the actions of the *habitus*? How does Bourdieu reconcile these with the overwhelmingly harmonious adjustment of practices to structures drawn in his logic of practice? How does Bourdieu *explicitly* treat those practices that, in a sense, 'escape' structure and defy his logic?

Michel de Certeau argues that, in Bourdieu's ethnographic studies, certain 'ordinary' practices are isolated from the totality of a group's or society's practices and given an ethnological form as 'strategies'. These strategies are subtle and omnipresent "styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance" (Certeau 1988: 26). They are tactics that work to turn the order of things to their own ends, "internal manipulations of a system ... of an established order" (Certeau 1988: 24; see also Dumm 1999). Despite their transgressive nature, Certeau maintains, they are always in Bourdieu's logic of practice dominated by "an economy of the proper place [or, the *habitus*]" (Certeau 1988: 55).[14] Moreover, in the sense that they are confined to an assumed social reality - one that "goes without saying because it comes without saying" - they cannot, for Bourdieu, be properly considered strategies (Certeau 1988: 56). In Bourdieu's reckoning, to be labelled such, actors' practices would need to be structured and the result of informed calculation and deliberation, rather than "short term and short sighted", "anarchical" and "relative to a disparate ensemble of semi-knowledges" (Certeau 1988: 55). Thus, although strategies are *knowledgeable*, in the sense that they are the work of actors who assume a (circumscribed) social reality, a single practical logic to which practices conform, they are *unconscious*.[15] As a result, they are (made)

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[14] As a result, de Certeau sees Bourdieu's choice of nomenclature as merely a concession to "the fact that practices give an adequate response to contingent situations" (1984: 55).

[15] Bourdieu's theoretical stance towards consciousness is ambivalent, to say the least. In discussion with Terry Eagleton for the *New Left Review*, Bourdieu accuses Marxism, and left intellectuals in general, of placing too much emphasis on consciousness. This he sees as a distraction. The social world, he argues, operates not in terms of consciousness but practices and mechanisms. These practices and mechanisms are not conscious but naturalised and habitual. Bourdieu thus implies that symbolic violence and

reliant for their coherence - for their very meaning as strategies - upon the 'foreign and superior' objectifying knowledge of the social researcher. Because these strategies 'do not know' - are unconscious - Certeau argues, they "provide Bourdieu with the means of explaining everything and of being conscious of everything" (1988: 63). By stressing their lack of consciousness and mobility, Bourdieu curbs those "wily, polymorphic and transgressive 'strategies' that threaten the 'plausibility and ... essential articulation' of his theory, which recognises 'the reproduction of the same order everywhere'" (Certeau 1988: 63). In Certeau's account, actors are made passive and immobile, or, objectified, in the service of Bourdieu's theory. In the process, their strategies of resistance, or tactics, are trivialised as either conducive to the perpetuation of structure, or unconscious, and thus of little consequence as a challenge to the status quo (Certeau 1988: 59).[16]

The salient point here is not so much Bourdieu's claim to epistemic sovereignty (one that Certeau appears reluctant to concede), but rather the assumed grounds for its legitimacy. As I have established, to the degree that the researcher exercises reflexivity in conducting her or his research, he or she is entitled to claim a measure of objectivity. Ordinary actors are, indeed, not conscious of many of the structures that influence, and, at times, determine, aspects of their existence, and in these such instances the social scientist *may* deliver enlightenment. However, we cannot *presuppose*, as does Bourdieu, that those ordinary actors whom we study are unreflexive in either a cognitive or hermeneutic sense. Ordinary actors are not merely reproducers of social reality, unquestioning of those categories used in the work of construction. Nor are they necessarily unconscious of their strategies *as* strategies. It is erroneous to extrapolate from the unruly and opaque nature of these strategies a lack of consciousness on the part of their authors. Indeed, as I argued in the previous chapter, it is similarly mistaken to impute from the transparency and conformity of actors' practices their unconsciousness.

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domination cannot *only* be thought about in terms of consciousness, for they are inscribed or, perhaps more accurately for Bourdieu, absorbed, into the body. Call it my "scholastic bias" (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992: 115), but I fail to see how a discourse or organised, collective practices of emancipation might proceed without bringing to consciousness these corporeal effects. But it is not my failing alone. For Bourdieu, dissent and resistance must take the shape of an oppositional form of language, or, 'heterodoxy'. Yet the development of heterodoxy is contingent upon consciousness of 'doxa' - the internalised and naturalised practices of symbolic domination, against which the actor is to resist.

[16] In comparing Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity with those of Beck and Giddens, Scott Lash (1994) suggests that Bourdieu's is a more hermeneutic form. Bourdieu's subject, he maintains, "cannot be de-situated to obtain the objectivity (or realism) of the 'cognitive' reflexivity analysed by Beck and Giddens. Its attunement is not of the subject-object variety presumed in propositional knowledge, but it is hermeneutic" (Lash 1994: 210). Lash bases this assessment on Bourdieu's employment of the *habitus*. Is this strict contrast entirely justified, however, given Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of consciousness (and a very particular, unified form of consciousness, at that)? As I have noted, Bourdieu defines reflexivity as the systematic reflection on unthought categories of thought, and is dismissive of strategies that, despite their challenging various forms of objectification, do not display the requisite form or level of consciousness.

True reflexivity, as Woolgar (1988) points out, demands that we argue for, rather than assume, these characteristics. A practice of reflexivity such as Bourdieu's is a hard standard for a social scientist to maintain, as is evidenced by his own inability to adhere to it.

The research and questions of method

In the course of my research, I primarily employed the methods of participant observation and semi-structured interview. Like most qualitative research methods, participant observation has been mapped along a continuum - in its case, according to the form of participatory role assumed by the fieldwork researcher (see Gans 1982; Gold 1958; Junker 1960; Spradley 1980; Yin 1989). These roles range from mostly-observer to mostly-participant, with the position chosen by the researcher depending upon the question being investigated, the context of the study and the theoretical perspective adopted (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Within the 'context of study' category, we might include, at Gans' (1982) suggestion, the fieldworker's emotional relationship to the people being studied. In my own case, the research problem and theoretical approach influenced my initial decision to adopt a role of mostly observer-as-participant but, in practice, my role oscillated in line with the context of the situation and my discretion. I discussed earlier the importance of preserving the integrity of actors' common sense knowledge for the purposes of my research (and, indeed, for political reasons). It was important to construct a view of the context of the study - including actors' knowledge and meanings associated with it - that was close to its 'natural state'. Bearing in mind the fact that it is not possible to *eliminate* the effects of the researcher, given that the researcher is part of the social world studied, my research problem nevertheless demanded that this impact be minimised. At the same time, however, an accurate apprehension and representation requires sufficient understanding of the cultural context of the study to determine what is its 'natural state'. To be able to interpret what is going on and, indeed, to be aware of researcher influences upon the context, it is necessary to understand its mores, shared explanations and expectations. This signals the need for a measure of critical interpretive space. Habermas's (1984) description of the social scientist as 'virtual participant' thus accurately describes my position throughout the research.

Also influencing my decision regarding the form of participatory role chosen was the theoretical perspective with which my sympathies might generally be said to lie. As Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln see it, "questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm [or the] basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental

ways" (1998: 195). Although they furnish two caveats that acknowledge the crudity of their division of research paradigms, neither of these qualifications accounts for the potential coexistence of conflictual beliefs and practices - even though logical accommodation of these might seem impossible. Through their assumption of the mutual exclusivity of many paradigmatic features, Guba and Lincoln attribute a solidity and stability to beliefs that simply may not exist. In doing so, they also, of course, presuppose a rational actor, the numbers of whom are, according to Converse's research and judgement (see Chapter One), in lamentably short supply.[17] Having identified this caveat of my own, in the terms of Guba and Lincoln's schema, my broad theoretical approach may best be described as constructivist. Perhaps the most significant distinction between the (otherwise largely commensurable) constructivist and critical viewpoints (as outlined by Guba and Lincoln) is their conception of the relationship between researcher and researched. Whilst both are committed to actors' emancipation, constructivist methodology entails a hermeneutical and dialectical approach to this goal; one that is more open to people's emic constructions, their understanding and reconstruction, along with the etic constructions of the researcher. Critical theory methodology, on the other hand, is rather more didactic in its attitude to this task. As a 'transformative intellectual' (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 206), the critical researcher is obliged to confront the ignorance and misapprehension either ascribed to or found in actor's constructions, so as to develop in these actors a more informed consciousness. Although the research process is still dialectical (after a fashion), it is, from the outset, an altogether more one-sided method than that of the constructivist view. Whilst I believe, along with all advocates of the stance adopted by Marx in his Thesis Eleven, that research should be progressive and change-oriented, I am of the view that this is best achieved through 'getting it right'. This entails a standard of openness and tolerance that is - to some degree - foreclosed by a critical, judgmental stance and privileged, authoritative standpoint for the researcher. In short, my research - whilst not unconfrontational, in the sense that participants were forced to reflect upon and articulate their attempts to make sense of a fragmentary and contingent existence - was co-operative throughout.

The theoretical debates and concepts outlined in the previous chapters provided the initial focus, and guide, for my collection of data. They served as what Herbert Blumer describes as "sensitising concepts" (1954: 7). These, he argues, provide "a general sense of reference and guidelines in approaching empirical instances. Where definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitising concepts merely suggest

[17] For a critique of rational choice theory and its assumption of holistic rationality and treatment of rationality as a paradigmatic norm, see Hindess (1988).

directions along which to look" (Blumer 1954: 7). In the process of participant observation, and throughout the course of the research, I developed and refined interview questions that drew on respondents' observed behaviours and emic constructs. This, Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson (1991: 24) contend, is a distinct advantage of combining these methods of research. Another benefit gained is that the interview may address one of the restrictions of participant observation - namely the fact that people's public persona typically involves 'putting on a show' or 'maintaining a front' (Goffman 1990; Hammersley and Atkinson 1991; Sapsford and Jupp 1996) - regardless of the presence or absence of the researcher. Since my participant observation was largely confined to formal, public settings, this was an especially important consideration. By interviewing people outside the public context, in their homes and on their properties, I was able to glean insights that might otherwise have been obscured by this façade. In these settings, people were more or less free to reflect and critically comment upon their public commitments and relationship to the wider socio-political realm.

Various forms of interviewing style are open to the social researcher. As is the case for participant observation, interviews are typically conceptualised as falling along a continuum, with 'structured' interviews at one end and 'unstructured' interviews at the other (Minchiello *et al.* 1990; see also Jary and Jary 1991: 327). This is, however, an erroneous conception for the social researcher who takes seriously the fallibilistic nature of their enterprise. All interviews, Margot Ely (1991: 58-9) argues, are 'structured', with the difference lying in how this structure is negotiated. Interview structure is either predetermined, or developed in the course of the interview. In the case of what should, then, properly be termed the semi-structured interview, the method I employed, the researcher has general areas to be explored, with these serving as guides to a 'conversation', in which the researcher "follows as well as leads" (Ely 1991: 58-9). For the purposes of my research, this technique exhibits several advantages over the structured interview method. It allows for increased flexibility, with questions able to be framed in such a manner as to suit the occasion, and thereby elicit 'richer' data. It also addresses (to some degree) the concerns of some critical ethnographers and feminist researchers who disapprove of the one-sided nature of the structured interview. The semi-structured (or, in-depth, ethnographic) interview allows the researcher to 'give' as well as 'take', and is thus seen by these critics as less detached and exploitative (Oakley 1972; 1981). Nevertheless, flexibility does have its price. This method reduces the comparability of interviews conducted within a study. However, and what is more important in terms of my own study, is that it also provides, in Minchinello *et al.*'s view, "a more valid explication of the informant's perception of reality" (1990: 92).

A common sense culture?

Having first posed my research problem in a very general sense, and considered the data and methodology required to further develop and address this problem, I was then confronted with the question of whom to study. The 'answer', as it happened, was relatively easy. Regardless of whether common sense is viewed in a largely positive or negative light, its analysts tend to regard rural people as both common sense's foremost practitioners and exponents. Lawrence Joseph, who belongs in the former of these two camps, identifies as the single most pertinent feature of a 'common sense culture' people's relationship to the(ir) environment. According to Joseph, common sense is apt to flourish where physical survival is paramount, and nature (or things nature-like) is the adversary. The struggle against an ambivalent environment, he maintains, promotes a "pragmatic, utilitarian relationship to reality" and a "down-to-earth instinct for survival" (Joseph 1994: 122). Common sense is, in his view, the body of knowledge and general approach to life derived from this life-and-death struggle. It is a shared resource whose job it is to deal with whatever the environment (natural and social) dishes out, in a pragmatic and utilitarian way. Despite their now being less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of nature due to the technological advances of modernity, it is rural people that most closely approximate Joseph's criteria in modern Western societies, such as Australia.[18]

Joseph views common sense in a largely positive light. If we draw instead upon social theory's predominantly negative conception of common sense, though, we nevertheless arrive at the same population, and for similar reasons. There is a long tradition in social thought of denigration of the rural, and this is due in no small part to the reliance of rural people on nature, and upon common sense (narrowly defined). Rural people and rural life, Raymond Williams (1973) notes, are linked to 'the country' and nationalist origin myths. It is this association with country, nature and necessity (one that Joseph sees as conducive to common sense) that invariably leads to rural people being "cast as relics of the nation's past rather than as vital representatives of the contemporary nation" (Ching and Creed 1998: 24). Since Marx's pronouncement of distaste for "rural idiocy", critical social thought in particular has typically represented rural people as backward. Being the residue, or detritus, of national development, not only do rural people fail to contribute to the (valued) cultural life and advancement of the nation, but they are often identified with the far-right, and its regressive racist, ethnocentric or nationalist ideologies. Rural people's lack of capacity for critical thought - their ignorance at worst,

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[18] Although a number of the rural people I interviewed spoke of "tough, learning times", none directly invoked that alternative academy, "the School of Hard Knocks".

and naivety at best - coupled with feelings of ostracism in more recent times enables them, in many critical theorists' reckoning, to be *made* conservative by populist politicians to suit their broader agenda (Grant 1997; Patten 1996). Moreover, rural people do not appear to help 'their cause' any. In Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed's assessment, through their frequent expressions of conservatism and anti-intellectualism, rural people "render their identities less interesting to scholars fascinated by the resistance potential of identity politics" (1998: 11). Those intellectuals criticised and frustrated by rural people's defence of conservative causes, "thereby collude with 'liberal' urbanites in casting rustics as homogeneous oppressors of other marginalised groups [and thus meriting] whatever degradation and neglect they may experience" (Ching and Creed 1998: 11).[19]

To some extent, this appears to have been the case in Australia's recent political history, with the emergence of the populist One Nation Party in 1996,[20] support for which was especially high in regional and rural Australia. Based on the evidence of Morgan and Newspolls for January 1997 to June 1998 (One Nation's high-water mark), backing for the party was strongest among older males with less formal education and dependent upon blue-collar jobs. In terms of political geography, One Nation Party voters lived primarily outside the states' capitals in regional and rural Australia (Goot 1998: 73). In

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[19] Generally critical of such representations, and of rural people's cultural devaluation and economic marginalisation though they are, Ching and Creed cannot help but align themselves with 'liberal' intellectuals and urbanites at the end of the day, concluding that "to the degree that rustic empowerment prevents other groups from asserting and capitalising on their marginality, it is regressive and discriminatory" (Ching and Creed 1998: 29). Ching and Creed focus on rural resistance in cultural terms. Thus, they and their contributors attempt to identify instances in which rural people employ their 'rustic identity', exposing those symbolic representations that politicise rusticity through determined, insistent demands that it be incorporated into the public sphere. Were rural peoples' efforts at resistance "more self-conscious", Ching and Creed argue, they could better challenge their manipulation and marginalisation at the hands of the dominant culture (1998: 29). Although Ching and Creed's meaning is not entirely clear, it needs to be said that their buying into 'sexy' identity politics is, in a sense, capitulating to the dominant culture's demands of rural people, many of whom do not want to capitalise upon, but rather to distance themselves from, cultural stereotypes.

[20] Briefly, the catalyst for this party's formation was the Australian Liberal Party's disendorsement of its candidate for Oxley (then the safest Labor seat in Queensland), Pauline Hanson, just two weeks before the federal election of 1996. Hanson, a local small businesswoman, was dropped when a letter she had written to her local newspaper, expressing the opinion that Australian politicians and governments had caused a 'racist problem' through their biased treatment in favour of Aborigines, was brought to the attention of the Liberal Party's federal leadership. Wary of a politically-damaging scandal, this cadre withdrew Hanson's pre-selection, only to see her run as an independent and win the seat with a 21 per cent swing, the largest swing against Labor in the country (Manne 1998: 3). Following her maiden speech in the House of Representatives during September 1996, in which she reiterated her earlier views on the treatment of indigenous Australians, and expressed the fear that Australia was in danger of being 'swamped by Asians', Hanson garnered increased public support. Buoyed by this backing, she went on to form, in April 1997, the One Nation Party. Among other things, this party held that: Aborigines were being treated over-generously by the Federal government; ATSIC should be abolished; the proportion of Asians in the immigration intake should be reduced; a short-term freeze should be placed on immigration and the policy of multiculturalism abolished; aid to overseas countries should be reduced; and, a compulsory twelve-month period of national service introduced for men and women turning 18.

these areas, One Nation Party supporters were especially vulnerable to the effects of economic restructuring, such as low commodity prices for primary producers and the withdrawal of services.

Whilst the many commentators on the left and the right who have attempted to explain the One Nation Party's ascendancy dispute its precise cause, there is nevertheless evident a degree of "interpretive agreement" (Manne 1998: 7) regarding its general source. The rise of the One Nation Party is usually attributed to an ideological divide between 'elite' and 'ordinary' Australians.[21] Katherine Betts describes the former grouping as a 'new class'; one that is composed of "professionally-educated internationalists and cosmopolitans", who are "attracted to the wider world of 'overseas' with all its problems, challenges and difficulties" (1999: 3). By contrast, ordinary Australians, or 'parochials', as their designation implies, cling to a sense of national community. They demand state control of immigration, labour market regulation and industrial protection, state interventions that are usually seen as necessary to protect them from external turbulence and distress (Betts 1999: 3). Although one might take issue with the simplistic and homogenising nature of this categorisation, for our general purposes, the point still stands. Suffice to say that, on the whole, rural Australians fall into the second category, and were roundly disparaged by a number of the former for their conservatism and ignorance.[22] Due to their reliance upon common sense, rural people are typically adjudged the least politically competent of Australia's citizens.

Boorowa

Having settled on rural Australians as a population for research, it was then a case of selecting a region and town. After scouring maps of New South Wales (NSW), reviewing ABS data to determine various towns' characteristics, and reconnoitering the rural south-east NSW region, I eventually decided upon the town of Boorowa.[23] Given the objectives of my research and the temporal and fiscal constraints to which I was subject, this town seemed ideal. Boorowa is not too far (by Australian standards) from the Australian National University in Canberra (where I live and work) and of such a size that it was possible, I reasoned, to observe and talk to a modest proportion of the town's and district's population. Whilst my 'sample' would not necessarily be statistically representative, I was nevertheless confident that it would be sufficiently

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[21] These groups have been variously described as 'the intelligentsia' and 'mainstream' (Rothwell 1998), the 'policy culture' and 'community culture' (Wooldridge 1998), or 'liberal cosmopolitans' and 'parochials' (Betts 1999).

[22] Including commentators such as Bligh Grant, who "refuse[s] to accept" the One Nation Party's [and, by implication, the above-mentioned analysts'] "fictitious division ... between an educated elite and the heroic little workers" (1997: 17).

[23] A description of the town is furnished in the following chapter.

large and varied to generate data that would provide insights into the way these people make sense of their world. Being a 'typical' small NSW country town, I also felt that Boorowa would constitute a useful site in which to examine, to a degree, the 'critical capacity' of common sense vis-à-vis rural ideology.[24] So far as I could ascertain through a search of the relevant literature, Boorowa had not been the subject of any previous social research, and its residents were less likely, as a result, to have 'pat' responses to my questions.[25]

I initially negotiated my access to the town through the Boorowa Shire Council and, more specifically, the then town General Manager, Barry. When I introduced myself as a post-graduate student from the ANU, and outlined, in general terms, the nature of my research, Barry (and, following the next Boorowa Shire Council meeting, the remainder of the town's council) was happy to support the project, and to offer practical assistance, should I need it. I suspect that this patronage was largely because they wanted the town's story of plight told, in whatever context. At various times during the ensuing twelve months, I spoke to, and recorded interviews with, the Mayor and a number of Boorowa Shire Council staff and Councilors. However, I chose to decline the Council's early offer of further assistance and thus remained independent. I did so largely because the local council was likely to be a substantial political actor in the town (see Gray 1991; see also Saunders *et al.* 1978), and I did not want my interactions, and responses to my questions, to be in any way coloured due to my affiliations. I was conscious at the beginning of the research that council members and other prominent actors could attempt to act as gatekeepers, in line with their expectations about my identity and intentions (Hammersley and Atkinson 1991). However, my concerns, such as they were, were allayed almost immediately due to the openness with which my research and I was received.

My research does not fit within the community studies genre proper, in the sense that I did not live and work in the Boorowa community for an extended period.[26] Nor did I join any formal community groups or associations in the town. (As intimated earlier, I

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[24] Boorowa boasts a number of historic buildings, lays claim to a rural setting, and is located in a shire with a high level of agricultural and horticultural activity. Indeed, South East NSW itself, due to its cultural and historical background, pattern of settlement and generally favourable climactic and soil conditions, among other factors, is one of the most intensive agricultural and horticultural region in NSW, and Australia (ABS 1999).

[25] Upon completing my fieldwork, I was contacted by researchers affiliated with the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) at the ANU who were preparing to conduct research into the adequacy of health service provision in the town. Various Boorowa people had alerted these researchers as to my existence, and the nature of my research.

[26] The emphasis given to participation and observation varies substantially within the Australian community studies literature (compare Dempsey 1990; Gray 1991; Poiner 1990, and Wild 1975).

did not want associations with any one group or organisation to preclude access to any other segment of the population). Instead, I visited the town on a regular basis over a twelve-month period from February, 1999, to March, 2000, attending social functions, going to meetings, a community rally, observing and drinking in the pub. I had no public role other than that of researcher and, whilst I did not conceal this role (or what my research was 'about'), I did not consistently publicise or emphasise it either. Besides a small piece in the *Boorowa News* to inform town members of my presence in the town, and the general nature of my research, all other 'publicity' was via word-of-mouth, or, colloquially, 'the bush telegraph'. In the course of observation I adopted a low-key approach, less out of a conscious desire to minimise my influence on the social processes observed, and more due to the fact that I was there to learn, and that it simply was not my place to comment on, or participate in, proceedings, unless invited. Having said this, I rarely took notes unless this was in a setting in which my doing so was unlikely to be conspicuous or disruptive. Although I was known to be an outside investigator by some of those people being studied, this did not appear to impinge upon or unduly influence their behaviour or attitudes. Nor did it count against my observation of informal social relations - of Boorowa people's behaviour and attitudes. This was especially important, given that I was concerned to assess both how widespread these were, and whether or not they were indicative of an uncritical common consciousness.

Interviews

From the outset, I aimed to observe and speak with as many and as broad a cross-section of the town and shire's population as possible, whilst also attempting to achieve something of an age and gender balance. (As it happened, neither of these aspirations posed any great difficulties). To this end, I spoke with the local state Member of Parliament, the town's Mayor and some of its councillors, unemployed people, farmers, business managers and employees, retirees, one of the district's police officers, nurses and professionals of various description. Inadvertently, but as it happened, fortuitously, I employed a snowball sampling method. My application of the method differs from the description provided in the literature, though, in that I did not start with a selected group of respondents, but instead with randomly chosen individuals. Respondents frequently 'volunteered' other people for the study, and offered to introduce me to these would-be participants. In some instances, they were positively insistent that their fellows should talk to me. Where this occurred, I made a point of stressing to the prospective interviewee that they should by no means feel under any obligation to participate in the study (despite their peer's occasional remonstrations to the contrary), nor, indeed, to speak to me at all, should they not wish to do so. Typically, they dismissed with candor my concerns about their being browbeaten into participation, and demonstrated their

willingness by asking me about the research and myself. When interviewees did not propose other candidates for participation unsolicited, and where I felt this to be appropriate, I posed the question.

Boorowa people were, on the whole, happy to talk to me, with only two people declining to be interviewed. I was prepared for some measure of reticence, given rural people's general treatment at the hands of social researchers and intellectuals. This belief was well founded for, as I was soon to discover, Boorowa people are all too aware of the many negative representations of rurality purveyed by academics. Having not had dealings with social researchers in person, or read the results of their research directly, however, they were more upset with the actions of journalists and media representatives. On more than one occasion, I was told of incidents in which city-based journalists had interviewed members of the community, only to then selectively interpret and misquote them. I addressed this concern by assuring people that, where the interview was recorded and when it had been transcribed, they were welcome to review their comments, and to read the final work, when completed. (Nobody took up my offer of checking her or his transcript, but a number expressed an interest in reading the final work. I made an undertaking to lodge a copy of the completed work with the town's library, along with an summary of its substantive content, written in layperson's terms). Whilst I certainly encountered an initial reserve and wariness in some Boorowa people, this usually did not last long. Indeed, when they felt more comfortable, the Boorowa people with whom I spoke appeared to see the interview as something of an opportunity to 'set the record straight'. In what was perhaps, in retrospect, a piece of advice to me as an outside researcher, one of my earliest interviewees, speculating upon his own and his fellow's guardedness, ventured this explanation of the behaviour:

> You hear about these sort of studies of the spatial distances and things like that, where people sort of like their space, and all that sort of thing. And I think that they just sort of, if you go and talk to someone from the country, you don't sort of say, "well, listen, this is what I want, and this is what I'm going to do", you know. You talk to them about the weather for five minutes and sort of finally get around to asking them what you want to ask them, or else they'll treat you with some sort of suspicion, anyway. They've got to size you up, you know. Are you a threat or otherwise. And I don't know whether it's that or not, maybe it's just, you know, they've got to suss you out, if you like. Country people don't like getting pinned down initially. They, like, it should be sort of done more subtly, sort of thing.

Peter Mewett (1989) describes a similar phenomenon experienced during his fieldwork in the crofting village of Lewis, in the Highlands and Islands region of Scotland. His

respondents' wariness translated into a degree of inscrutability, due to their shielding certain aspects of local knowledge from inquiry. The operation of the social organisation of the village itself distanced him from much social activity and its emic interpretation. The same could not be said for Boorowa people. Their wariness did result in some preliminary obscuration, but when this was dissolved, I discovered that they were neither blind to, nor unwilling to discuss, their own and the town's shortcomings (as they saw them). On the contrary, many presented me with a 'warts and all' description of the community and its problems, and, in an often self-deprecating and humorous style, their own (perceived) manifest limitations. In many situations, I found myself talking with people on an informal basis about a wide range of topics and issues not immediately or obviously related to the research. However, as one Boorowa person put it when he felt that he was drifting away from the topic, only to be reassured that this was not the case, this information was "all grist to the mill". Not only did it flesh out the context of their more specific responses to my questions, but it also provided me with an indication that I had been accepted into their confidences.

In all, I conducted interviews with some 70 Boorowa people, and had informal discussions with a number of others. Only 52 of these interviews were tape-recorded - this was not because anybody I interviewed objected (or, I felt, would have objected) to the prospect, but because in certain instances I either sensed that it would not have been appropriate to do so, or found myself engaged in an informal interview with only my notebook to hand. These recorded interviews, along with the proceedings of several meetings and speeches at the town's rally (and in the pub afterwards), I subsequently transcribed. The duration of interviews varied between 1 and 3½ hours, with most averaging around 1½ hours. I conducted several follow-up interviews in order to clarify or elaborate upon certain points. Where possible, and necessary, I took notes during interviews. Some of these annotations were mnemonics related to participants' responses, whilst others were to do with my impressions of the setting, interactions and behaviours of the participant and myself. Many of the interviews were conducted in an informal setting, with people talking to me in a work context, or in the pub. To fit in with farmers' often busy schedules, for example, I was on occasion invited out 'on the job' - rounding up sheep, reaping, or inspecting some aspect or other of a farmer's property. My participation, or 'contribution', in such instances, consisted largely of opening and closing gates, pulling this or that lever on command, or nodding sagely at explanations of the workings of, or problems with, farm machinery. Other interviews were more formal - organised in advance and carried out in people's homes and offices. These offered the chance to talk in relative peace and greater depth. Having said this, however, those people I interviewed in a work setting often appeared to use as an

opportunity for contemplation those interruptions posed by customers, overly enthusiastic sheep dogs or recalcitrant farm machinery. Frequently, where they were dissatisfied with their responses due to such interruptions, or their prospect, Boorowa people would seek to clarify these in our subsequent meetings, or organise to reconvene the interview in a more conducive setting. Although they were broad-ranging, in each instance interviews dealt with people's: backgrounds and associations with the town and community; perceived differences between rural and urban people and lifestyles; notions of what is an Australian; conceptions of rights, responsibilities and commitments; and, understandings of Australian political institutions and socio-political constraints on people's action. As a secondary source of (local) data, I drew upon the *Boorowa News* and information produced by the Boorowa Shire Council as documentary evidence. These furnished further insights into Boorowa people's community life and awareness of broader socio-political issues. At the same time, they provided historical and contextual dimensions to my observations and to actors' accounts. I also utilised published and unpublished Municipal Employees Union (MEU) materials, Federal and NSW Hansard, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian.* I did so both to capture the 'broader context' of Boorowa people's common sense understandings and action, and to analyse the policy dispute in which Boorowa people became embroiled during the latter part of 1999. It was this challenge that came to provide the primary focus for my analysis and representation of Boorowa people's perceived lived experience, common sense understandings of their world, and their 'political' action.

The analytic procedure

I chose to employ Boorowa people's assessment of and response to the NSW government's proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance services not because I was faced with what Miles and Hubermann (1994: 50) term "data overload", but because this case seemed to exemplify the nature of these people's common sense 'in action'. As I demonstrated earlier, the notion of grounded theory is, in a strict sense, something of a misnomer. My research provides an apposite example of this, in that it is both hypothesis testing and grounded - exploratory or discovery oriented - given that I could not be sure precisely what I would 'find' 'in the field', or how the social action there observed would unfold. One obvious implication of such an approach to research for data analysis is that data cannot simply be assigned to pre-formulated analytical categories - without some violence being caused to their meanings, that is. Rather, these categories have to be developed. In the course of my research, those analytical categories, or sensitising concepts (such as citizenship and political competence), with which I assayed empirical instances were formed and, at

times, transmogrified, in response to the ways in which Boorowa people understood and enacted them. In a process similar to that described by Miles and Hubermann (1994: 56), categories were derived from Boorowa people's accounts and actions, and these then, in turn, served as categories for the collection of further data and its analysis. Data collection and their analysis was thus a continual and dialectical process throughout the research. This was by no means a mechanistic procedure, informed as it was, in some measure, by what Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer (1994) describe as "intuition and imagination". The process of qualitative data analysis is complex (Seidel 1998) and difficult to represent and it is only relatively recently that detailed attempts to do so, such as those of Miles and Hubermann (1984; 1994) and Bryman and Burgess (1994), have been undertaken. In the past, much of the process was simply taken-for-granted (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), and that these authors have endeavored to remedy this is perhaps testament to a more general reflexive approach to social research.

My study's primary focus and source of evidence is actors' accounts, their attempts to make meaningful sense of their social reality and to explain this to me, the social researcher. But because actors' accounts are inescapably selective, and because what people say is not necessarily what they do (Lewins 1992b), one cannot, as a social researcher, take at face value everything one is told (or observes). Actors' accounts cannot be assumed to be authentic. Thus, as a part of the analytic procedure, actors' accounts must be interrogated in order to ascertain their validity. It needs to be established just why and how these data - along with their interpretation - should be taken seriously.

The interpretive nature of qualitative data analysis poses questions to do with the accuracy of data and their analysis that are rather less thorny for the social scientist of a more positivist bent. The positivist social researcher assumes a real reality that is apprehendable, and that it is thus possible, with research, in principle, to converge on the 'truth of the matter'. From this realist ontological perspective, it is the task of the social researcher to assess the truth or falsity of actors' accounts of reality on the basis of whether or not they accurately reflect that single, shared reality. Through the use of standardised methods of data collection, it is believed that the objectivity, validity and reliability of the data collected may be ensured. Accounts derived under such controlled circumstances can then be treated as either true or false expressions of reality. The qualitative (constructivist) researcher, on the other hand, assumes multiple realities that are local and specific (although elements are often shared among many individuals and across cultures (Guba and Lincoln 1998)). In the absence of a single shared reality, facts and laws from which to determine *the* truth of actors' accounts, or, from a standpoint of

ontological relativism, the criteria for judging the quality of data, differ. Instead of actors' accounts being assessed on the basis of their reliability and validity, they are judged according to their trustworthiness and credibility (Flick 1998). Qualitative social research's move away from positivism and its epistemological and ontological assumptions, including its insistence that the social researcher is not external to the social world being studied, does not signal a retreat into radical epistemological relativism. Nor does it imply a lack of analytical rigour. Granted, qualitative data and findings are (to an extent) created in a process of dialogic interaction between the researcher and the researched. This is inevitably so, as these actors are, in an interpretive sense, linked. However, the reflexive social researcher has access to observations and knowledge that ordinary actors do not, due to their different backgrounds and systems of relevance, typically possess. It is this knowledge that enables the researcher to assess the authenticity of accounts. The qualitative social researcher is also not bereft of criteria for judging the quality of actor's accounts. Indeed, these criteria parallel quite closely those benchmarks employed by positivist researchers (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 213-14).[27] Their only - albeit crucial - distinction is that they proceed from a rejection of realist ontology and its dogmatic posture towards the notion of truth (and are thus simultaneously more and less fallible).

At this point, we are effectively returned to the problematic of common sense, and to the methodological framework for my research, outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Common sense is, like actors' accounts, composed of elements of truth and falsity. 'Truth' is, however, conceptualised by Bauman (and Gramsci) as residing on two different levels. On the first of these, common sense (and the actor's account) is true, or critical, where it accurately reflects the actor's perception of her or his experienced social reality, and not extraneous elements. This conception of 'truth' (and quality in actors' accounts) follows closely the positivist notion.[28] The second ('emancipatory') level of truth demands an epistemological break with positivism's realist ontology. It stems from the recognition that social reality is not natural and ahistorical - 'really real' - but instead a human construct, thus contingent and open to intervention and change. (In Bauman's account, we should recall, because of its rootedness in 'naive philosophical realism', common sense is incapable of progressing to this level. Obeisance to truth on the first level actively militates against truth on the second). Given that my research is concerned with highlighting the political and critical content of common sense (albeit in

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[27] So closely so, in fact, that their coinage appears to be merely an unnecessary exercise in semantics. For the criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, Guba and Lincoln substitute, respectively: trustworthiness, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

[28] Which itself follows the correspondence theory of truth in philosophy. Truth, this theory has it, is that which corresponds to the 'facts'.

relation to a single case study), my analysis of Boorowa people's accounts centres upon their accuracy, or 'truth', on both these levels. However, in keeping with the constructivist standpoint adopted in this study, these accounts are neither more or less true in any absolute sense, but made up of more or less informed, or critical, constructions.

To ascertain whether or not Boorowa people's accounts were related to and congruent with their perceived actual practical experience, as opposed to a shared and uncritical common consciousness, I assessed these accounts' external validity. I did so by comparing them with other Boorowa people's accounts of their similar social situation, and experienced events, as well as my own observations of these. By using secondary sources, I was able, on occasion, to corroborate or question aspects of Boorowa people's shared accounts of historical events. Through these means, I could identify instances of 'external', or imposed, interpretations of their reality in their accounts, rather than those that result from their own direct observation and perceived experience. Of less relevance for my research purposes, but nonetheless reassuring in terms of its indication of the overall reliability of Boorowa people's accounts, was these accounts' high degree of internal validity. Although there were contradictions evident at times in their accounts, these were rarely related to their perceptions of their empirical reality. Rather, such inconsistencies arose in discussions to do with inherently conflictual common sense values, such as freedom and equality. For example, when I drew Mark's attention to the apparent discrepancy between his general support for individual moral responsibility and self-determination, and his conviction that people should be made to vote, he replied:

> It might seem like, it might sound like a conflict. But the point is, the government of, you know, of one's self, I think it's, is a great thing, you know. It's a, and if you don't want to express that, I just think you could fall foul, you know, later on down the track, with minorities telling the majority what to do. It probably happens now, you know what I mean. But at least we all think that, you know, we're contributing to society. And it might be just a, even a, you know, a mettle sort of thing. Anyway, you do think that you are contributing to society.

In analysing the critical quality, or 'emancipatory truth', of Boorowa people's accounts, I used as indicators Bauman's distinguishing criteria. Simply put, I asked of their accounts, Do they reify social reality, viewing it as natural and ahistorical? I then asked the related question, Are Boorowa people's accounts opposed to alternative forms of social reality? I was also, however, attentive to other possible critical qualities in their accounts, and common sense.

Representations

As noted earlier, there is a school of thought in social theory that holds that it is not the place of the social researcher to theorise beyond actors' accounts of their everyday activities. On this (radical constructivist) view, it is not possible to distinguish between actors' accounts and the reality they describe. Given that researcher and researched share the same methods and interpretive capacities, any representation should be consistent with actors' accounts. Whilst I do not subscribe to this view, for reasons outlined above and in the previous chapter, I believe that in the treatment of people's accounts, the researcher should be constantly aware of the political nature of this process. This awareness should in no way influence the nature of these representations. Nevertheless, I agree with O'Neill's (1995) argument that representations should, in principle, be translatable into the terms of actors' own accounts. Although this thesis does not necessarily meet these criteria, a report I write for Boorowa people based upon it will do so.

* * *

If one takes seriously the political character of the sociological project and its implications, then the study of ordinary people's common sense demands a certain type of methodology, as well as the use of qualitative research methods.

The necessary methodological approach requires a rigorous practice of reflexivity, and one that is at the same time more 'open' than that permitted by a strict, critical-theory informed stance. Imposing limits to the exercise of reflexivity is an essential component of the reflexive research project. However, I have argued that care needs to be taken in doing so to ensure that sites and practices of anti-hegemonic resistance do not go unrecognised and/or ignored (whether consciously *or* unconsciously). In conducting research on common sense, one must take account of people's perceived experience and the understandings and shared knowledge derived from their interpretations of this. This is not to deny the central role played by 'structure' in shaping the perceived experience, interpretation and associated knowledge of reality. Rather, it is to insist that the two are not essentially coterminous, and should not be treated as such. One cannot assume that people's common sense can be simply and unproblematically 'read' from 'structure' (or from the absence of alternative forms of structure).

My research draws primarily upon Boorowa people's accounts of their social reality and, in particular, their common sense understandings of the NSW government's proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services. The

analysis of these accounts is at one and the same time an attempt to discern their quality in terms of measures such as validity and reliability, and as a critical, political resource. This, however, is the stuff of the final two chapters of the thesis. In the next, I describe the above government proposal and the contestation it engendered.

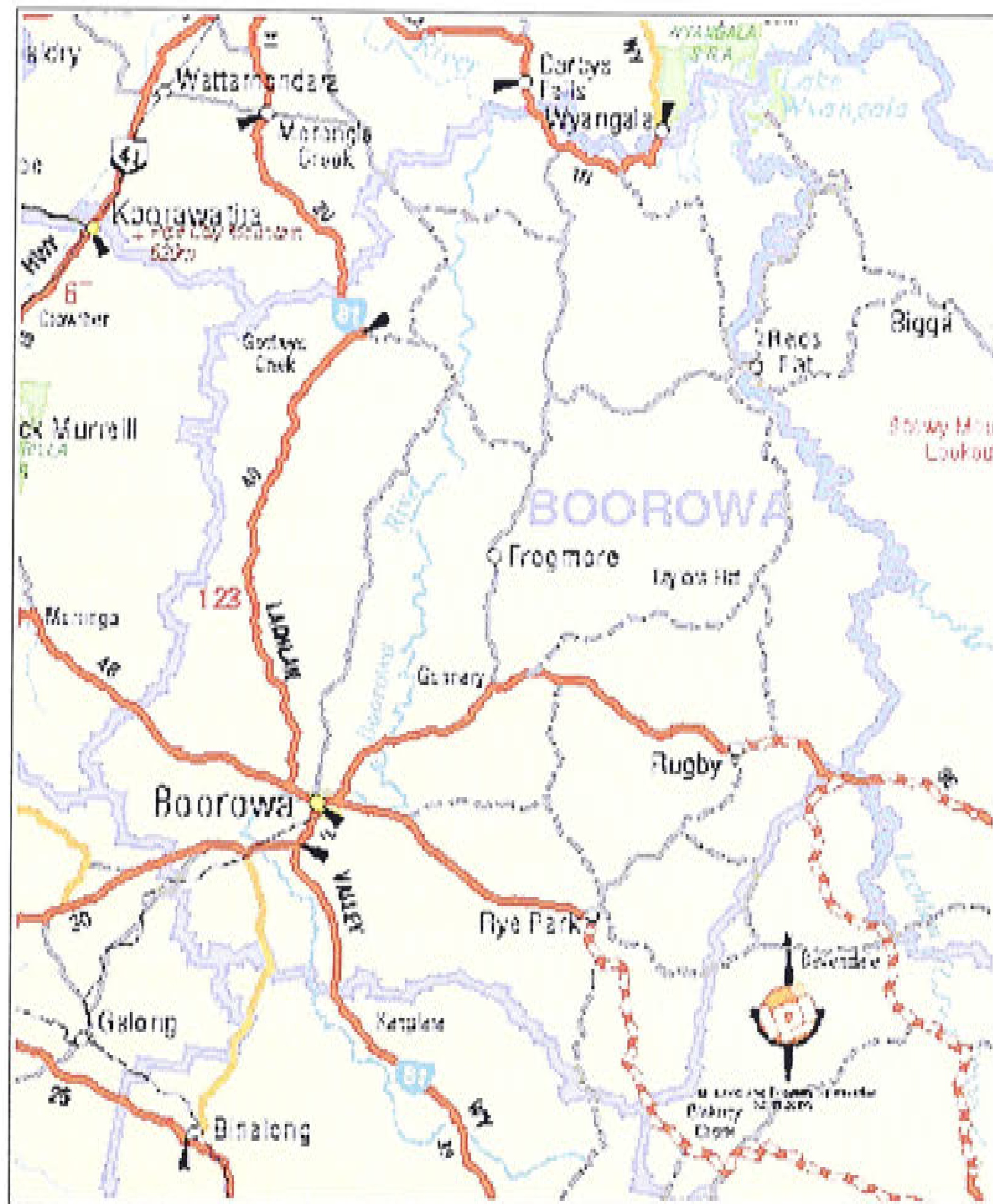
CHAPTER FOUR
THE PROPOSAL

In this chapter, I present a brief, chronological description of the dispute that arose over the New South Wales state government's proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services. This narrative largely serves the purpose of providing the context for an examination of the main empirical focus of the thesis in the chapters that follow, namely, Boorowa people's common sense conceptions of their socio-political reality, as evidenced in this instance of socio-political struggle. Specifically, the chapter introduces the proposal itself, but more generally it gives an indication of the nature of the wider environment in which Boorowa people exist, and of some of the socio-political forces to which they are subject. In short, it outlines a number of structures that influence, in ways we are soon to uncover, these people's thought and action.

Boorowa

A little under fifty kilometres north of Yass, and about a hundred kilometres north-west of Canberra, lies the town of Boorowa (formerly known as Old Burrowa Town - the name originally gazetted for the town in 1880), population approximately 1300 (see maps 1 and 2). Like Yass, Boorowa was settled shortly after the crossing of the Blue Mountains by Alexander Hamilton Hume and William Hovell. Boorowa does not, however, share that town's irreproachable pedigree, having been established by Irish insurrectionist ex-convicts (a point of pride, incidentally, for many Boorowa residents). Situated on the Boorowa River, the town is located in a shire which also shares its name. Boorowa Shire is itself composed of four villages - Rye Park, Frogmore, Rugby and Reid's Flat - that cover a total area of 259 square kilometres, and house a further 1220 or so people.[1] Much of this area (some 260,000 hectares) is devoted to agricultural activity and, in particular, the production of livestock. Billed by locals as 'the district where the ride on the sheep's back begins', Boorowa Shire is especially renowned for its production of merino wool, as well as numerous cattle, horse and sheep studs. The most famous of these is undoubtedly Merryville, which is reputedly Australia's number one fine wool stud.

[1] As at the 1996 census, 2,376 persons were recorded as living in Boorowa Shire.



Map 1. Boorowa Shire (Boorowa Shire Council. n.d.a.)

Map 2. 'Capital Country', showing Boorowa, top left hand corner (Wilkins Tourist Maps. n.d.).

A less bucolic, and certainly more infrequently remarked-upon, feature of Boorowa Shire is this district's 915 kilometres of roads, 176 kilometres of which are main roads, and therefore State-owned. In my earliest discussions with Boorowa people they would, on occasion, complain about the poor state of repair of many of the district's roads, some of which one resident described as "nearly impassable". The same respondent found this situation particularly galling in the light of the vast amounts of funding devoted to the building and maintenance of infrastructure east of the Blue Mountains in the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.[2] Nevertheless, in the months preceding the NSW state government's unheralded announcement of the competitive tendering of road maintenance services proposal, and especially the Boorowa Rally against this policy on 8 September 1999, the Shire's roads were hardly in the foreground of Boorowa people's consciousness. Instead, townsfolk were preoccupied with the perennial maladies of the wool and lamb industries, the imminent prospect of losing their sole remaining bank,[3] and the NSW State Government's seemingly inexorable commitment to local council amalgamations. This last issue, in particular, was to figure prominently in some Boorowa people's understandings of the competitive tendering proposal, after the plan was made public in the middle of 1999.

An anatomy of the dispute over the competitive tendering of NSW road services proposal: the Proposal

On Friday 28 May 1999, The Road Traffic Authority (RTA) of New South Wales (NSW) announced proposed changes to the contracting arrangements of maintenance and development works undertaken on NSW state roads and national highways.[4] Under

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[2] The Blue Mountains and the Great Dividing Range reckon in many Boorowa (and rural NSW) people's conceptualisations of rural and regional Australian disadvantage. Boorowa people feel that Sydney-based NSW Government decision-makers tend to forget and neglect those west of this divide; in their account, they are out of sight and, therefore, out of mind.

[3] At the time, the town also had two bank agencies, one of which operated out of the Boorowa Shire Council offices, and the other from the town's Great Southern Energy office. These agencies offered a limited range of services and no additional jobs, with office staff required to double as bank tellers. On 29 September 1999, the Westpac Bank sent a letter to all of its customers in Boorowa Shire, and to the Shire's Council Offices, informing them of its intention to close its Boorowa Branch and to open in its stead an in-store branch. Located in one of the town's shops, this branch would offer a reduced range of (face-to-face) services and entail the loss of a number of local jobs. Of the six staff presently employed in the bank, two were offered jobs at Westpac's branch in Young, some 40 kilometres north-west of Boorowa, whilst the remaining four were offered redundancies. Boorowa's mayor's immediate response to Westpac's decision was to call a community meeting on 5 October in the Boorowa Sports Club Hall. In addition to community members themselves, the meeting was attended by: a television crew from the nationally screened show, *A Current Affair*, local, state and federal politicians, representatives of Credit Care and the Bendigo Community Bank and a representative of the Westpac Bank itself. After this meeting, and a series of consultations, Boorowa people decided to reject Westpac's offer and to support the establishment of a branch of the Bendigo Community Bank in the town.

[4] A government audit evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of planning by the RTA for road maintenance in NSW was conducted before the proposal's release. This study found that the RTA's measuring and reporting of performance, in terms of road works completed and their quality, was insufficient. Although the RTA had adopted a strategic approach to road maintenance, linking its

the proposed strategy, more road services would progressively be put out to competitive tender, with local councils, the RTA and the private sector encouraged to bid for work undertaken on state roads. Informed by the principles of the NSW Government's Service Competition Policy,[5] the RTA's programme for the delivery of road maintenance services on State roads and National Highways aimed to improve the quality of maintenance work undertaken, encourage the development of enhanced work site safety and environmental standards by RTA and local council work crews and, most importantly, reduce the cost of maintenance expenditure so as to make available increased monies for further works on NSW roads.

For the purposes of the RTA Road Service Competition Strategy, the state of NSW was divided into three main regions, designated Far West, Rural and Metropolitan. The Far West region encompassed the area west of the Newell and Sturt Highways, whilst the Rural Area comprised the entire territory east of the Newell Highway - including the north and south coasts - with the exception of the Metropolitan Region, which was bounded by Raymond Terrace, Lithgow and Kiama. These three regions were themselves to be further subdivided into a number of 'contract zones', which would vary in size according to the nature of the road works - such as road widening, pavement rehabilitation, resealing and road marking - to be undertaken. Various sizing options for contract zones were presented in the RTA proposal, so as to better ensure the economic viability of contracts for tenderers (LGSA 1999: 6).

Under the competitive tendering proposal, the Far West Region was to be exempt from the competition strategy process. In this region, the RTA would instead implement more rigorous benchmarking of local council works on state roads, in an attempt to increase

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objectives to the Government's transport plan and its own plan for roads and the management of traffic, this did not extend to the formulation of plans and targets and regular monitoring of output and performance against these. The development of such plans and targets would have been made all the more difficult due to the inconsistency in the approach to data collection and analysis evident in different RTA regions across the state. At the time of the audit, only about 7 percent of road maintenance services was contracted out, with a majority of work undertaken by RTA 'in-house teams'. This, the audit concluded, led to a degree of "uncertainty as to whether the RTA [was] achieving maximum value from its maintenance expenditure" (Audit Office NSW 1999a: 2). The one area in which the audit found the RTA's planning and practices perhaps 'too efficient', was with respect to the assessment and management of environmental and heritage issues related to road maintenance works. In complying with *all* relevant environmental regulations, and approaching environmental and heritage issues on a case-by-case basis, the RTA might, the audit suggested, be reducing its overall effectiveness and efficiency (Audit Office NSW 1999a).

[5] This policy is itself derived from National Competition Policy. National Competition Policy is, in turn, based on the recommendations of the report of the National Competition Policy Review (better known as the Hilmer Report) of 1993. According to the Hilmer Report, competition policy aims to "improve the productivity and international competitiveness of [Australia's] firms and institutions" (1993: 1). This is to be achieved primarily through the withdrawal or minimisation of direct state involvement in, and contracting out of, service delivery.

local councils' competitiveness. Within the Rural Region of NSW (which included Boorowa Shire), a number of changes was proposed. Whilst the routine maintenance (such as potholing and heavy patching) of roads situated in local government boundaries was unaffected by the proposal, allowing for "appropriate emergency response" (LGSA 1999: 6),[6] more substantial road works like resurfacing and rehabilitation would progressively be market-tested, and opened for tender. Unlike the Metropolitan Region, in which progressive implementation of the competitive tendering strategy was not considered necessary, with all road maintenance, resurfacing and rehabilitation to be subject to market testing and competitive tendering from March 2000, the new arrangements were to be phased in in the Rural Region of NSW. Fifty percent of road resurfacing and rehabilitation work would be tendered from March 2000, and the remaining road works would be opened to tender from March 2001. Acknowledging the novelty of the proposed arrangements for councils due to their lack of experience in contracting procedures, and their potential difficulty in meeting the new, more rigorous, qualifying standards, the RTA would assist councils to improve their Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S), Environment, Quality and Industrial Systems. The RTA also pledged to supply councils with documentation outlining system pre-qualifying standards, and model contract documentation for guidance purposes.

The institutional response: the Shires and Local Government Associations and the the Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia, NSW Division (MEU)

With up to 19 percent of RTA work carried out by local government, and some $86.5 million of local government funding to be affected by the competitive tendering strategy (MEU 1999a: 1), representatives of NSW local councils (the Shires and Local Government Associations) and local government road maintenance workers (The Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia, NSW Division (MEU)) were justifiably concerned about the possible implications of the proposal. At the Shires' Association Annual Conference in early June 1999, Mr Carl Scully, Minister for Roads and Minister for Transport, further outlined the details of the proposal and was met with a cautious response. Whilst Shires' Association conference delegates welcomed the prospect of being able to compete for road maintenance work that was previously exclusive to the RTA (or at least stated that they did), they rejected the proposal that these construction works - and especially those in rural and regional NSW - should be subject to compulsory competitive tendering. Instead, they preferred, and proffered, a policy wherein the current contracting arrangements of works undertaken

[6] And, presumably, because routine maintenance work was deemed not sufficiently lucrative, thus financially viable, for tendering purposes.

on state roads would be retained, but augmented with a system of bench marking initiatives designed to identify cost savings and workplace reform opportunities. Following the conference, the Shires' Association and its companion organisation, the Local Government Association, wrote to the Minister to inform him of their opposition to the proposal along these lines. The MEU was far less equivocal in its response to the proposal.

In a letter to Mr Carl Scully MP dated 8 June 1999, the General Secretary of the MEU, Mr Brian Harris, expressed the union's concern that the competitive tender of RTA work, rather than providing councils with extra work, would most likely result in the loss to private contractors of much of the work currently undertaken by local councils, and with it a substantial number of jobs in local government. Further, Mr Harris noted the RTA's absence of notification and consultation with the MEU prior to the proposal's release, and pointed out that the proposal itself appeared to contravene an undertaking given to the MEU by the NSW Premier, Mr Bob Carr, before the last state election to not implement compulsory competitive tendering for local government work. On 21 June 1999, claiming to have received no response to his earlier correspondence, Mr Harris wrote to Mr Scully once again, reiterating the MEU's opposition to the competitive tendering of road services. In this missive, Mr Harris expressed the view that the information regarding the potential financial impact of the competitive tendering initiative on local government funding, provided by the RTA to the MEU after repeated requests, although limited, indicated that a number of councils could be seriously disadvantaged by the proposal, resulting in a direct loss of employment. He pointed out, moreover, that the MEU's fears for job security in metropolitan and regional NSW had been exacerbated by the proposal's coinciding with the introduction of the Local Government Reform Bill by the Minister for Local Government, Mr Harry Woods MP.[7] This Bill provided for the voluntary amalgamation of councils and, among other concerns, the MEU was worried that councils would use amalgamation as a means of "introducing or further implementing ... competitive tendering" (Harris 1999: 5). Given the apparent gravity of the MEU's concerns, Mr Brian Harris sought an "urgent meeting" with Mr Scully, the Minister for Local Government, Mr H. Woods, and the Premier of NSW, Mr Bob Carr, to discuss the potential impact of the competitive tendering proposal.

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[7] On 4 June 1999, Mr Woods wrote to NSW Councils outlining these legislative changes and inviting councils to prepare and submit joint proposals for voluntary amalgamation by 30 June 1999. Upon receipt of 8 initial proposals from 24 councils, the Minister deferred these councils' September 1999 elections until early 2000, to allow them to concentrate on fulfilling the requirements of the merger process. The proposals were considered by the NSW Boundaries Commission, which was charged with the task of assessing their viability.

Whilst attempting to establish contact with the relevant Ministers and Premier, and convince Mr Scully to abandon his proposal, the MEU engaged in an "information campaign" (MEU 1999a: 3) directed at members and local union delegates. MEU executive members attended regional council meetings and worked to garner support against the policy from employers, employees and other unions. On 28 July 1999, the MEU Consultative Committee, which was composed of delegates, executive members, branch secretaries and union officials, met in Sydney to co-ordinate a state-wide campaign against the proposal. This campaign was to include demonstrations in regional centres in the week commencing Monday 6 September 1999, followed by a rally at NSW Parliament House on Thursday 16 September 1999.

In the meantime, at a meeting conducted on Thursday 29 July 1999, the RTA's newly formed Local Government Liaison Committee was charged with overseeing the Road Service Competition Strategy for Local Government. This committee, in turn, formed the Local Government Competitive Tendering Working Party, which was made up of representatives from The Shires' Association, the Local Government Association, the Institute of Municipal Engineering Australia (NSW Division), the MEU, the Local Government Engineers' Association, the Institute of Municipal Management, and the RTA. The Local Government Competitive Tendering Working Party was to consult with, and assist, local government in the move to competitive tendering for maintenance on state roads. It would do so by ensuring the establishment and maintenance of appropriate communication processes between the RTA, Local Government and Unions, addressing issues related to contract pre-qualification, and ensuring equitable treatment for all parties affected by the implementation of competitive tendering.[8] To this end, the working party decided that the RTA should provide a series of seminars, scheduled from 26 August 1999 to 28 September 1999 at various locations across the state. At these seminars, the Local Government Competitive Tendering Working Party would inform councils of issues related to the introduction of competitive tendering for maintenance on state roads, and of the implications of this programme for councils themselves (LGSA 1999: 4-5).

On 8 September, 1999, MEU-organised rallies against compulsory competitive tendering for road maintenance services were held in the country NSW towns of

8 However, according to the MEU, RTA representatives conceded that the Authority had no brief from the Minister to conduct an analysis of the economic and regional development implications of the competitive tendering strategy, nor any immediate intention to examine the social welfare and equity considerations of the proposal. The RTA's concerns regarding the social impact of competitive tendering were, it believed, limited to ensuring that the pre-qualifying criteria related to issues like occupational health and safety would be applied to potential contractors.

Kyogle[9] and Boorowa. According to the MEU and LGSA, smaller rural councils such as Kyogle's and Boorowa's would be particularly disadvantaged by compulsory competitive tendering, with the policy leading to significant job losses and consequent deleterious social effects for the communities as a whole. As the President of the Shires Association of NSW, Mr Chris Vardon, saw it, the difficulties posed by the competitive tendering policy were insurmountable for country councils. Regardless of how efficient and competitive country councils might be, he maintained that they were "disadvantaged by their public sector status" (MEU 1999d: 1). Country councils are not "able to jeopardise ratepayers' funds by under-cutting on price. Nor do they have the financial or resourcing capacity of large contractors, which can take an initial loss to win a contract" (MEU 1999d: 1). Confronted with this situation, Mr Vardon argued, "it is patently unfair to expect some councils to compete against bigger contractors" (MEU 1999d: 1). Were country councils to compete for large contracts under these circumstances and lose, these organisations "may have no choice but to lay off staff and sell off equipment, thereby ruling out [their] chances of being competitive in future" (MEU 1999d: 1). Whilst he stressed that country councils are generally highly efficient organisations for their size, Mr Vardon went on to point out that "when you have a staff of 15 and a budget of less than $1 million, you aren't realistically going to win tenders over organisations with hundreds of staff and budgets in the tens of millions" (MEU 1999d: 1).[10]

In Boorowa's case, the MEU claimed that the Shire Council stood to lose approximately $1,042,000[11] in funds as a result of the competitive tendering proposal, a deficit which translated to "a loss of some 20 staff, with flow on effects of up to 70 positions in the community" (MEU 1999a: 2).[12] Boorowa's Mayor, Mr Robert Gledhill, similarly argued that the policy would lead to the immediate loss of jobs for the council's 13 road crew, and another 7 council employees, with a further 40 jobs going in the town itself (Gregory 1999: 2). In support of its demand for a social impact assessment of the proposal, the MEU emphasised that the figures it presented were only estimated, and that without such a study, "accurate information concerning the potential impact of competitive tendering on small communities will not [be] available" (MEU 1999a: 2).

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[9] Kyogle is located in the far north-east of NSW, approximately 30 kilometres south of the Queensland-NSW border.

[10] On Shires Association President, Mr Chris Varden's comments, see also (LGSA 1999: 6-10).

[11] Of a total $5,033,000 for the 1999 financial year (Information Australia 1999).

[12] The MEU expected Kyogle Council to be even harder hit by the proposal, with nearly $3,000,000 of its funding and between 25 and 30 positions directly affected, and a subsequent loss of up to 100 jobs anticipated throughout the wider community (MEU 1999a: 2; see also *The Northern Star* 1999: 2).

Following the Boorowa and Kyogle rallies, an MEU-organised demonstration was held outside NSW Parliament House on Thursday 16 September 1999. The next day, Mr Carl Scully MP announced the Inquiry into Road Maintenance and Competitive Road Maintenance Tendering, to be conducted by the Standing Committee on State Development and chaired by Mr Tony Kelly MLC, President of the Country Labor Parliamentary Group. The committee was provided with five terms of reference. These stipulations intended firstly to establish the effectiveness of road maintenance in New South Wales under the existing arrangements by means of a comparison with other jurisdictions' policy and practice. They then anticipated an assessment of the impact of the implementation of competitive tendering in terms of overall cost savings and quality of road maintenance, and the degree to which the initiative fostered the participation of Roads and Traffic Authority road services and Local Government in competitively tendered road maintenance work (Scully 1999a).

The focus of the debate then shifted to the interrogation of these terms of reference. Both the MEU and LGSA expressed dissatisfaction at the perceived limited nature of their scope. These bodies argued that the committee's five terms of reference were restricted solely to economic considerations, with no terms specifically related to the potential social impacts of the proposed legislation. Partly in response to these protestations, Mr Tony Kelly MLC wrote to Mr Scully to request clarification of the scope of reference of the Standing Committee on State Development's study. In particular, he wanted to determine whether or not the terms of reference would "cover the social impact of Federal cuts to road funding in NSW and future changes to the delivery of road maintenance of the cost of road maintenance" (Kelly 1999: 4-5).[13] On 22 September 1999, Mr Scully responded to his colleague's query, insisting that the existing terms of reference were, indeed, of sufficiently wide scope to cover an assessment of social impacts, "should the committee choose to pursue this line of inquiry" (Scully 1999a: 10).

In the meantime, it was business as usual for the RTA, as it pressed on with its brief of implementing the policy. Having consulted with RTA staff and unions and the various Associations represented on the Local Government Competitive Tendering Working Party, the RTA formulated a preferred position regarding contract sizing and packaging associated with the competitive tendering programme for maintenance and development

[13] According to Mr D. J. Gay, the NSW Labor Government's references to Federal cuts to road funding in NSW contained in the Standing Committee's terms of reference were simply a "red-herring". In the NSW Parliament on 13 October 1999, he accused the Labor Government of attempting to shift attention from its own patently contentious competitive tendering proposal by insinuating that such measures were necessary due to Federal road funding cuts (Legislative Council 1999: 10).

works on State Roads and National Highways. Although this paper was a substantial enlargement of the original proposal, providing in most categories of competitive tendering works packages a number of possible options, it met with considerable criticism both from the MEU and LGSA. From the MEU's perspective, the document was of concern because, whilst subject to further consultation and not endorsed by the Minister, Mr Carl Scully, it nevertheless anticipated "the mass contracting out of local government road services" (MEU 1999b: 2), an outcome to which the MEU was fundamentally opposed. The LGSA's more conservative, or pragmatic, evaluation resembled closely its stance adopted at the Shires' Association Annual Conference earlier in the year. Whilst once again emphasising that it was "keen to maximise the opportunity to win contracts under a competitive tendering structure" (LGSA 1999: 10), the LGSA argued that the options outlined in the RTA's preferred position would render Local Government incapable of competing for contracts under a competitive tendering structure, largely due to the financial and geographical scale of the contracts, and the attendant logistical difficulties associated with preparing for and servicing these contracts. Given the size of the contracts and the relatively limited resources of many country councils, they reasoned that councils would be obliged to form consortia to tender for proposed contracts.[14] Forming and sustaining consortia, with their requisite mutually operating systems and co-operative arrangements, would be exceedingly difficult. Country councils in particular would be likely to struggle to meet their obligations as members of consortia in terms of the transportation of workers and equipment to roadwork sites, and possibly reluctant to commit limited resources where there was a high risk that contracts may not be won. Such apprehensions are perfectly reasonable, in the LGSA's view, considering that were councils to commit to, and miss out on, contracts of the size being proposed by the RTA, the loss of work entailed could lead to idle workforces, machinery and equipment and, ultimately, forced redundancies. The LGSA was also dissatisfied with the timeframe allowed in the RTA's schedule. It argued that insufficient time had been allocated for councils to complete prequalification courses and establish systems to tender for projects under competitive tendering arrangements before the implementation period's commencement from March 2000.

The LGSA's own preferred option for contract sizing and packaging, developed in response to the RTA's proposal and outlined in a submission to the Minister, was to expand the number of contracts throughout the state and/or divide the reduced number

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[14] This is seen by some members of the MEU to be one of the main purposes of the policy. In their view, the competitive tendering policy is intended by the NSW Government to serve as a 'Trojan Horse' for 'voluntary' local council amalgamations (MEU 1999b: 2; Kruse, B. 1999: pers. comm., 20 September 1999).

of RTA contracts into separate, geographically based, component projects. In this way, the LGSA argued, it would be possible both to improve councils' ability to effectively participate in the tender process, and to ensure that councils were able to compete for work in their own areas, thereby retaining local knowledge and expertise for routine repairs and larger projects. Neither did this smaller scale option, as the LGSA saw it, preclude other competitors, including council collectives, tendering for contracts or components thereof. The concentration of road works into discrete, geographically-based packages which include state roads and councils' local road networks was, it claimed, attractive to all potential tenderers, because this method of packaging reduces the costs associated with traveling between a number of wide-spread road work sites. The LGSA was also at pains to point out in its submission that, in many respects, the current road maintenance arrangements were indeed competitive, and to warn that their alteration could lead to a lack of co-ordination and resultant loss of efficiencies.

Whereas the LGSA persevered with its more conciliatory approach, the MEU continued to insist that the NSW Labor Government adhere to the principles of its own competition policy. At the NSW ALP State Conference of 2 October 1999, Mr Scully further incurred the ire of the MEU through his rejection of a call to expand the Standing Committee on State Development's terms of reference to compel an examination of the social impacts of the competitive tendering of road maintenance policy. In answer to this request, Mr Scully reiterated his opinion (outlined earlier in a letter to Mr Kelly on 22 September 1999) that the existing terms of reference required no amendment because they already allowed the chairperson of the committee, Mr Tony Kelly, to consider social issues related to the policy. Mr Scully also repudiated the request for a moratorium to be placed on the policy's implementation until such an assessment had taken place, insisting that without the realisation of some form of competitive tendering, the committee would have nothing to report on in terms of its social impact. On 6 October, the President of the Shires' Association of NSW, Mr Chris Vardon, joined the MEU in demanding that a moratorium be placed on the competitive tendering of road services in NSW until the social implications of such a policy had been addressed by the Parliamentary Inquiry. Once again, Mr Vardon expressed the view that because of their public sector status, no matter how effective and competitive country councils are in undertaking road works projects, they would be unable to compete with the larger contractors to be admitted through the compulsory competitive tendering proposal.

By early-October 1999, Mr Scully, under mounting pressure from a number of sources, including his own cabinet colleagues, appeared to have wavered in his resolve not to

widen the Standing Committee on State Development's terms of reference.[15] On 12 October, he wrote to Mr Tony Kelly to outline the contents of the motion passed at the NSW ALP State Conference, which asked that a number of social issues be considered as part of the committee's inquiry.[16] He went on to inform Mr Kelly that he believed that these issues were indeed relevant for the committee to "receive submissions on within the existing terms of reference of the inquiry" (Scully 1999: 5). The following day, the compulsory competitive tendering proposal was debated in the NSW State Parliament, in response to a motion in three parts presented to the House by Mr D. J. Gay. Mr Gay's motion requested that: the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on the social impact of compulsory competitive tendering; the Government impose a moratorium on the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for country roads until the Standing Committee on State Development had reported to the house; and, the Committee report by Thursday 25 November 1999. Responding to the first part of the motion, Mr Kelly informed Mr Gay and the remainder of the assembled House that, following the ALP State Conference, he had received the above-mentioned letter from Mr Scully, and with it, instructions to consider social issues in the Committee's terms of reference. The debate then turned to a discussion of the seeming need to locate competition policy in general, and competitive tendering in particular, in the broader social context. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans, Reverend F. J. Nile and Ms L. Rhiannon each stressed, in turn, the need to take into account the flow-on effects of legislation, balancing immediate and short-term economic efficiencies against the possible long-term inefficiencies associated with these policies. Both Dr Chesterfield-Evans and Ms Rhiannon argued that when a broader, or 'whole-of-government', approach is brought to bear on policy development, the competitive tendering of road maintenance services in rural areas represents a false economy. The money that is likely to be saved on road repairs by the RTA must then be spent on the infrastructure required to sustain dislocated workers - and, when country towns collapse, other community members - elsewhere, including that of NSW's already over-taxed cities. In effect, the large corporations that are liable to win road maintenance contracts will privatise the profits, and the losses will be socialised. Moreover, Dr Chesterfield-Evans and Ms Rhiannon maintained that it was also necessary to consider the personal and social hardship associated with the 'body hire' practices of big road maintenance contractors. The itinerant workers employed by these companies are, they claimed, frequently

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[15] At least this is the way it is perceived by Mr D. J.Gay in the parliamentary session of 13 October 1999.
[16] These included: the impact upon occupational health and safety; community service obligations; industrial relations, including the impact upon rates of pay, conditions of employment, equal employment opportunity, together with the effects upon job security and unemployment; the impact upon rural and regional employment including the maintenance of local government as a strong and independent public employment sector; economic and regional development; and, the effect upon skill development and training (Scully 1999a: 2).

deprived of the basic safeguards and conditions won over decades by trades' union. Whereas Dr Chesterfield-Evans and Ms Rhiannon advocated the increased use of social impact assessments in the formulation of social policy, Reverend F. T. Nile preferred a more narrowly focused form of institutional assessment. Reverend Nile's apprehensions regarding the competitive tendering of road maintenance services proposal centred on the disruption to family life and the family structure in general which are likely to be caused by road workers' loss of employment. He used the debate as an opportunity to promote the Christian Democratic Party's Family Impact Commission Bill, under which a commission would operate on an on-going basis to assess the social and economic impact of policies on families that the Christian Democrats see as the fundamental 'building block' of society. By the end of the debate, the first two elements of the motion were carried by unanimous agreement. The third (that the Committee should report to the house by Thursday 25 November 1999), following Mr Gay's own suggestion, was deleted to ensure that adequate consideration would be given to the potential social and economic impacts of the policy. Before the parliamentary session concluded, Mr Kelly assured the House that the standing committee intended to visit a number of country towns over a considerable period of time, and to continue to receive and consider submissions from unions and country councils.

Although it was satisfied with the expansion of the terms of the inquiry, the MEU remained concerned that despite its extensive campaign and the NSW Parliament's passing the second part of Mr Gay's motion, which requested that the Government place a moratorium on the introduction of competitive tendering until the Standing Committee on State Development had reported to the House, Mr Scully still refused to accede to this request. Mr Scully's argument remained that the only way to measure the social and economic effect of competitive tendering was through the implementation of the policy. Faced with Mr Scully's sustained intransigence, the MEU, whilst continuing to meet with Mr Scully and the RTA throughout October to press the need for a moratorium, began to plan, in consultation with the MEU RTA CT Consultative Committee, an industrial campaign calculated to force the Minister's hand. As it happened, though, strike action by MEU members and council workers was rendered unnecessary.

In a media release on Tuesday 30 November 1999, Carl Scully MP, Minister for Transport and Minister for Roads, announced that, having reviewed the proposal in the light of consultations with the RTA, Country Labor, local councils and unions, he would not be introducing the competitive tendering of State road maintenance in NSW. Instead, local councils and RTA road crews would continue to carry out State road maintenance, but according to a new system of benchmark standards to be instituted by

the RTA from 1 July 2000. He envisaged that these benchmark standards would establish "greater accountability for all aspects of roadwork carried out by local councils" (Scully 1999a: 2), ensuring a high quality of work, cost savings for taxpayers which would be reinvested in the State road network, and the protection of the jobs of road workers.

Mr Scully's decision was welcomed in a flurry of media releases from NSW Parliamentarians, country mayors and the MEU. The MEU "applauded" (MEU 1999c: 2) the government's decision, congratulating Mr Scully and the NSW Premier, Mr Bob Carr, for listening to the concerns of rural and regional communities. Mr Tony Kelly MLC, President of the Country Labor Parliamentary Group and Chair of the Standing Committee on State Development charged with evaluating the now abandoned policy, also embraced the announcement, on behalf of Country Labor. The decision, he felt, demonstrated the key role played by Country Labor in conveying the concerns of rural and regional communities, and the Carr Government's "commitment to improving the quality of the State's road infrastructure whilst at the same time protecting jobs and maintaining the socio-economic vibrancy of country NSW" (Kelly 1999: 2). The Mayor of Kyogle, Mr Ross Brown, was less effusive in his endorsement of Mr Scully's announcement. He described it as "a sensible but inevitable retreat from an offshoot of National Competition Policy" (Brown 1999: 5). In his view, having recognised the weight of opinion against competitive tendering, and resultant political risk, Mr Scully had been looking for a compromise acceptable to himself and local government. He found this concession in Local Government's own preference for the benchmarking of services provided by the RTA and Local Government as a means to reduce the cost of road maintenance - a proposal similar to that outlined by the LGSA at the Shires' Association Annual Conference in June. In a joint press release with Greens MLC, Ms Lee Rhiannon and the Mayor of Armidale, Mr Richard Torbay MLA - fellow architects of an intense lobbying campaign against the proposal - however, Mr Brown was a little more magnanimous. In this statement, he congratulated Mr Scully on his decision and expressed the willingness of local councils to co-operate in the development and implementation of the new benchmarking policy. Perhaps the final word in this summary of the dispute over the NSW government's competitive tendering proposal should go to Lismore's Mayor, Mr Bob Gates. He, quite simply, commended the decision as "a victory for common sense" (*The Northern Star* 1999: 2).

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The proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services is but part of the NSW Labor government's more general commitment to free market principles where it comes to the provision of government services. The general framework in which the government balances people's needs and demands is, then, strictly utilitarian. One of the main roles of government is seen as that of enhancing, wherever possible, the efficiency of service provision and of reducing costs for the average taxpayer. Boorowa people's wider socio-political milieu is thus characterised by its insistent demand for economic efficiency on behalf of individualised taxpayers. For those parties involved in the dispute, as described above, the proposal and its implications were understood in relative abstraction. This was not so for Boorowa people, whose reading of and response to the proposal was qualitatively different as a result. It is Boorowa people's common sense understandings of the proposal and its socio-political context, and the relationship of these understandings to their expressions of moral autonomy - their action - that are the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE
BOOROWA PEOPLE, COMMON SENSE AND PRACTICAL POLITICS

In the previous chapter, I presented a largely procedural and institutional account of the NSW government's proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services. In this chapter, the focus is shifted to the ways in which Boorowa people themselves understood the proposal, and the form of action that this made possible. The broad aim of this largely descriptive, ethnographic account is to address the underlying question of how these people perceive the nature of their socio-political reality more generally, and how this, in turn, relates to their conception and exercise of moral autonomy. This is a significant question, given the tendency of social and political thinkers to either assume or read through decontextualising survey research or to solely focus on people's actions how rural people think, or do not think, as the case may be, about their worlds.

More specifically, though, I seek in this chapter to consider the critical quality of Boorowa people's common sense, in relation to their understanding of the proposal, and the first of the two measures outlined in Chapter Three. I aim to establish whether or not, and the degree to which, Boorowa people's common sense correlates with their perceptions of their practical experience. At the same time, I hope to tease out some of the complexities of Boorowa people's thought and action, and especially those aspects that impact upon their moral autonomy. In doing so, I will in this account establish a basis from which to problematise, in the following chapter, predominant characterisations of both common sense and rural peoples, as exemplified in critical theory.

Boorowa people, jobs, business and survival

Boorowa Shire residents are, on the whole, friendly and relaxed people. Upon hearing of the NSW government's competitive tendering proposal, and throughout the latter half of 1999 before the dispute over the proposal had reached its denouement, however, their easy-going nature was to be sorely tested. With a few exceptions, Boorowa people were vehemently opposed to the competitive tendering of road maintenance services policy. As they saw it, the implementation of such a plan would inevitably result in Boorowa Shire Council's road workers losing their jobs. Typical of Boorowa people's early assessment of the proposal is the town butcher's retort:

> These bloody politicians, they say they're going to do this and do that, even Bob Carr, you know, bringing competitive tendering into the bush, you know. And that would, that'd stuff this place. We've got about thirty blokes on the council, and they'll bloody lose, all lose their jobs! And we don't want that, that's what keeps us going.

Jobs, especially those that are government-funded and relatively permanent (such as positions with the Boorowa Hospital and Boorowa and Districts Shire Council) - rather than the seasonal or casual employment like shearing or crutching provided by local farmers - are seen as crucial to the on-going survival of the town.[1] These posts are a source of regular and comparatively guaranteed income for the town, bringing a much-needed injection of money to locally owned-and-run businesses. Such economic considerations are of significant concern to Boorowa people. They are acutely aware of the need to sustain local businesses, and generally treat shopping locally as a community member's duty:

> Well I think if you live in a community, you have a right to make sure - well, you don't only have a right, it's up to you to make sure you put the best you can towards the community. My friends and I go over to Young to the dentist, I could shop over there, couldn't I? I don't. I come back and shop here, because this town, if we don't use our own town, it'll die, won't it? It'll sort of, you know, fizzle down the drain. We don't want this happening. That's me, living in this town, it's up to me to see that nothing happens to this town. And if I do it, and if everybody else does it, this town will keep going.

The responsibility to shop locally is, however, difficult, and becoming increasingly onerous. The goods required or desired by Boorowa residents may not be supplied in the town and, as the above respondent indicates, given that many essential services are only available in regional centres such as Young or Canberra, it would be easy - and in most cases cheaper - for them to 'kill two birds with one stone' and do the shopping whilst undertaking these other tasks.[2]

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing indicate that, in terms of numbers of people employed, the top five industries in the shire are Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (453), Health and Community Services (67), Education (63), Government Administration and Defence (59) and Retail Trade (58). These figures are, perhaps, a little deceptive, in that they record 'employed persons' without discriminating as to whether or not this is paid employment. Some farmers can no longer afford to employ contractors and are instead increasing their own workloads and calling upon family members for assistance. The only manufacturing industry of any note in the shire is Stonehaven Furniture, which employs up to half a dozen young locals as apprentices.

[2] This point was made by a representative of Credit Care who spoke at the Boorowa community bank meeting on 5 October 1999 in relation to the Westpac Bank's decision to close its Boorowa branch and open instead an in-store branch: "And, of course, you all know, when you travel out of town to bank you just don't bank out of town, you shop out of town. You buy your petrol, you buy your papers. And I can't emphasise enough, the dollar you spend up the road at Young, Young gets the benefit of it. The dollar you spend in Boorowa turns over four times, six times in Boorowa. And it's so important to trap the

What with the general downturn in the rural sector, retail shops struggling to remain solvent or closing, and most local children already obliged to leave the town and shire in order to find work,[3] Boorowa people maintained that they could not afford to lose further community members who supported the town's remaining businesses simply as a result of ill-considered government cutbacks and economising. The proposal would, they felt, constitute yet another 'nail in the town's coffin', without its effect on the community having been adequately considered. Boorowa people were under no illusions in this regard. For them, the town's long-term survival itself was at stake.[4]

An affective response: the experience of community

The above representation of Boorowa people's understandings of the competitive tendering proposal and their concerns arising from this is, of course, a partial account. This description reflects neither the nature nor depth of their comprehension or sense of disquiet. Whilst NSW State Government funding for Boorowa Shire Council is seen as central to the economic survival of the town, the financial aspects of the policy rarely figured in Boorowa people's discussions of the proposal and its potential impacts. Many Boorowa people were not aware of or particularly interested in the financial figures involved, such as the amount of council funding at stake, and quoted by MEU officials at the town's rally against the proposal. For them, it was enough to know that Boorowa road workers' jobs were at risk, and that their families' pasts and futures - which are, as

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money here in Boorowa, and stop it from travelling out of your town". What Boorowa people found particularly annoying about Westpac's decision - besides, of course, the loss of local jobs and likely repercussions for local businesses - was that this decision did not reflect the loyalty shown to this institution by the Boorowa community over the last 80 or so years - especially given that the bank was still realising a healthy profit from this branch. Boorowa's Mayor, Councilor Robert Gledhill, spoke to the Westpac manager, after the branch's closure was first announced: "I asked, how come you're closing a business which is employing six people, is it running at a loss?' And I was told, 'No. The Boorowa branch of Westpac Bank is running at a profit'. Now how many people, with any common sense, shut down a business that's running at a profit? There's only one reason. Pure greed. Nothing else".

[3] This is a perpetual malady, common to many rural and regional Australian towns (see Bowman 1981).

[4] References to survival, death and dying abound in Boorowa peoples' discussions of the RTA proposal, and in its portrayal. These notions furnished the key symbolic theme of the town's rally and protest against the NSW Government's plan. At this event a grim reaper - the competitive tendering proposal personified - striking in black cloak and hood, marched along with a procession of protesters carrying MEU-issued placards bearing suitably pithy messages like, 'Reject Scully's Attack on Shire Road Workers', 'Save OUR Shire Jobs', 'Say NO to R.T.A. Road Contracts' and 'Our Shire town NEEDS Council Workers'. Neither was there any mistaking the victim of the proposal, or its perpetrators. 'Father Time' led a lamb wearing a vest emblazoned 'rural community', as to the slaughter, and carried a scythe whose paint-bloodied blade read 'Carr' and 'Scully' - respectively, the Premier of NSW and the Minister for Roads and Transport. The death and decline of rural communities was further epitomised through a graveyard-like display assembled on the flat-bottomed tray of a semi-trailer truck. The centerpiece of the display was a large sign exhorting rally goers and townsfolk, 'DONT LET COMPETITIVE TENDERING CRIPPLE YOUR TOWN'. This sign was flanked by mounds of soil and mock coffins, labelled, 'RIP Hospital', 'RIP Schools', 'RIP Homes', 'RIP Livelyhood' (sic) and, 'RIP Boorowa'. Upon reaching the Boorowa Shire Council Offices, the 'cemetery float' doubled as a platform from which the day's speakers addressed the crowd.

they see it, indivisible from that of the community - were under threat. The competitive tendering proposal was understood in largely "personalised" and "socialised" terms, with people's perceptions of their practical experience, and especially that of community, accorded primacy in its interpretation.

Whilst most Boorowa people possessed only a rudimentary understanding of the facts related to the dispute, some, due to their affiliations with the Boorowa Shire Council or the MEU, were privy to more information than others. In his capacity as Works' Supervisor at the Boorowa Shire Council, and Secretary of the MEU's NSW Southern Branch, for instance, Neville Mudford was aware that the NSW Minister for Local Government, Mr Harry Woods, had attempted to push through legislation which would eliminate the twenty-eight day public consultation period before local councils' merger proposals are submitted to the Boundaries Commission for assessment. As a result, Neville was inclined to regard the NSW government's stated commitment to voluntary local council amalgamations as largely rhetoric. The competitive tendering proposal would, he felt, be used by government to render small councils such as Boorowa's inefficient, and thereby force them into amalgamations. Boorowa Shire Council's General Manager, Barry Greaves, also (unwittingly) alluded to a possible synchronicity between the council amalgamations and competitive tendering of NSW road services policies in our discussions earlier in the year, and several months before the announcement of the competitive tendering proposal. He maintained that if council amalgamations were on the NSW government's agenda, they had "ways and means" of forcing the issue. Despite their 'connections', however, Barry and Neville were also operating with limited information. Both the MEU and the LGSA (which is responsible for keeping local councils such as Boorowa Shire's up to date) were, it seems, kept in the dark regarding many aspects of the government's proposal, and obliged to play catch-up throughout the course of the dispute.

Bounded rationality, experts and practical experience

To begin with, the NSW State Government did not consult with either the LGSA or the MEU prior to its announcement of the proposal. Much to its chagrin, the MEU first heard about the state government initiative to put local government road services to tender through a press release obtained from one of its delegates. At the Boorowa rally against the proposal several months later, Mr Ben Kruse, Legal and Special Projects Officer with the MEU, claimed that the government had still not proffered - or, indeed, produced - any formal documentation related to the proposal. When he attempted to obtain from the RTA written details of the options for the contracting out of road works being canvassed as part of its consultation process, Ben was told by a director in the

RTA's Change Management Division that the only information that had been committed to print and might be made publicly available consisted of a number of overhead projector sheets. The MEU was, he maintained, obliged to invoke the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* in order to force the government to release further - but nevertheless, still limited - information regarding the proposal.[5] Moreover, as noted earlier, partly in support of its claim for the need for a social impact study of the competitive tendering of NSW road maintenance services policy, the MEU freely acknowledged that without such a social impact study, neither itself nor the government had a clear idea as to what the social impact of the policy might be.

In any case, regardless of their improved access to albeit limited information, Neville and Barry, along with the remainder of the Boorowa community, privileged their perceived practical experience as a basis for, and means of, conceptualising the proposal. Unlike MEU officials, Boorowa people did not feel bereft of information; they neither expressed a desire nor felt a need for further details regarding the policy. It might be argued that this was simply because they were content to delegate to the relevant experts - politicians who also opposed the proposal and MEU officials - the task of representing road worker's and, indirectly, their own interests. To an extent, this was the case. Nevertheless, these details were largely incidental to their resistance and, although they were indeed obliged to rely on experts, through their adherence to their own particular means of understanding the issue, Boorowa people were guarded in their alliance with expertise. Boorowa people were confident that they possessed sufficient understanding through perceived experience to evaluate the proposal itself and to gauge its implications - in their own terms and with reference to their own specific "common places" (Billig 1996), chief of which was community. They knew that the proposal was, in terms of the consideration of people and their needs, including the requirement for some degree of autonomy, rather than just a rational utilitarian calculus, wrong.

Boorowa people and common sense pragmatism

Boorowa Shire residents are pragmatic, down-to-earth people, and pride themselves on these qualities. In speaking and associating with Boorowa people, and with rural Australians more generally, one of the first things one notices is the importance of common sense as a guiding pragmatic principle of life, in a mundane, day-to-day sense.

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[5] The information that the MEU *had* obtained prior to the Boorowa Rally on 8 September 1999 was made available in the MEU publication *Competitive Tendering of Road Services: the impact of State Government Policy on Local Councils and Communities?* MEU-prepared materials, including a pamphlet which detailed 'the facts' related to the competitive tendering proposal, a summary of the plan's likely implications for road workers and communities, the substance of Local Councils', the MEU's and the Shires Association's opposition to the plan, and means of assisting these organisations to block the proposal, were also distributed at the Boorowa Rally.

Common sense is a much used and prized means of apprehending and dealing with everyday reality, practically. One need not resort to bush mythology, or romanticised records of a pioneering Australian past, for example, to witness the oft-cited utilitarian approach to fixing farm machinery with a piece of fencing wire - or whatever else comes to hand - in order to save money, or simply to get the job done. However, common sense is - in this sense - hardly confined to 'the man or the woman on the land', or, indeed, to rural populations. Common sense pragmatism is employed to a greater or lesser degree and, no doubt, with varying levels of success, throughout Australia as a whole. In fact, this mode of reasoning is - *at this level* - so admired and valued as to be "virtually sacral" (1988: 139) in Australia, according to Bruce Kapferer.

Upon further, deeper discussion with Boorowa people, however, one begins to recognise more clearly the dialectic between common sense as a body of knowledge taken as relatively self-evident by the community, and as a universal capacity for rational judgment. Common sense's moral and political qualities, expressed through its intentional universality, become apparent. It is these qualities that comprised the touchstone for and structured Boorowa people's resistance to the proposal. Because common sense is (theoretically, at least) available to all, an 'ought' principle emerges; common sense should, for Boorowa people, be exercised in the apprehension of, and in dealings with, reality. Certain things should be done in certain ways. According to their common sense reasoning, the experts and politicians involved in the formulation of the proposal should understand that whilst the tendering of road maintenance and development services makes sense - is, perhaps, perfectly logical and rational - in their own, limited, professional realm, and even for certain more densely populated, metropolitan areas in which tenderers are able to compete on reasonably equal terms, outside of this restricted setting, wider common sense rationality, which takes account of people, tradition and community *must* prevail.[6]

The competitive tendering proposal - a common sense assessment

In keeping with their common sense pragmatism, Boorowa people did not delude themselves with respect to the economic viability of the competitive tendering proposal. All of the people with whom I spoke were aware that the competitive tendering of road services 'makes economic sense' - in the short-term, at least: "I mean, I know just as well as anybody they could probably fix that road out there cheaply by getting some big consortium in. It's obvious, it's really obvious, and everybody knows that". Similarly, they were under no illusions regarding the town's inability to compete for, and win,

[6] Pragmatic economism may be practical common sense, but critical, wider common sense insists that one cannot simply elaborate economic concerns as also moral concerns. Money is *not* for Boorowa people the measure of moral value.

contracts in its own right under the proposed competitive tendering arrangements. A Boorowa resident who was born and raised in the town, and whose husband probably stood to lose his job as a result of the competitive tendering policy, told me of her concerns along these lines in the month preceding the Boorowa rally: "We're worried about competitive tendering. So bigger, bigger towns, you know, tender, and we, being a smaller town, can't tender, can't put in as much tendering. So that's going to be a real problem, because of the competition".

Boorowa people were equally cognizant of what the probable personal and social consequences of such a policy would be. Boorowa's road workers are relatively unskilled (according to the requirements of post-industrial/information society) and, having either been born in Boorowa or lived there for a majority of their lives, not likely to find work outside this milieu. Boorowa Shire Council's road workers were themselves all too aware of their industrial vulnerability. One told me, "I don't want to lose my job. It's only my missus is working - well, my wife - working. And I think it's a bit hard at the age I am, I'm forty two. If this come in ten years ago, twenty, fifteen years ago, maybe I could have got another job. I'm getting to that age, now, they reckon you're over the hill when you're forty, so, I'm forty two. Well, it's all I know". Where Boorowa's road workers were understandably concerned largely with their own futures and those of their families, other community members were able to assess, from their slightly more detached vantage points, the potential ramifications of the proposal for the Boorowa community as a whole. These people's evaluations were based upon their intimate knowledge of the workers concerned, gleaned through shared personal histories which extend, in some cases, their entire lives:

> Those guys are bloody, you know, under threat. Their livelihood's under threat. If you've driven the council truck for twenty years and you've done your job, and you've done your job well, all of a sudden they say, "Oh, sorry mate, piss off", they can hand you a bit of money and say, "Alright mate, here's your payout", what the hell are you going to do with your life? Those guys have no other skills. You can say, "Oh, here you go, Geoff, here's a hundred grand" and, like a lot of guys might cope well with that. But, I'll tell you for a fact, there's a lot of guys that will not cope well with that. And it'll reflect in their family lives, in their community lives and the livelihood of the whole community, thereafter. There's a percentage, and it'll be bad, I feel. I really feel that. Because I know all these guys, mate. I know them all. There'd be domestic violence, alcohol abuse, all those things will flare up. We don't need that in this little town. It's fucking hard enough without that. This is what the men in Sydney have to look at, the whole of the social fabric, the cost in humanitarian terms instead of just money, you know.

As Boorowa people see it, in order to truly comprehend and evaluate the extent and gravity of the loss to the workers themselves and the community as a whole should the competitive tendering proposal be implemented, it is necessary to know the workers - to be acquainted with their circumstances and those of their families, and to have some appreciation of the nature and workings of the Boorowa community. Without exception, Boorowa people emphasised the importance of community to their material and ontological well-being, and how it stood to be damaged as a result of the introduction of competitive tendering.

The dichotomy of community support

With such a small population and limited number and range of government-provided and/or funded services, Boorowa people recognise that they need all play a part in the day-to-day functioning of the community - if it is to possess any real, meaningful existence, or 'life', that is:

> Without the community support, Boorowa really is just nothing. We run, within our own community, we run our aged care, they run all the sporting facilities, we have ballet, we have music, we have swimming clubs. But without everyone in the community pulling their weight, it doesn't happen. It really is a very community-based town and area, Boorowa and shire.

In addition to an array of service and sporting clubs, the Boorowa community sustains a number of annual events, one of which is, predictably, sporting. At the Boorowa Showground on the third Saturday in May each year, the town runs a Football and Netball Carnival, which attracts about ninety netball and sixty football teams from the region. Like many Australian country towns, Boorowa stages an agricultural show. In Boorowa's case, this event is scheduled for the first weekend in March, shortly before the Sydney Royal Easter Show. As such, it is considered by locals to be a testing ground for the district's exhibitors of stud sheep, cattle and horses, with Boorowa Show winners frequently being further honoured at the larger and more prestigious exhibition. The Boorowa Show also features the usual craft, needlework, knitting, cooking, preserves, horticulture and vegetable displays, and is described as the 'shop window' of the Boorowa District. Besides the above events, Boorowa holds a Picnic Races on the first Saturday in May and a Woolfest on the October long weekend.[7] As its title implies, this exhibition is a celebration of the sheep and wool industries, and highlights their essential contribution to the town and district. Through their membership of various committees and auxiliaries, Boorowa people organise each of the above proceedings.

[7] The Woolfest has subsequently been renamed. It is now (as from 2002) called the Irish Woolfest, in recognition of the town's principally Irish heritage.

Perhaps more importantly, though, they assist on a day-to-day basis with the community's health and aged care facilities, the operation of both of the shire's schools, and run the district's bushfire brigade, which is also responsible for primary rescue in the event of road accidents, which are quite frequent in the district.

Almost all Boorowa people contribute to the community in some way or another. Where they are unable to volunteer their services to a particular group or event (usually due to their numerous other community commitments, and/or the efforts required to keep local businesses afloat), they will often chip in with financial donations: "If people can't work, they'll give you something. It's marvellous". Boorowa people's commitment to the community is, they will assure you, nowhere more evident than in times of crisis. They are particularly proud of their willingness to pull together in pursuit of a common goal and under conditions of adversity, and the results they can accomplish when they do so. When the town's old hospital burned down some four years ago, for example, Boorowa people, through a concerted effort, raised sufficient funds to exact a pledge from the NSW Government to replace this facility. Through their continued hard work, moreover, the Boorowa community went on to furnish the new hospital using funds raised in the town. Boorowa people are able to relate many similar illustrations of community camaraderie, and point to their tangible results. As a result, they value highly the contribution made by the shire's road workers and their families to the community in a hands-on sense, and felt keenly the prospect of their loss to the town and district:

> Anything that sort of impacts on losing jobs is bad news to the small country areas. I mean you've got rationalisation of farms and stuff like that, less people in the farming, in the rural areas, which then impacts on how many volunteers you've got to run the rural fire service, which impacts on schools, you know, have we got enough kids to sort of keep the school open. And, basically, it's a decaying of the social fabric in those small or outer-lying areas, because the people aren't there to support it. So that's, that difficulty is facing this community, as well as many others, too.

Whilst Boorowa people appreciate the assistance given to the community as a whole by its members when times are tough, they equally esteem the community's support for themselves, its constituents, in times of individual crisis. As they see it, "We've got that tight-knit support, you know, in town, if something goes wrong". A shire resident relates just such an instance of personal crisis and community support:

> Anytime something goes wrong, everybody pitches in. My sister was killed here in a car accident and before I could even get my mind around what had even happened, there was enough food to feed an army, you know, just arrives. Half the time you don't even know who brings anything, you know. It's just there. It's ... and no-one expects any thanks or anything. It's taken and it's left, you know. It's great.

Indeed, community aid is seen as compensating for the apparent widespread experience of rural disadvantage:

> Another thing about country people is, in general, they have a lower income, and perhaps a lower standard of living. But they can survive on that because of this much stronger community commitment that exists, that enables you to survive. So, even though you've got less, in a lot of ways, you've got more. So it offsets it, really, the lesser money you have, the financial disadvantages are offset by it.

As the above respondent intimates, the experience of community is one respect in which Boorowa people perceive a difference between themselves and city folk. The principal of Boorowa Central School here describes in greater detail - and emblematic fashion - the nature of the distinction as they see it between city and country living:

> You have a community relationship and you have neighbours on a wider scale, here. In a town this size, you basically know most of the people in the town, whereas in the city you might know two or three immediate families around. You don't have, I think, that strong thing, the bond, as much as what you do in the country. And when something does happen, you find that the majority of the town gather around and are supportive of people in difficulty, where in the city, unless it's their immediate neighbours or family, you don't have that supportive atmosphere. You do, you do through your agencies, but it's not the critical family support that you have in the country.

Support, for Boorowa people, comes from a community association in which people know and are known by each other. Boorowa people value this aspect of community, seeing it as important not just in terms of the material support that is close at hand should they require it, but also in the less tangible sense of providing for their ontological security. As important as physical assistance, and just as frequently stressed by Boorowa people, is their experience of community as stability and belonging. David, a sheep grazier and farmer, summarises this feeling:

> There's a lot of people in Australia that have, they've come from somewhere else to where they are now. And I guess that's a world-wide trend, you know, because of transport, it's so easy to get around, and communications. A lot of people move from where they started out. But I think it is a very important thing, it's a real stabilising thing in people's lives, to be really connected to a community. I really think that's a very important thing with human relations, really. You know, like in a community like Boorowa, everyone knows everyone. I think I'd know, I wouldn't know all of them, but I'd know most of them ... I'd know most people, and most people would know me, I reckon.

Neither is this last claim an idle one. Boorowa people do indeed know most of their fellow community members. Stephen, one of the road workers with whom I spoke at the town's rally against the competitive tendering proposal assured me (as did many other Boorowa people), "I could tell you the whole street. I can tell you the whole town!" Moreover, due to their small population and the fact that they occupy a settlement within a fixed and relatively bounded local territory, Boorowa people feel that they have quite a clear apprehension of their fellows: "Here, you work and live together as well, in a small community. So, you obviously get to know each other at a deeper level, I guess". Because of this sense of intimacy, Boorowa people's perceived experience of community support is regarded as qualitatively different to that which is typically available in the city, and furnished through city-based, bureaucratically organised institutions. The support provided by the community is seen as more personalised; it is attentive to people's idiosyncrasies and 'real' needs. A prerequisite for this type and degree of support is, of course, the sacrifice of one's anonymity, and a responsibility to support fellow community members in kind. Boorowa people recognise that being a part of the community entails limited privacy, but this is accepted (at least by the people to whom I spoke) as a necessary concomitant of community life. To forfeit some of one's privacy is considered a reasonable and worthwhile trade-off in the light of the benefits realised:

> While I know that some people sort of say that small communities everybody knows everybody else's business, and all that sort of stuff, there's no privacy, well, I suppose that's true up to a certain point. But, then again, I would sort of state that that's probably more supportive of each other, you know. Because if you're in Sydney, or a bigger place like that, and you haven't got a very good and wide circle of friends, you know, you can sort of slip through the cracks in the boards, so to speak. Whereas, if here, people will look after each other, or look out for each other, you know. If Mrs So-and-So doesn't front up to get her milk at a certain time of the day,

> you sort of think, "Well, I wonder where she is, or what's happened to her?" and they'll go check it out.[8]

Being known is a requirement for the provision of substantive support. Likewise, being a knower, one is able and expected to be judicious in one's support - to exercise discretion and not be too intrusive. Boorowa people are obliged to sacrifice their time and efforts in support of the community, and are acutely aware of this as being a moral responsibility, as well as a practical necessity:

> There's not many people so you all have to pull your weight. You all have to take your turn at the school cleaning and community service organisations, and everybody's got to do their bit, there's no escaping, because everybody knows if you don't do it.

> Well, I think when you live in a small country town, you've probably got an obligation to be on, you've always, to be on a certain number of committees. And I think most people in country towns feel they've got an obligation, and they do it willingly.

The perceived experience of community, and moral autonomy

To qualify for social membership of the Boorowa community in any meaningful sense, people are expected to participate in and contribute to this collective. As Sue puts it, "I think you'd find that being involved is something that's just essential in any small community. You can't live in a community unless you become involved". Without people's participation, they recognise, the community would, quite simply (and logically), cease to exist. Although these conditions might seem arduous to community members at times (not to mention outsiders), they are not considered tyrannical. This is both because playing a part in the community is viewed as necessary for the town's survival, and derived from and respectful of their own, shared cultural traditions. Indeed, these conditions are themselves part of local tradition and the community's way of life and, because of its respect for people as human, the community is considered worthy of commitment. Participation is, moreover, regarded as both a prerequisite and legitimate demand of those who would seek to have a say in how the community is to be run. Sue went on to say, "You can't be running around criticising how the town's going to operate unless you have an impact on how things are going". Boorowa people are especially tough-minded - and terse - where this requirement is concerned, frequently making comments along these lines: "It's no good whingeing about the state of things if you don't try and do anything about it, you know". Furthermore, when

[8] In conversation, Boorowa people frequently slip between usage of the first, second and third person; in this instance using the third person to talk about the first person. Boorowa people's community relationship is such that the "I" or "you" is largely indivisible from "they".

criticism is forthcoming, it is anticipated that this will be constructive, rather than simply 'knocking', or fault-finding.

Boorowa people's sense of responsibility centres, for the most part, upon their community and on what they can do in an immediate, practical sense to assist its members. In this, as in so many other aspects of their thinking, understandings of practical experience and everyday life are accorded a preeminent status. When I spoke with Boorowa people about citizenship (and its more narrowly-defined responsibilities), for example, it soon became evident that this status is considered relevant only inasmuch as it has some tangible grounding in their lifeworlds. Without exception, the people with whom I spoke were aware of the meaning and implications of citizenship in its legal-political guise. Citizenship, they know, entails membership of a political community and, with it, an associated bundle of rights and, more importantly, obligations. They are conscious of their responsibilities to pay taxes, perform jury duty (if and when required), vote, obey the laws of the land (generally speaking) and ultimately, if necessary, defend the political integrity of the community with their lives, among other commitments. However, the above description was never furnished directly in response to my question, "What is citizenship?" This objective information was elicited only after these people had established in their own minds what citizenship *really* means, how it is actually understood. Certainly, citizenship is, for them, membership of a political community. Furthermore, this membership is dependent upon, and defined by, community involvement. Citizenship is, therefore, understood as an inherently social category. One is a member of the community *through* one's active participation in that community, which, being social, is only really - that is, practically - possible in a local, face-to-face setting and by means of hands-on involvement.

Thus, it is, in the first instance, one's immediate community of more or less shared perceptions of experience and face-to-face interactions, along with its local customs and mores, that serves as a mediating institution for wider, 'imagined' (Anderson 1983) community awareness and participation. Indeed, without encouragement, some Boorowa people found it difficult, even pointless, to conceive of citizenship outside their community and its practices:

> Citizenship is being responsible and contributing in a community.

> Community-mindedness. Citizenship means, it means the welfare you have for your fellow citizens. It means ... that's about it, I suppose.

> Citizenship? Well, taking an active interest in your, in the community, and the welfare of your fellow beings. Citizenship is to be involved and help out wherever you can, to the best of your ability, for your fellow man.

Alternatively, they were inclined to simply conflate the two:

> As a national citizen, or citizenship of a community? Probably both the same, anyway ...

When speaking of their responsibilities in a more general sense, Boorowa people conceptually confined these in a similar manner, for two main reasons. Firstly, as already noted, they feel that they exert little meaningful - that is, practical - influence outside this realm, beyond the 'thin' (and unsatisfactory) minimal requirement of following rules. Secondly, on the whole, Boorowa people adopt something of a grassroots approach to the exercise of moral responsibility. They operate on the understanding that if everybody else does something to assist their fellows, and especially those in need, 'the other' (including the physical environment) will be catered for:

> I'm not really concerned with what government does for a person. Usually, I just think what I can do for that person. So it's mostly the community here. I'm only interested in what I can do here, what I can help with this town, here. My influence stops there. As long as I'm doing something. If everybody else does the same thing in this world, we'd be a lot better off, wouldn't we?

> My contribution to the Australian community might only come in taxes and obeying their laws. I can't pack up and go and save this, or, but I think I contribute, yes. I think your responsibilities, broken down, like you have your responsibility to the country, and then, which you do, that comes back down to the community basis.

> Well, I think if you're good to your local community, you know what I mean, it's a social flow-on effect, if everybody does the right thing. Of course you have responsibilities to the nation as a whole, and probably decisions. When you vote at the national level, that's your input, you know.

As noted above, Boorowa people express a deal of deference for tradition and 'the rules'. Bud explained this attitude with reference to his past work experience: "I was a horse trainer and a jockey, and you had to play by the rules. If you didn't play by the rules, you'd get suspended or disqualified, you know. And if you've got no respect for the rules, you know, you lose them". Respect must, however, be earned. Where rules are felt to be capricious and/or inattentive to people's (changing) needs, they are deemed

better off lost. Several Boorowa people told me of instances in which they felt obliged either to disregard or maintain a pretence of abiding by certain pieces of NSW state government legislation. However, they typically dislike circumventing 'the rules', and resent those regulations that "make good people dishonest". Their preference is for clear but general rules that are within the comprehension of the average person, do not interfere unduly with the exercise of their daily activities, and are sensitive to the nuance of the situation and its context. Hence, rules are actively grounded in Boorowa people's perceived everyday experience, and narrative; they are interpreted through their conceptions of their mundane experience and *made ordinary*.

Following the rules does not, for Boorowa people, exhaust or negate their own individual moral responsibility. They recognise that rules largely serve the purpose of accountability and feel that they are certainly not an adequate guide for morally responsible conduct. Indeed, the proliferation of rules and regulations associated with rationalising processes is viewed by them as increasingly impeding people's willingness and ability to exercise moral responsibility. Responsibility requires judgement and choice, but it also, they insist, demands a (greater) measure of individual autonomy:

> I feel if you conform pretty well with society, you know what I mean, that it should leave you alone. I think we're being over-regulated, this is even through work practices, whatever, government interference. I know everyone comes back and says, "Oh well, it's like occupational health and safety. We need a safe working environment". But you can go too far, you know what I mean? People have to, people have to have responsibilities for their own actions, and I just think these days that we're trying to blame everybody else. Like, if I go get drunk in a club in Canberra and fall over, wrestle the bouncer out the front, and whatever, and I get locked up, it's not because they've served me too much alcohol, it's because I've wanted the alcohol, and I deserve what the law measures out. Now that's the way it should be, cut and dried. But everybody wants to blame somebody else these days. I get drunk, have a car accident, I'm suing the poor man behind the bar.

As significant as 'pulling one's weight' is for Boorowa people, equally important in a practical sense is the necessity to participate in the day-to-day life of the community in order to become a competent 'knower' of the community, and 'known' by its other members. Whilst one's participation in the community need not be directly political, in the sense that it makes no claims for rights and/or services, and does not necessarily contribute to their provision and/or support, this is deemed relatively unimportant. This is not to say that questions of economic viability and the survival of the town are not of importance and concern to Boorowa people. Clearly they are. However, what appears to

be most important is that one should be involved. Through involvement in community activities - regardless of how seemingly apolitical, inane, even feckless these may appear - one demonstrates a commitment to the community in a more or less practical sense; but, what is more relevant, one inevitably becomes a knower of, and known by, the community.

Boorowa people's commitment to the community is not unqualified. They recognise that the community is not 'natural', in the sense that it demands of them certain sacrifices not required of many of their city cousins, not least of which is the inculcation of community values and responsibility: "I was always brought up to be prepared to help people, you know. You live within the community and as, you know, being part of the community you can't just take, you've got to give as well. So, whereas, I've never struck that in the cities, though". Nevertheless, Boorowa people fulfill their responsibilities to the community willingly, not only because they see their own future and well-being as tied to that of the community - they could, after all, choose to live elsewhere and, in some cases, benefit financially as a result - but also because they respect what they see as the quality of the community relationship. The community is considered worthy of commitment due to its recognition of and respect for people "as human":

> I think you have a responsibility to the community at large for those who are involved in different voluntary organisations - the bush fire brigade and all the other groups that see that everybody is a human being. I believe that that is a genuine community responsibility. And, I think people in the country know that better, and are members of these organisations because, well, just because they're there, and you don't have the government funding ... we don't have the services that are offered in the city.

Not only is their community and commitment to this body central to Boorowa people's understandings of the competitive tendering proposal and its potential impacts, but also to their common sense conception and expression of moral autonomy. Moral autonomy is not, for them, realised through absolute sovereignty. Rather, it is achieved through making spaces, where necessary, for the exercise of moral responsibility, and questioning in the light of perceived experience those rules and regulations that they encounter or with which they are presented. Moral autonomy for them entails a relational self: one that acts and is acted upon, knows and is known. Such a self and form of moral autonomy is, they believe, one of the principal benefits of membership of and participation in a small, face-to-face community. Community enables and demands, to a greater or lesser degree, this particular form of moral autonomy.

The question of Boorowa people's common sense notion of moral autonomy is an important one, and one with some relevance for the discussions in the following chapter. For it is this particular 'internalised structure' that perhaps most profoundly influences the scope and nature of their political action - what they see as possible and legitimate to change, and what they do not. In the next section, I continue to elaborate the nature of Boorowa people's perceived experience of community. The focus, however, shifts to the relationship between various other aspects of this complex cultural and historical understanding and the 'political' thought and action of Boorowa people.

The perceived experience of community

As I observed earlier, Boorowa people particularly value their community for its treatment of people 'as human'. A similar, but this time, normative, assessment is brought to bear on their evaluation of the competitive tendering proposal. They hold that Boorowa's road workers must be seen not as "numbers", but instead as community members and human beings with certain basic needs. Indeed, it is in this sense that Boorowa people feel that themselves and many of their city cousins understand issues differently. It might be argued that this point has been overstated somewhat by Boorowa people, especially given their privileging of common sense and its intentional universality, which contends that based upon our shared human nature and relatively uniform natural world, we share a general baseline for human interaction. However, in Boorowa people's view, it is not merely a matter of perspective, according to which city people are not aware that the compulsory tendering of road services threatens to drain the lifeblood of country towns such as their own. For them, some people *cannot* understand the Boorowa community and thus, what stands to be undermined through such ill-conceived legislation:

> They [the instigators of the competitive tendering proposal] don't understand the social fabric of the community here. They've never been here, and if they have, they've driven through and they're on their way to something else. You have to live here, you have to experience it, you have to know what this situation is, what it has to offer, the way it operates. You can't sit in the bloody office in the city and count beans. It doesn't work like that.

For Boorowa people, the community *must* be experienced - not only because they privilege knowledge derived from practical, lived experience as an authoritative mode of knowing, but also due to the difficulty they encounter in attempting to explain the community to outsiders. Boorowa people are certainly able to describe the basic functions of the community, and are at times eloquent, even poetic, in explaining its

perceived importance. Beyond a certain point, though, the complexity of the community's social organisation and the depth of its significance elude their expression. Anthony Cohen identifies such a phenomenon in his examination of the ethnography of locality, which he defines as "an account of how people experience and express their difference from others, and of how their sense of difference becomes incorporated into and informs the nature of their social organisation and process" (1982: 2). The consciousness and valuing of distinctiveness is, Cohen argues, especially prevalent among peripheral communities. Where community members feel marginalised due to their economic and/or political dependency, this often results in a sense of resentment, and view of themselves as "misunderstood, powerless, misrepresented, exploited, ignored or patronised" (Cohen 1982: 6-7). In such contexts, communities tend to devalue the dominant culture of behaviour at the expense of their own perceived distinctiveness. This distinctiveness is communicated through complicated messages to its members and cultivated through the regulation of social behaviour in accordance with its principles. The locality's distinctiveness need not, however, be visible or intelligible to the outsider (Cohen 1982: 7). When presenting itself to the outside world, the community under threat "simplifies its message and its character down to the barest of essentials" (Cohen 1982: 8), or, in other words, ideological statements. As a result, the message articulated by "the politician, the bureaucrat, the journalist ... is frequently experienced by the members of the community as a misrepresentation, for they find the composition of their collectivity inexpressibly complex" (Cohen 1982: 8).

When Boorowa people refer to the "fabric" of the community, they are certainly making an ideological statement intended to encapsulate its constitution. Yet it is also a declaration of the community's complexity, for elements of this tightly structured cultural milieu such as friendship and the membership of certain community groups are seen as "inextricably related" (1982: 8). Boorowa people do not, therefore, "cognitively disentangle them into discrete systems of ideas" (1982: 8). Neither can Boorowa people's emotional attachment to the community, "that strong thing, the bond", be adequately expressed in precise, formal terms. Indeed, the inexpressible attachment and commitment to community is, one Boorowa resident feels, "beyond bloody, probably beyond politics ... the depth of feeling that you'll find in some of those people here today [the Boorowa rally against the competitive tendering proposal] will be beyond any sort of, type of, politics you want to put your name on. It's grounded more in community and, you know, way of life". This same person was obliged to resort to another ideological statement to describe this feeling and its importance - namely, 'mateship':

> I think what summed it up for me was there was a documentary on the ABC[9] not long ago about the Burma railway. And one of the interviewed people on that said that if you didn't have a mate, you were history, you died, you'd cease to exist, you know. And I think that's what it's all about, really. That's what rural communities are like, you know. People have to support each other, otherwise there's too much to be lost. People who don't have this communal aspect to their, you know, it sustains everybody, I think. And it's the thread, it's the common thread that binds a little town like Boorowa. And there's many, many, many diverse aspects that do that, as far as I'm concerned, you know. You can watch, you can watch the fabric of a little town like this, you know, and if we lose a valued community member, the whole community feels the grief, you know. If there's a success by a certain sports person, the whole community's elated, you know. It's just like everybody is so interrelated in a small town.

Competing discourses - local versus expert knowledge

Boorowa people recognise that they are unable to compete with the logic of economic rationalism. This doctrine makes sense in its own terms and typically garners support due to its dominance in the wider, political environment and socio-cultural milieu. They are equally aware that their vulnerability stems in large part from their own inability to reduce or translate their community into precise, formal language, or empirical terms. Their arguments must instead remain largely confined to the emotional, symbolic level. And at this level, they maintain, "It's just over the top of all those big boy's heads. It's just over their heads. We've got no voice at all". Whereas experts such as the MEU's Legal and Special Projects Officer, Ben Kruse, can speak authoritatively on their behalf through reference to 'the facts of the matter' and employing legal and political discourse, Boorowa people restrict themselves to their own perceived experience - to what they 'know' but cannot, frustratingly at times, express. Even if they were able to articulate their understanding of community, however, they are aware that this would not be in the terms required by and gain little credence from those economists, bureaucrats and politicians to whom they disparagingly refer as 'bean counters'.

Most Boorowa people retain what they see as a distinctive concept of efficiency. For them, efficiency cannot be detached from and, indeed, must value and prioritise the perceived experience and needs of people and community. In his speech at the Boorowa Rally, Neville Mudford, Boorowa Shire Council's Work's Manager stressed that councils are not against change *per se*, and pointed to Boorowa Council's own willingness to accept and adapt to the demands of bench marking and world's best practice standards that have gradually been introduced by the RTA as evidence of this. However, he insisted that councils *are* against "change for change's sake", or change in

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[9] The Australian Broadcasting Commission.

the pursuit of narrow, short-term "political agenda". This is what competitive tendering to him represents, since it does not account for the needs of the Boorowa community, the improved efficiency of council road workers under RTA restructuring,[10] or the local knowledge and practical skills of these workers. Whereas outsiders viewing the increased size of his roadwork gang argue that this represents inefficiency, in our conversations Neville reasoned otherwise:

> Like, a lot of people say we aren't efficient, but we've actually ... oh, we've probably got a slightly increased staff at the moment, but with the new regulations you've now got on you through Workcover and everything else, where you've got to have traffic control on everything, and more signage and work safety, and all this type of thing, it's actually increased employment a little bit. Some people are taking the other attitude of using stop, portable traffic lights, and all those types of things. I see them as a bit of an anti-social situation on roads. I've been lucky with the council that they go along with me, they actually employ young people that probably wouldn't get a job in a lot of other areas, but they actually allow me to employ them on traffic control and mundane jobs that a lot of other people don't want to do. So it gives them employment, so that's important. It's one of the things, like a lot of things, a lot of people want to go down this track where you chop, chop, chop for efficiency. But we're efficient, doing what we're actually doing.

Being a pragmatic, down-to-earth person, Neville respects the skills and experience shared by the road workers under his supervision. Drawing upon the observations of RTA experts for validation in his Boorowa rally speech, whilst simultaneously downplaying his own perceptions, Neville maintained, "Building roads is an art. These are not my words but those of senior engineers in the RTA". Road construction cannot be mastered through reading a book, he insisted, but must be learned through practice, "To learn to build a road, you have to build a road". It is simply not efficient, in Neville's reckoning, to waste local knowledge, expertise and commitment through the institution of the competitive tendering policy. Boorowa's road workers are familiar with the shire's terrain and roads. As a result, they know which roads are prone to flooding, where the accident trouble spots lie, which roads are generally dangerous, and for what reasons. This is useful knowledge in the event of a road accident that might require the rescue by locals of a vehicle's driver or passengers. Besides their knowledge of the shire's roads, Boorowa road workers are familiar with sites from which various

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[10] At the Sydney Rally on 16 September 1999, Neville pointed out that although the RTA had accused local councils as a whole of inefficiency through over-expenditure, this organisation had not identified any of the allegedly offending councils, or provided data to substantiate this claim. He went on to charge the RTA itself with inefficiency. Having spent millions of dollars on implementing an effective decentralised road maintenance system and training council staff, he argued, the RTA was now planning to waste this investment by opening the system to contractors over whom it could exercise little control.

resources for road building and maintenance (such as gravels, crushed rock and topsoil) are and may be obtained. This enables the council to reduce costs, and allows for the quick repair of potentially hazardous potholes or road verges. Not only do Boorowa road workers possess local knowledge and experience that outside contractors are unlikely to be interested in, or able to accumulate, but they are also dedicated to providing a service to the community. In Neville's and other Boorowa people's view, contractors exhibit no such loyalties. Instead, their commitment is to making a profit for themselves and similarly disinterested shareholders.

In defence of community: becoming politically active

Boorowa people prize the comparatively calm and co-operative nature of country life. This existence, as they see it, contrasts favourably with the more hectic and competitive character of city life. Furner, who is something of an institution in the town, says "It's a different way of life ... we're pretty easy going. But the city feller's a bit different to what he is, a different way of life. You know, it's hustle and bustle and every man for himself, never hardly know your neighbour". Whilst they are, to be sure, on the whole, easy going, Boorowa people are quick to emphasise that their typically tranquil demeanor should not be (mis)interpreted as being due to political unsophistication, or lack of knowledge of their own interests. Defending his own and his fellow's seeming political lethargy, Peter, Boorowa Hotel's Manager asserts, "They all know what they want and what they need, you know. As far as their political views, and all that sort of thing, they've got them. They know what they're ... they're not stupid in any way, but they're a lot laid-back, they don't, they'll only speak up and push for what they want when they have to do it. And they don't get on their soap-box all the time".[11] The competitive tendering proposal is, for most Boorowa people, just such an instance; it demands their attention and activity.

Were it not for the strength of their feelings, the emotive gut-response to the competitive tendering proposal as an attack on the community's material conditions, and knowledge of its consequences, Boorowa people recognise that they are not overly politically inclined. Like many other Boorowa people, Marty observed:

> I'm probably a person who doesn't say a lot as a rule, and I do a lot more listening than talking. But bloody, things like this, you know. I know all these people, and I know, you know, the sort of people they are. And I know that they do their job, and they take pride in their work, these guys. And bloody, if their jobs were to go, it would really have a very profound effect, directly and indirectly. Anything that sort of sows the seed that may be derogatory in any sense or other,

[11] See comment, footnote 8.

> you know, I sort of burn up about that, and I don't like it. Because it's so easy to do damage, and it's so hard to create good, or it's so hard to advance a little community like this, but it's easy to do damage.

In the modern political economy, whose logic deems locality an 'anathema' (Cohen 1982: 7), Marty and his fellows are compelled to defend their community more and more frequently, and aware of this. Mark, who owns and runs by himself a small service station near the outskirts of the town, says:

> We're becoming more political because of our circumstances. Once upon a time I'd say, yes, when things were rolling along alright, I didn't, I was like everybody else, I just went along and said, "Oh", I'd see things through the paper, and I'd say, "Oh, Jesus Christ, you mongrel!" But, you had a dollar in your pocket, things were rolling along alright, and as long as that was occurring, you didn't, you didn't care, you know. Now things are affecting you, you know, health, whatever, schools. So, you've got to look more closer at everything which is occurring now, because they're taking away certain rights that we've expected for years.

Nature, marginalisation and determinism

Boorowa people are not laid-back simply due to their environmental circumstances, as part of a conscious life-style choice (or, as I later argue, through the prevalence and dominance of a community ideology and associated non-politics ethic). There is an element of determinism - or what they regard as realism - in Boorowa people's world view, and in their assessment of recent socio-political developments which affect them. This derives both from the perceived historical experience of marginalisation and an awareness of their reliance upon nature. As many Boorowa people see it:

> In the country you're totally tied to the weather for your livelihood, and then, you know, you've got the other thing of, you know, market prices, you haven't got much control over them. So you, you learn to accept things when they're tough, you just have to buckle down and get on with it, you know. And you're pretty much independent. You know, there's not too many hand-outs out here.

Much of the shire's income derives from agricultural industry.[12] In the absence of any major manufacturing enterprises or a substantial tourist income, the town and district

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[12] At a net of $9 million per annum, agriculture is Boorowa Shire's most lucrative form of industry. The shire's second largest means of income is the retail industry at $7.7 million, followed by tourism at $4.0 million and manufacturing industry at $3.6 million (ABS 1999). (As mentioned earlier, the shire council was allocated just over $5 million for the 1999 financial year, making it the third highest overall source of income for the town and shire (Information Australia 1999).

are especially vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the commodities market and nature, and aware of this.[13] Moreover, given that Boorowa Shire's fortunes still hinge largely on the now ailing wool industry, their overall financial situation and viability is all the more dire.[14] Farmers in the district (and, indirectly, the Boorowa town as a whole) are also reliant upon favourable weather conditions to ensure their livelihood:

> You know, most of our economy, I suppose, in an area like this, still we're mainly on the sheep's back. Sheep's a seasonal sort of thing. If, you know, if you don't get a decent rain at the right time, you haven't got any feed; if you get too much, you end up with footrot, all that sort of thing.

Those farmers who are able - mostly those whose properties lie on the western side of Boorowa township, as the eastern side is only suited to grazing - now subsidise their dwindling wool income through cropping. And, of course, they are dependent upon sufficient rains at the right time of year for these largely wheat and canola crops as well.[15]

Boorowa people rely, too, upon the largesse of government for the provision and retention of essential services, which are frequently not forthcoming. This obvious

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[13] The Mayor and Council are attempting to attract, using various incentives, outside businesses to set up in the shire.

[14] Boorowa farmers' plight worsened with the changes to the lamb export industry that unfolded in early 1999. Here is one farmer's explanation of these changes, which illustrates the sense of inevitability that is, at times, associated with their dealings with the market:

> Yes, the global village, it's biting a bit, isn't it, really. You know, you get, you see we produce some, we're basically merino wool producers, but we also produce some fat lambs, prime lambs you're meant to call them now. You're not meant to call them fat lambs - politically incorrect - sends the wrong signals to 'the healthy society'. But, yes, so you know what's happening now, we're being, we had this beautiful export lamb market in the US, all of a sudden, a few weeks ago, or months ago, US lamb producers decided that we're impacting on their industry. So they go to the US Senate, and the Senate says, "yes, we find that import sale is affecting the lamb industry", and they haven't done it, but I'll bet you they will do it, they're going to put a bloody great subsidy on all of, you know, quotas, import quotas, on New Zealand and Australian export lambs, in the US. And they'll decimate the export, well, the export market sort of tends to underpin the local market, and if the export market gets a kick in the guts, well, you know, it'll make it, it'll really sort of turn things around for the land job.

[15] To compound their woes still further, many farmers have to grapple with the multifarious problems caused by 150 years of European farming practices, chief of which is land degradation. Although Landcare is well-established and supported in the area, with many farmers helping to clean the Boorowa River, planting trees to reduce soil erosion and working hard to eradicate weeds and rabbits from their properties, they are at the same time caught in a 'cost-price squeeze' and pushed to make more money from these same properties. Farmers have had to run more stock in order to realise a profit, or simply to meet expenses and many have, in the process, caused possibly irreparable damage to native vegetation and increased soil erosion as a result. Moreover, many who *do* want to make good the damage done on their properties are unable to raise sufficient funds to meet halfway the government requirement for Landcare projects.

reliance has resulted in "a fair bit of despondency" in the town of late, with many people like *Boorowa News*' editor, Derrick, complaining that:

> Boorowa people have, other people are making decisions that, for our future, which we don't have any control over at all. You feel powerless, really, to do anything. It's very frustrating. You know, I think people could survive better if they had an opportunity to make more of their own decisions on what affects them, you know. Now we're almost being told that, you know, to save money and to make the books look better, we're better off doing away with a lot of services. That's the strange part of it.

Boorowa people's sense of marginality and helplessness generates feelings of distinctiveness (Cohen 1982). One of these is the perception of a stoical attitude: "[Boorowa] people are rather philosophical about the way things are, because they know they can't control so many things". An air of powerlessness and resignation pervades many Boorowa people's assessment of the NSW Government's local council amalgamation proposal. Early in 1999, Boorowa Shire Council's General Manager, Barry Greaves, told me:

> If it's on the government's agenda, down the track, I guess whatever we say or do is not going to make much difference to that, if they make up their mind to do it. I mean, we've sort of been saying that "No, we won't do it. We'll block your amalgamation", but there's ways and means, as you know. They'll sort of start saying, "Well, you're not eligible for this grant, that grant - but once you do this, that and the other". And you're sort of thinking, geez, you know, otherwise we'll chuck the towel in. And, you know, because at some point, the rate-payers are going to say, "Well, you know, hey, we're paying too much, we're paying too much and not getting enough". And, you know, sort of, historical affinity, if you like, only lasts, only goes, sort of, so far, and then they become, sort of, economic decisions.

Several months later, in August, the Minister for Local Government, Mr Harry Woods, attended a meeting in Boorowa with the mayors and general managers from many of the region's local councils. At this meeting, he spoke about the government's local council amalgamation proposal and delineated what he saw as its benefits. Mr Wood's conduct in this public forum did little to assuage Boorowa residents' perception that the purportedly voluntary policy was, in effect, to become mandatory, and that ultimately they would have very little say in the matter. Despite unanimous opposition to the amalgamation proposal, residents felt that the Minister was committed to the policy, and to its eventual uniform application:

> The Minister stood there and said, "Well, I think it's the right thing to do, and that's what's going to happen". So it's one bloke against all these other fellers, and [he] just more or less said, "Well, now I've put it to you and we'll do this and we'll do that". And you could hear in his voice, you could hear in what he was saying, that it's just going to go ahead and he doesn't care. He's there and he's worried about those figures on the book. He doesn't care about the families who are going to be put out, and all the whingeing and hollering everywhere is just not going to make any difference to him. I might be wrong. He might say, "Shit, you know, we've got that many people against us, we'll have to change".

Such assessments are based upon the experience of having lost services in the past, and the manner in which they went. Whilst older Boorowa residents can and do cite a litany of services that have been withdrawn from the town over the years, most employed as an example the recent amalgamation of the electricity company. They did so because this was seen to closely parallel the local council amalgamations' proposal, and its underlying logic. Like the council amalgamations' proposal, the electricity companies' merger was informed by the principles of competition policy, and, they felt, unmediated by adequate consideration of its social and personal impacts:

> You would have heard what's happening at the moment, they're trying to amalgamate all the councils. Major, major problem. They've already done it with, what is it ... Southwest Electricity went into Southern Energy, the Great Southern Energy, and we had something like twelve blokes working here, two blokes now. And if you break it down, they've got a couple in Young and Harden, they don't employ the two blokes here on an hourly rate. They've got to come away. They've cut out four families in the town already. And they'll talk their way around it, they'll say, "Oh yes, we've contracted this bloke back and we've done this and that", but they've ruined the whole thing. There's your yards[16] around there and they're empty. It's just not on. It shouldn't be on. Amalgamations shouldn't be on. They shouldn't be. We should be able to look after ourselves.

Not only has the town lost a number of jobs and community members as a result of the rationalisation of electricity services in country NSW, but, as Boorowa people see it, contrary to the commitments exacted by the NSW Government and outlined in service agreements, service levels have been dramatically reduced:

> Nobody is comfortable about it [the local council amalgamation proposal] because we had our electricity went the same way. I think there's only about two men over in the yards left, because

[16] Fenced enclosures for the storage of vehicles and other maintenance equipment, as well as spare electrical cable, insulators, transformers and the like.

> they all come from other areas. We're moving up to a, a bit of a, if we have a black-out or anything with our electricity, it takes about three or four hours to have it fixed now. Whereas, once upon a time, you could ring here and it'd be fixed within a matter of, you know, an hour, or half an hour, or something like that. That doesn't happen now. And that's what they call progress.

Another person saw some irony in the new arrangements. Boorowa people, being 'on the ground', so to speak, have now, he feels, been 'recruited' in a diagnostic role:

> So now, you know, if there's a power failure or something, you ring the one three two number and then you get someone, I don't know where they are, someone from Great Southern Energy and that could be in Sydney, I don't know. You know, but that sort of help line thing and, you know, not so much local input, you know, like if there's a problem, you know, you get the message, "There's been a problem in such and such an area, and we expect to have the power restored within", you know, "a couple of hours", or whatever it is. And then, the one at the end of it really gets you, it says, "And if you have any information about this power failure, we'd appreciate your calling". So, in other words, "We haven't got a bloody clue what's going on".

Neither do financial deregulation and competition policy in general lead, for them, to a reduction in prices:

> Well, they talk about deregulisation [*sic*] and all the rest of it, our prices will come down. Yes, they do for the city, in the country they just go up. They say, you know, it will drop. But it never drops, it always goes up in price. And the country people seem to pay more. I know we've got to pay more. I know we've got to pay freight, and that. But, you'd think it could be sort of designated a little bit over the whole of the country now as, they would spread out to make things a little bit easier for people in the country. Because they talk about the average wage being, what were they saying, forty thousand dollars a year or something. My husband worked in the sheds[17] until he retired, and when our children were small, I think our taxable income per year was sixteen thousand dollars.

Moreover, as they see it, deregulation does not, in the longer term, make good business sense. The deregulation of certain essential services is regarded as a poor economic decision on the part of the state, both because it ultimately has a responsibility to ensure their provision, and because these services are, almost by definition, so lucrative:

> They were cash cows, they shouldn't have got rid of them, telecommunications, the Commonwealth Bank, you know what I mean. They make huge, huge money, and they got rid of

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[17] Sheep shearing sheds.

> them. Why? If I was in business, I wouldn't get rid of those sort of things. It's the state's, you know, it's the state's, the state has to provide those services and, you know what I mean? Police, whatever, you know, health, as I said, they've got to provide them, and I don't think they should have ever went out of their control. If other people wanted to come in, fair enough. But, you know ...

Instead, as they see it, deregulation and competition policy cater largely for the interests of big business and shareholders, rather than for people as citizens and stakeholders:

> Usually it's not for the better, you know, deregulation of certain things, the competition policy as a whole. I think the only people they're catering for is big business, you know, not for the little fellow.

Rural Australia and rural ideology

Personal experience and the evidence of the senses are prioritised in Boorowa people's understandings and explanations of their situation. Rarely do they depart from these grounds, and, when they do, this is typically to speak of their own experience in relation to that of other rural towns and rural Australia as a whole. Their experience is one of community, but, more specifically, it is one of rural community.

In *Smalltown: a study of social inequality, cohesion and belonging*, Ken Dempsey observes after Anthony Cohen (1985) that where communities feel increasingly alienated from centralised and institutionalised governments and economies, "regional or immediate groupings may prove increasingly important sources of identity" (Dempsey 1991: 107). According to Dempsey, this was indeed the case for Smalltownites. These people's sense of alienation from government, big business and the city contributed not only to strong feelings of identification with their own country Victorian town, but also attachment to rural Australia. Smalltownites felt that they shared with other rural Australians "the problems of country life", which included, "inferior basic facilities, excessive charges for transport, insufficient industry to support the local population [and] the withdrawal or threatened withdrawal of vital services" (Dempsey 1991: 39). They attributed these problems to the greater political power of the city and the "propensity of politicians to comply with the demands and wants of 'city people' in order to stay in power" (1991: 39). The city, as country people see it, is parasitical upon the countryside. City-based governments use "the wealth generated by primary industry" to ensure their own survival. They "bestow benefits on city people yet reduce their deficits by withdrawing basic facilities that rural people need to earn a living and make their life reasonably comfortable" (1991: 39). Understandably, then, rural Australians feel threatened by the dominant and contrasting institutional settings

and life-styles of the city. So profound are their feelings of distinctiveness and the strength of their identification with rural Australia that Dempsey maintains "the overriding conviction of Smalltownites is that country people are radically different to city people" (1991: 36).[18]

Judging by Boorowa people's conceptions of themselves in relation to rural and urban Australians, Dempsey is mistaken in extrapolating the experience and interpretation of Smalltownites to rural Australians as a whole. Dempsey speaks of Smalltownites and rural Australians almost interchangeably, arguing that Smalltown itself "exists as a social entity, even as a point of view, more than it does as a territory" (1991: 41). His implication is that rural Australians share a common consciousness that is based upon their perceived distinctiveness. Although Boorowa people do indeed identify with other country towns perceived to be in a similar plight (especially those in the region), feel threatened by contrasting institutional settings, and view centralised governments as generally freeloading upon the rural, they do not hold a conception of themselves as radically different to city people. Nor are they deluded (as many theorists charge of rural peoples) by the artificial separation of rural-urban interests and rural ideology upon which these feelings of distinctiveness are said to be founded.[19]

In his 1994 study of a country village in Northern Hampshire, Southern England, Michael Mayerfeld Bell argues that this village's residents see two principal contrasts between themselves and city people. They feel that there is a stronger sense of community in the country, and that life in the countryside is closer to nature. Boorowa

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[18] Structural explanations of rural-urban opposition may be broadly grouped according to their correspondence with the dominant theoretical orientations of Sociology's 'holy trinity', i.e. Weber, Durkheim and Marx. From within a Weberian theoretical 'paradigm', rural-urban enmity may be interpreted as being due to internal colonialism, or, the spatially unequal distribution of power and prestige, with absentee ownership of rural regions and resources rife. According to this model, urban elites' interests lie in the exploitation of (rural-based) natural resources, and the imposition of elite ideology on subordinate strata through cultural institutions. Durkheimian theorists of the rural-urban gap adhere relatively closely to the theory of socioeconomic dualism and diffusion. This theory posits a general societal evolution towards national integration, with the development of a shared value system and a national secular political culture leading to the gradual disappearance of rural-urban differences in roles, norms and institutional structures. Resistance on the part of rural peoples is translated as resistance to the breakdown of 'traditional culture' and its associated social structure. Marxist theory of the 'law of uneven development' holds that there is a developmental tendency of capitalism towards uneven spatial development because cities are the spatial locus of capital accumulation. They are the market for commodities produced and the 'nerve centre' for the co-ordination of production and circulation activities. As a result, rural areas are characteristically subject to the ills of underdevelopment and a resultant economic dependence (Buttel and Flinn 1977: 259-66).

[19] Unlike Dempsey's respondents, Boorowa people do not defend that tenet of agrarian ideology, or country mindedness, that holds that primary industry is central to the nation's wealth - recognising that this is no longer the case. Vexing though it may be to some of them, Boorowa people acknowledge that although food and fibre are essential to human existence, agriculture no longer generates the wealth for the nation that it once did.

people are of the same view. They know, based upon their own observations and perceived experiences, that country life is different to that lived in the city. Like Bell's Childerleyans, they might be wrong. Nevertheless, their practical consciousness - founded upon the interpretation of immediate experience - has, as we have seen, important political and moral consequences. It contributes to a willingness to defend their fellows, and to resist what are seen to be alien and autonomy reducing discourses.

Boorowa people's conviction that there are *some* real differences between city and country life leaves them susceptible to the charge of false consciousness. A number of theorists and researchers have in recent years devoted attention to the question of rural ideology.[20] Essentially, these thinkers argue that rural ideology and the myth of the rural idyll (in Australia, 'countrymindedness' Aitkin (1985)) serves to obscure marginalised rural people's objective class (and other) interests, and, when employed by dominant class interests, to quash opposition. Their focus is upon the use and abuse of the text 'rural', either based on the assertion that the images contained within this text are false, or, independent of their truth or falsity.

Judith Kapferer is one such theorist. She questions why ruralism is so central to Australian's understandings of themselves and 'the Australian identity' when the characteristics "mythologised and celebrated as quintessentially Australian" are "not of themselves particularly rural" (1990: 87). Kapferer attributes this phenomenon to the false separation of rural and urban political and economic interests - a dichotomy which is, she argues, "a taken for granted assumption not only in everyday life but also in political, economic and social analyses of Australian society" (1990: 104). Because of its hegemonic force, this idea "provides an unquestioning and unquestioned foundation for the mythologising of Australianness as the embodiment of rural virtue, a virtue which is none other than an ideology produced in, by and for an urban industrial world" (J. Kapferer 1990: 104-5).

Kapferer bases her argument that the cleavage between rural and urban styles of life and cultural orientations is more perceived than real - an ideological construction with ideological significance - upon an identification of "aspects of the mythology of the rural within widespread, urban-constructed and politically motivated ideologies" (1990: 88). For example, whereas Australian community studies of country towns and political scientists' analyses of party politics emphasise the distinctiveness of rural political culture, based upon the separation of rural and urban interests, and the Australian mass media frequently contrasts 'rural conservatism' with the 'more liberal and enlightened'

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[20] In Australia, the most prominent of these are Dempsey (1990), Gray (1991) and Poiner (1990).

views of urbanites, this neglects the links and connections between country town and metropolis. In particular, Kapferer argues, this focus overlooks the fact that capital dominates labour in the city as in the country town, a detail that is reflected both in the development of political parties and in their constituencies. Rural conservatism, she argues, does not differ greatly from its urban counterpart, based as they both are on the same mythological foundations. The distinction between rural and urban is, in political and economic terms, a false one - an ideology that is constantly employed, highlighted and exacerbated in the 'divide and rule' manoeuvres of urban business interests and the state which limit social and political action.

Kapferer overstates the degree to which the separation of rural and urban interests is a taken-for-granted assumption in everyday life. When Boorowa people oppose forces of domination this resistance is, indeed, based on their lived ideological reality. Yet, they employ common sense that is not the overwhelmingly unreflexive and hegemonic force Kapferer makes it out to be in representing the separation of rural and urban interests as a taken-for-granted assumption. When I discussed with respondents the notion of a rural-urban gap, or, the idea that rural and urban people may generally misunderstand each other, they were typically circumspect in their replies. They were able, and frequently all too willing, to identify the divergent beliefs, characteristics and values observed or perceived to have been experienced in their dealings with urbanites. However, these were ascribed to different lifestyles, and often artificially-imposed circumstances, rather than to some more fundamental (cultural) difference, or differences. Indeed, many detected in recent media reportage and political representation of rural issues what they saw as a Machiavellian 'divide and rule' tactic, which they resented. Essentially, they argue, we all share in nature, and in our experience of nature, the same basic needs, problems, and, to an extent, interests and aspirations:

> I think people, basically, are the same. I mean we all have our different backgrounds that do affect us, and affect the way we think. But, I think, my personal opinion is that, I mean, really, when you come down to the basics, everyone wants the same things, you know. They want the best for their families, and they want to achieve their own goals. And, I think, whether you're rural or suburban, that they're the same.

> I think people just live. They do their best to live and ... your life really revolves around eating, sleeping, having some sort of leisure activity and some interaction with people. And that's really what everybody's all about, no matter where you are.

> I think that most people are concerned with just making ends meet, and getting through life. And I don't think it matters where you are, and I really believe that it's getting harder for the average Australian to make ends meet and get through life, that that is becoming a greater challenge. And perhaps, in a way, that could be a unifying link between the country and the city.

In the chapter, thus far, I have used as an exemplar and means Boorowa people's understandings of the NSW government's competitive tendering proposal to draw out the broad features of their conceptions of their reality. This has included the ways in which they think about and perceive their experience of their community, and the implications of this for their understandings and expressions of moral autonomy. In the final section of this chapter, I synthesise the main characteristics of the political action spawned from Boorowa people's worldview and from their common sense conception of moral autonomy. This summary provides a basis from which to assess in the following chapter critical theory's criticism of practical politics and the common sense that informs it.

Practical politics and common sense reasoning

Boorowa people's practical politics is concerned at all times primarily with the satisfaction of community members' basic material needs. People's *real* needs, as they see them, are those that derive from a state of nature. Although they recognise that these vary widely across and within cultures according to diverse customs, mores and associated standards of living, the availability of resources and varying stages of development, people's essential needs (regardless of who and where these people are are), can and must be met - if not by the relevant national community, then by the broader, international community. These basic survival needs are quantifiable, and may be claimed as rights. Indeed, the notion of rights and rights discourses only make sense to them and are meaningful where these are firmly grounded in realism. Where rights depart from the solid (and legitimate, because natural) ground of basic needs, and are instead expressed in transcendent terms, Boorowa people's suspicions are aroused, and their commitment becomes less firm - if not outright dismissive. Lofty ideals are, they feel, all too frequently empty. This is because they are either seen as completely unrealistic, or not truly aspirational because they are driven by instrumental ideology, sectional interests and partisan politics. Theirs is a logic that prioritises what they see as substance over form. On the whole, it rejects the reification of immutable political institutions and procedures. Rather, it prefers reasoning that admits emotion, humanism and subjective reality - or, at the very least, to their presence and importance. Devotion to formal institutions and their procedures, particularly at the expense of the natural attitude, strikes them as not only impersonal, but also, to a degree, illogical. It amounts,

in effect, to 'gilding the lily' - so long, that is, as people participate in, and are thus common sense knowers of, the community.

Boorowa people's own idealism is rooted in and governed by the here and now. In their view, we can and should cater for all people's basic needs. When and where people are in a position to do so, they should earn these rights to the provision of goods and services and the standards embodied in a community's way of life through participation in and contribution to the community. With rights of any description come responsibilities, and this is what is truly important to Boorowa people - the right to be able to exercise responsibility.

Perhaps the most important need for Boorowa people, as for most people in Western societies in which a work ethic exerts some influence, therefore, is that of paid employment. None too surprisingly in the ferment of the competitive tendering dispute, a Boorowa road worker told me, "I think everyone should have a right to make a living, I don't know, not depend on the dole". His fellow workers, and Boorowa people as a whole, said much the same thing. As they see it, the state - "and that's what we are supposed to be" - has a responsibility to provide paid work for those who want to work, to 'pull their weight' and contribute: "Everyone should have a job if they want one. I know it's hard in this economic climate - they go on, and on, and on, and on ..." Moreover, it makes little sense for the community to not do so, as unemployment is deemed wasteful of its most precious resource, not to mention damaging of human dignity and disempowering for these people. For Boorowa people, efficiency entails the best use of resources that, in their local context, means employing as many people as possible, and especially those without (relevant) skills or qualifications who would struggle to find work elsewhere. Although they recognise (arguably better than most) that people can and do make a contribution to the community through means other than paid work,[21] Boorowa people prize such employment because it enables a measure of financial independence and, with it, the exercise of some - albeit limited - control, if not for themselves, through self-sacrifice then, for their progeny: "I try to be independent. I work, my wife works. We're putting our son through uni., and he's going through uni. because I don't want him to do the same job as me. I want him to improve his life".

Boorowa roadworkers are not qualified to do much else, and aware of this. They know that they do a job few other people want to do, and why this is the case: "Blokes like me are only there to fill in pot-holes ... You don't see anyone smart, with money, doing this

[21] Contrary to the findings of the Civics Expert Group (1994: 134), Boorowa people do not see civic duties in a narrowly defined sense. They perceive participation in voluntary activities as a civic duty, and are conscious of this as being a fundamental form of political participation.

sort of thing". They also recognise that they enjoy little meaningful autonomy in the workplace, which Donaldson describes as "constructed to induce and reinforce feelings of stupidity, ignorance and powerlessness" in working class employees (1991: 7). These feelings are likely to be less prevalent in a setting such as Boorowa, in which townsfolk, on the whole, value the job road workers do, and their supervisor respects their shared skills and local knowledge. However, the very nature of the work itself, which is relatively uncomplicated and repetitive and requires no formal qualifications, and its portrayal in the wider culture, leave them in no doubt as to their peripheral standing. Nor are they sanguine regarding their societal influence: "I've got no say at all. And your vote, it doesn't count, really". Like many working class people, Boorowa's road workers have quite a clear understanding of why this is so: "If I was a James Packer or someone that said, 'How about doing this', or if they wanted a road doing, there's a pothole there for me to fill in in three weeks [clicks fingers], it gets done tomorrow! It [society] works for the rich and the wealthy".[22] Nevertheless, Boorowa road workers are equally aware that, although they are relatively powerless in the workforce, unemployment would render them still further marginalised.

Theirs is an understanding borne out by Jocelyn Pixley's (1993) study of post-industrial alternatives to wage labour. Pixley's argument, based upon an evaluation of the post-industrial strategies pursued by various OECD governments, is that all policies that seek to break the cash/work nexus in the face of (considered inevitable) mass unemployment result in decreased autonomy for those excluded from mainstream work. Thus, although she concedes that it seems contradictory from an emancipatory viewpoint, Pixley argues that it is necessary to defend paid dull and powerless work against alternatives that separate income from work. Pixley's position is not, however, so paradoxical as her above conclusion might imply, since she then proceeds to argue that alienation experienced in the workplace is never absolute, and that "'being there' holds the greater possibility to intervene than 'being absent'" (1993: 297). Freedom and choice might indeed be largely denied labourers in the workplace through its very structure, but workers nevertheless struggle to increase autonomy, job control, freedom from harassment and authoritarianism, both in work itself and through their separation of work from 'real life' (Donaldson 1991).

Besides its focus on realising people's material needs, Boorowa people's practical politics exhibits a number of other features. The first of these is its emphasis on collective, rather than individual, action. Because Boorowa's road workers form an integral part of the community, it is seen (by most) as being in the interests of all

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[22] On this point, see Chamberlain (1983: 127).

community members to defend their livelihoods. Without a collective response (their lobbying, petitions, protest rallies and support of threatened strike action) they realise, road workers themselves would, even as a group, struggle to defend themselves against this particular demand for economic change. For Boorowa people, it stands to reason, based on their perceived experience, that as a community they are better equipped to realise most goals - upon which a majority appear to agree because they pertain to the perpetuation and improvement of the way of life they value.

But this explanation is somewhat partial and misleading. It implies that Boorowa people's commitment to defending its road workers' jobs, and to the community itself, is based primarily on an instrumental utilitarian assessment of the situation, and of the costs and benefits associated with community alliance. This is to negate their very real allegiance to the community and the feelings of reciprocity and mutual obligation - the bonds - that exist between its members. Furthermore, it is to deny or disregard the emotive dimensions of their common sense knowledge. Boorowa people's opposition to the competitive tendering proposal was, as we have seen, informed by a common sense knowledge-based assessment of this proposal's implications for the town's road workers. But it was also spurred by a shared and affective commitment to their common sense. Although Boorowa people defended vigorously their common sense's rationality against that of experts associated with the competitive tendering proposal, their sense of its commonality and importance, and resultant commitment to this knowledge, did not derive primarily from this feature. Instead, it obtained from their knowledge's affective aspect, its grounding in the Boorowa community and its members' shared perceptions of the practical experience of this relationship. Their critique of 'economic rationalism' is not one of rationality as a whole, though. Nor does it entail a simplistic withdrawal into naive subjectivism. Boorowa people's common sense evaluation of economic rationalism derives from within the epistemological and ontological framework of Western utilitarian rationality. What it aims to do is to restore to this form of objective rationality some balance through reference to the indelible association between knowledge and shared perceptions of *human* experience.

Embedded in the above assessment, we find the remaining elements of Boorowa people's practical politics, namely, its emphasis on perceived shared, practical experience; reduction of the issue to one of competing first principles or 'common places'; and, *telos* towards compromise. In their resistance to the competitive tendering proposal, Boorowa people continually referred to their perception of their own practical experience as an authoritative mode of knowing. This understanding was at all times prioritised over 'facts and figures' that, whilst recognised as important, should never,

they feel, form the sole basis for, or exercise the final word in, decision-making. Their matter-of-fact assessment of their situation, which drew on historical precedent and its lived legacy, told them all that they really needed to know. They could gauge, using these means, the impact of the proposal in terms of its likely personal and social costs. They could also, once again realistically, and painfully so, estimate the prospect of their resistance to the proposals' success.

Boorowa people typically reduced the dispute over the proposed competitive tendering of road services to one of opposing principles, or, common places. As Gramsci would have it, their common sense reasoning found "the exact cause [the doctrine of economic rationalism and its proselytisers], simple and to hand", without letting itself be "distracted by fancy quibbles and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo-jumbo" (1971: 348). The dispute was, for Boorowa people, about the survival of their community and its members in the face of instrumental rationalisation and the greed and self-interest that drives it. A similar assessment was adopted towards Westpac's decision to close the town's last bank branch and offer in its place an in-store branch. "Your figures", one resident told me, "that's why the bank shuts down and pisses off, you know. Because they say, 'Oh well, okay, that bank, that branch is not bloody earning its keep'. It really doesn't matter the fact that you've made bloody, four or five billion profit last year. You have to look after the share holders, and you have to do this, and you have to do that. People become numbers and their tradition's lost as far as personalities and people caring and looking after each other".

However, despite its seeming fundamentalism, Boorowa people's defence sought not to negate in its entirety the opposing view, but rather to temper this according to people's perceived needs. They aimed for a socially acceptable compromise, rather than a rejection of market freedom and its potential benefits. This stance is partly to do with the ideological nature of common sense (that is, its dichotomous composition), but is also related to their realism. Boorowa people's pragmatism has it that market liberalism and user pays policies are seemingly inevitable, but not necessarily entirely problematic, so long as they do not become doctrinal and/or beyond ordinary people's control:

> Telecommunications, once you went down the privatisation track, you've got to keep on going. You can't have forty-nine percent in private hands and fifty-one percent in government hands. I think they're, they'll make a rod for their own back if they do. You know, litigation further down on decisions that they make. So, now they've done that, they've got to keep on going down it.

> I suppose governments appear to be standing back and letting rural industries, like they're not saying, trying to say, "Oh gee, the wool industry's in trouble. Let's, you know, throw a bucket of money at it". They're a bit more inclined to say, "Well, you know, the wool industry's in trouble, but the wool industry has to solve its own problems". So, in a way, that's probably more realistic. It's harsh for a lot of people, because a lot of people are going to go out of business. But, you know, that's reality, isn't it?

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As Boorowa people saw it, the proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services posed a substantial threat to the welfare of the town's road workers, and, ultimately, to the well being and survival of the community as a whole. The proposal was, along with its underlying logic and implications, instantly recognised by them. Like so many NSW Government policies before it, it was the product of experts and politicians caught up in the thrall of the doctrine of economic rationalism, and concerned with their own short-term survival. These "bean counters" were all too willing to pander to the narrowly defined interests of taxpayers, shareholders, and, especially, big business. That this was to be at the expense of marginal road workers and their community (whose significance they did not and could not understand) was of little consequence or easily justified. They were simply to be sacrificed, unceremoniously, on the altar of the supposed common good.

Boorowa people's common sense understanding of their situation drew at all times on their perceived shared practical experience. It was this aspect of their common sense that both spurred and shaped the nature of their resistance to the proposal, along with their expectations of its likelihood of success. The perceived experience of community and its bonds told them that the livelihoods of Boorowa's road workers and their collective way of life are worthy of commitment. At the same time, their common sense knowledge of similar types of policy enabled them to readily identify the cause of their plight, and thereby reduce the dispute to one over competing principles and associated forms of knowledge. This parsimony, combined with a faith in the validity of their common sense understanding of their circumstances, limited their reliance upon experts and expertise. It allowed them to function in conditions of bounded information and simultaneously to be sure of the justness of their cause. Common sense represented, for them, a court of higher appeal, incorporating as it does an insistently universal, and human, element. However, Boorowa people's common sense pragmatism also dispelled any illusions as to the ease of their undertaking. They recognised that, in an environment dominated by the demand for economic efficiency, the proposal "made

sense". Similarly, they acknowledged that their discourse of resistance would hold little sway with the relevant experts, even were they to truly comprehend it.

In this chapter, I have placed an emphasis upon the form of action made possible by Boorowa people's common sense understandings of their reality in their resistance to the NSW Government's proposal. As a logical consequence, this focus has, of course, unearthed in crude form, or at least hinted at, some of those possibilities that were foreclosed through these understandings and related action. Clarifying the limitations placed upon Boorowa people's politics, and their autonomy more generally, through their common sense conception of reality will form the task of the first part of the next chapter. This is a charge made easier by critical theory's resolute critique of practical politics and the common sense on which it draws. The remainder of the chapter will then question this account by making explicit those critical elements inherent in Boorowa people's common sense, as evidenced in relation to this case study.

CHAPTER SIX
CRITICAL THEORY AND COMMON SENSE

In the previous chapter, I established that Boorowa people's common sense understanding of the NSW government's proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance and development services makes constant reference to their perceived practical experience. And, given that Boorowa people did not resort to external interpretations in their conceptions of their situation and, on the whole, their social reality more generally, in this respect, their common sense could be said to be critical. It draws on their own perceived experience in order to interpret others' attempts to define, partly, this reality. In this chapter, I proceed to consider the second, related question: To what degree does Boorowa people's common sense doubt the reality of their social reality? Or, in other words, in what ways and how much does Boorowa people's common sense reify social reality in the context of this case study? This is a vexed question, for, in the light of the findings of the preceding chapter, it raises a problem similar to that which Schutz terms 'the paradox of common sense rationality'.[1] On the face of it, to the degree that Boorowa people's common sense is 'critical' through its faithful reflection and defence of their shared experience, this increases the prospect of its reifying this social reality. In short, the more critical is Boorowa people's common sense in the first sense, the less critical it will prove, *in theory*, in the second.

But all this is to privilege relatively unquestioningly a particular form of critical thought. Bearing in mind that critical theory does not possess a monopoly on the definition of that which is and that which is not critical, I am concerned in this chapter to address explicitly the problem: Just *how* is Boorowa people's common sense critical? Is it critical simply in the sense that it is fault-finding and disparaging of various 'material' aspects of their social reality? Or, does Boorowa people's common sense

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[1] Similar, but not identical. As noted earlier, Schutz is not concerned with thinking about or isolating critical elements in common sense. Lindenberg (1987) is, however, and he talks about strong group solidarity (which is not, it is important to note, the same thing as perceived shared practical experience) as restricting the exercise of common sense within any given group in favour of a common consciousness. Lindenberg notes that where it is open to other 'outside' interpretations of reality and solutions to problems, common sense is more likely to prove critical. But herein lies the potential dilemma for critical common sense. The incorporation of other versions of social reality entails a relativising of one's own perceived experience and understanding of it. This enables a departure from this baseline and the conscious or unconscious employment of 'external' explanations where this suits one's purposes. People's flight from 'their own' version of social reality may be for instrumental, political purposes or for reasons of ontological security that are perhaps more benign. The point is that whilst relativism introduces the possibility of a more critical common sense, it also brings with it the potential for a *less* critical form. Relativism does not necessarily lead to reflexivity (Woolgar 1988), let alone a critical type of reflexivity.

judge more systematically (if not necessarily 'rationally' or theoretically) and in greater depth the conditions of their action and social reality? Does it indicate a reflexive, or dialectical, understanding of their situations in the social world? As I have implied, an answer to this question demands that I both problematise critical theory's rationalist conceptions of critique and the human good, and locate Boorowa people's practical politics and common sense in terms of its particular socio-political context.[2]

In order to take up this task, I employ as a framework critical theory's general censure of practical politics and common sense reasoning. Having demonstrated in the previous chapter the characteristics of Boorowa people's practical politics, and of the common sense on which this politics draws, I present a critical theory reading of such political action and its limitations. I then consider the validity of this critique when applied to Boorowa people and their action, as evidenced in the context of this case study. I do so by calling into question certain assumptions implicit to this critique and identifying the critical elements of Boorowa people's common sense that are neglected or overlooked through what is, I argue, such an essentialist theoretical stance. I then turn to critical theory's ultimate target of objection, and the attributed root source of the failings of Boorowa people's 'political' action: their practical, common sense consciousness and its assumed reification of social reality.

Critical theory, practical politics and common sense

Boorowa people's everyday understanding of how the world works (and should work) is reflected, to some extent, in their perceived practical experience and politics. These are, in turn, largely developed out of and perhaps inextricably related to the Boorowa community and its way of doing things. Boorowa people are committed to their community and confident that their way of life is the most suited to their circumstances. This is largely because their conception of reality is shaped by this perceived (historical) social experience and in opposition to the dominant culture of behaviour's perceived failings. According to critical theorists, though, such a commitment and conviction militates against their development as truly morally autonomous selves, and, with it, the radical freedom that is humanity's birthright. Not only does Boorowa people's politics neglect much of the structural inequality and oppression inherent to their reality and

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[2] In this chapter, I draw primarily on the works of Zygmunt Bauman and Iris Young. I acknowledge that neither of these analysts could, strictly speaking, be considered a Critical Theorist, given that each departs to varying degrees from the core tenets of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory's programme. Indeed, both Young and Bauman also rely heavily on postmodern theory, which is, in crucial respects, incommensurable with the modernist ideals and assumptions of Critical Theory. (Young, in particular, takes issue with the Western and male presuppositions and biases of this theoretical tradition.) What they do share in common - with each other and with Critical Theory - is a commitment to deconstructing and opposing what they perceive to be common sense understandings of reality. It is on these grounds that I employ them as exponents of contemporary critical theory.

visited upon themselves and by themselves upon others but, through this at times active avoidance, these structures are further entrenched. Because their political action does not derive from a critical, theoretical consciousness, it fails to challenge what Bourdieu describes as "the game" (1990b: 184) itself. Instead, not recognising social reality as essentially arbitrary and contingent - as a 'game' - it merely questions (and then none too rigorously) some of its rules.

In the following sections, I consider the validity of such assessments, firstly in relation to Boorowa people's politics, and then with respect to the conception of moral autonomy that informs this politics.

Material needs and the distributive paradigm of justice

Boorowa people's conception of needs is a naturalised one. In the case of their resistance to the NSW government's proposal, this shared conception of needs, when combined with their pragmatism, served to restrict their political claims to demands for those immediate requirements necessary for road worker's and the town's survival. Not only did their minimalist, egalitarian understanding of needs restrict their own demands, it also, more generally, made them suspicious of and frequently resistant to those claims of interest groups whose distinctive needs fall outside these criteria. Because they cannot be traced to natural, biological sources, such needs may be, as a result, adjudged less- or illegitimate. Their claims thus fell squarely within the "distributive paradigm of justice" that, Young (1990) argues, predominates in welfare capitalist societies.

The distributive paradigm of justice conceives of people primarily as self-interested client-consumers: as possessors and consumers of material goods and, hence, as relatively passive, that is, not politically engaged. Young takes issue with this conception of people and ideal of justice on the grounds that people should instead be viewed chiefly as actors embedded in social processes, thereby expanding the terrain of justice to include *all* those inhibitions imposed upon people's action. On the strength of this critical theory appraisal, Boorowa people's practical politics limits the scope of politics and possibilities for progressive social and political change. Politics is preserved as the sphere of utility, leaving untouched those conservative values and principles that support a range of other inequalities. By confining their own and other's demands to material needs (in this case, the need to earn an income), Boorowa people actively endorse the legitimacy of the distributive paradigm of justice, and its assumptions. In doing so, they acquiesce to the assumption of welfare capitalist societies as being peopled by *homo economicus*. And, it is this idea that is crucial to the ongoing survival

of the economic rationalism they purportedly so despise. Their action thus fails to challenge, and, indeed, bolsters, the dominant culture of behaviour and its interests.

This state of affairs is further exacerbated through Boorowa people's emphasis on pragmatism, and willingness to compromise. They do not reject altogether market liberalism and user pays policies, or the logic underpinning the proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance and development services. Neither do they attempt to challenge the political economy by circumventing the conventional political process through which their demands are channeled. Instead, they demand through lobbying, petitions, rallies and the support of road workers' threatened strike action that concessions should be made to ensure a modicum of well-being for all. Compromise is, Lawrence Joseph (1994: 24) argues, a very commonsensical thing to do. Needless to say, this feature of common sense and the practical politics that derive from it hardly endears it to critical theorists. Serving as it largely does the interests of those who determine and control the status quo, compromise is, for critical theorists, treated with no small degree of suspicion.

Hence, Boorowa people's practical politics delimits their own political claims and those of others. Moreover, it does so seemingly without questioning this 'naturalised' conception of needs. Boorowa people do not attempt to locate its socio-historical origins, nor do they question whose interests it serves. That politics is confined largely to the distribution and redistribution of material goods and services appears to be seen by them as being basically legitimate. This is, for the critical theorist and other commentators, further evidenced by their pragmatism. For the critical theorist, Boorowa people's politics is the product of a contradictory, practical (rather than theoretical) consciousness. In confining their own and other's demands, they help to bolster economic rationalism and the model of the human and social that informs it, and that they abhor. But matters are not this simple.

Boorowa people's conception of material needs is not so reductionist as it may appear on a surface reading. Although it is based upon a naturalised, and thus universal, definition, it is also socio-historical. People may essentially want and need similar things, but these are the products of history, and relative to given communities and specific situations:

> I think that rights, as whatever, becomes part of community expectations of what's on offer. And my rights are different to what my father's were, or my expectations are different to what my father's, and my kids' will be different.

> Rights adapt with society, as society develops. There's some things that come and some things that don't.

> Well, perhaps what we always thought was a right, you know, which was to live in the country and to do what we wanted because we owned the block, but now, you know, as time's gone on, I think that people now know that that isn't a right, you know. That's actually a privilege of being a caretaker of a piece of land. And you might be able to exchange money, but, I mean, but in fact, it's never really yours. So maybe what we first perceived of as a right was a privilege, really.

> By my standards, or by my, the community I live in's standards, I have rights that others don't have. Without living in their community - maybe there is a good reason why they don't have them rights, that I have.

> By doing the right thing by the community and country, I have the rights to enjoy what the country's got. If the country hasn't got it, well I don't believe I have the rights to it.

Boorowa people appreciate that not only do needs differ across communities, but also within them. This awareness highlights the question of social conditions and the relationship between these and the conditioning of people's needs. At a general level, Boorowa people are conscious of this conditioning. However, because they start from the premise and political ideal of sameness rather than difference, emphasising shared community expectations and limitations, as well as the particularity of needs *within* nation states, their conception of needs is problematic from a critical theory perspective. There are, as Young emphasises, certain needs that cannot be universalised in multicultural societies. One cannot assume, as does the theory of liberal individualism on which welfare capitalist societies are based, a universal subject: that is, a white, middle-class and 'productive' male. As a result, differential treatment as well as institutional and cultural value pluralism is, she maintains, essential to ensure the full and equal membership and social and political participation of all in the community.

The tensions inherent in their minimalist conception of needs do not escape Boorowa people. Many identified in themselves and their fellows a tendency to be less open-minded and liberal where it comes to issues of value pluralism and differentiated rights claims than are their cosmopolitan city counterparts, generally speaking. This was especially so where those needs being claimed were seen to derive more from personal preference than from a genuine need, essential for survival and community participation. The identity politics of middle class citizens is all well and good, but

frequently considered an indulgence where other people's basic needs are not being met. Politics is all about prioritising needs claims and some needs are, quite simply, more important than are others. Although Boorowa people are more knowledgeable about multiculturalism and related issues than in the past, they frequently form attitudes and values based upon a more limited realm of *actual* experience. However, common sense's immanently dialogical nature ensures that Boorowa people's conception of needs, although naturalised, is not simply cut and dried. Instead, it is at all times caught up in the problem of universalism and particularity.

As Geertz (1983; see also Billig 1996) points out, common sense is not a harmonious system of interlocking beliefs, but is composed of contraries. It is these contraries - justice versus mercy; the collective versus the individual; sophists versus casuists (in short, the eternal dilemma of the human condition) - that render beliefs, whether individually or collectively held, inherently volatile and subject to either replacement or modification by persons implicated in the common sense attitude. Boorowa people are, of course, no exception. Witness, for example, Christie's attempt to grapple with the question of rights:

> We should all be the same because, let's face it, we're all Australians, we all have to live here, and we all have to get along. So why have different rights for different people? But, then again, I don't know about that. Only in respect to Aborigines that I think have rights because, you know, they have their land rights and all of that, but I think that's fair. But, then, we don't get that same right. But, I don't know, I agree with it that they should have, but by doing that I've just contradicted myself, haven't I! But, yes, I think we should all have the same rights, but I think that people, Aborigines can have certain rights because originally they were here, and then we came and took over.

Christie is, like most other Boorowa people with whom I spoke, obliged to equivocate between what are, on the face of it, equally compelling common sense principles (or common places) - in this case, equality and freedom. Although their starting point is typically one of naturalised needs and sameness, this is constantly challenged by the reality of difference. It is also tested by the persistence and seeming intractability of inequality related to social conditions, an issue they often discussed with me:

> They just haven't got health care, they haven't got education, they haven't got them in lots of centres, you know. And you see highlights of how indigenous people live. I know in lots of places, lots of communities are in a shocking, appalling state. And because they're minorities, they just haven't got the opportunities.

Boorowa people are aware of the fundamental contradictions in their social reality. They are in particular conscious of the discrepancy between the ideals of liberal society - those of freedom and equality - and their true content (at a general level) in reality. These ideals, they recognise, go unrealised, with inequality the result, because of the exercise of power. Boorowa people's emphasis upon the principle of a universal form of equality obviously bears further examination, and contextualisation. This is especially so given that it entails, for critical theorists, the restriction of conflict and policy discussion to the distribution of material goods and services, and associated 'protection' of the structures and institutional contexts that constrain so many people's actions by separating these from choice and normative judgement. To some extent, Boorowa people's resistance is undoubtedly an expression of what Michael Ignatieff describes in *The Needs of Strangers* as "nostalgia, fear and estrangement from modernity" (1984: 139). But it of necessity draws attention to the power relations associated with the expansion of political discourse and fragmentation of political voices. We need to trace back to structural conditions - to the problem of power and authority, of expertise - aspects of Boorowa people's practical politics.

The problem of power

A certain measure of resistance to the rights claims of others is, as Young sees it, under present socio-political circumstances, both to be expected and to a large degree reasonable. In privatising the citizen's relationship to the state, she argues, the distributive paradigm of justice promotes the un-democratic processes of interest group pluralism. These processes depoliticise public life, foster political cynicism and further fragment social and political relations.[3] In fact, I maintain, ordinary people's resistance to the political action of some interest groups is arguably more complex and reasonable than Young's theoretical stance allows her to discern.

Political participation outside formal institutions may have been increasing in recent years, and perhaps even developing into a new form or forms of politics.[4] However, Young, like other commentators, appears to be of the belief that politics cannot unfold

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[3] This position may be contrasted with that of Patten (1996). He argues that ordinary people's perception that minority special interest groups dominate decision-making processes within the welfare state is largely a construct of political parties working in the interests of the dominant classes.

[4] See, for example, Richard Topf's 'Beyond electoral participation' in Klingeman, H. D. and D. Fuchs (eds). 1995. *Citizens and the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Topf demonstrates that political participation beyond voting - or, non-institutionalised forms of political action - has risen dramatically in Western (European) democracies since the late 1950s. A high level of 'alternative' political participation is also evident in Australia. See Ian McAllister's 'Political behaviour' in Parkin, A., Summers, J. and D. Woodward (eds). 1994. *Government, Politics, Power and Policy in Australia*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

completely outside the parliamentary domain. Anthony Giddens, for example, observes that "social movements and special interest groups cannot supply what parliamentary politics offers - the means of reconciling different interests with one another, and also of balancing different risks in relation to one another" (1998: 34). There is, of course, some question as to whether or not parliamentary politics *can* supply this. This is especially so given the pressures to which democratic states are increasingly subject. Democratic states are finding themselves caught between the need to commit to global economic, migratory and technological processes and to appeal to their constituencies whose interests may not be best served by such a commitment.

Moreover, we need also consider the possibility that social movements and interest groups may help to transform for the better (that is, more democratic) parliamentary politics. Were this their intention, then perhaps they might argue that the ends justify the un-democratic means, so to speak. All too frequently, though, this does not appear to be the case. Rather, social movements and some interest groups[5] subscribe to an essentially dogmatic (and romantic) notion of political radicalism, which has it that one must 'stand outside the system' in order to be truly progressive.[6] One must, this view has it, avoid at all costs having one's goals and values being co-opted and watered down by mainstream political parties and dominant socio-political interests. At the same time, one must maintain some distance to defend against the effects of the iron law of oligarchy (Michels 1962), where internal democracy is an explicit goal of the group, as is the case for most social movements.[7] In doing so, they avoid to a large degree the difficult and messy work of state-based, institutionalised democracy. They sidestep the need to

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[5] I acknowledge that in terms of their motivations social movements do not typically follow the standard pattern of interest group behaviour (Harvey 1990; White 1988). Rather than being concerned with capital interests and issues of wealth redistribution, social movements are frequently grass roots, democratic and motivated by substantive values and moral visions. It is not, therefore, my intention to collapse the two on this basis, but rather on the strength of the methods they employ - albeit potentially for vastly different reasons.

[6] It is important to distinguish here between those groups that seek more meaningful representation in political institutions and processes and those that demand their own separate political communities. Kymlicka and Norman (1995) censure both Young and her critics for just such an omission, arguing that these theorists collapse three different kinds of group, and three different kinds of group rights. As they see it, claims to special representation rights, multicultural rights and self-government rights are qualitatively different. Whilst the former two are intended to promote integration into the larger society, self-government rights, as the name implies, are claims to a more complete form of differentiated citizenship. Within the Australian Aboriginal community, for example, there are groups that argue for the establishment of a treaty with white Australia so as to gain greater inclusion in the larger political community. Others reject such an approach, demanding instead sovereignty and the formation of a separate and distinct political community. I am not referring above to those groups whose explicit goal is that of sovereignty.

[7] A Foucauldian conception of socio-political action displays some resonance with this sort of view. For Foucault, actions and resistances, such as those engaged in by social movements, cannot be taken out of their localised spatial, temporal or community confines. Outside these spaces, he argues, they inevitably lose coherence and meaning (Harvey 1990: 52).

negotiate with 'external' competing interests and to forge viable compromises. By capitalising on their marginality, the identity politics of such groups also, Dennis Altman argues, fails to contribute to a larger social good (1997: 105-13).

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, it is those groups that eschew such a stance in favour of 'self-limiting radicalism', such as the German Greens, that have fared better in terms of the realisation of their goals. Indeed, Elim Papadakis (1988: 449) argues that through the adaptation of their objectives and structure so as to exercise as much influence as possible upon the political process and society as a whole, groups such as the German Greens are in fact more radical than their critical counterparts. These groups have, he holds, simultaneously helped to transform relations of domination and oppression and expand the realm of parliamentary politics.

The main point to be made here is that one cannot dismiss wholesale as uncritical and/or reactionary ordinary people's resistance to the politics of interest groups and social movements. This is *not*, of course, to attribute to such resistances a critical weight akin to that of the 'self-limiting social movements' considered above. Clearly, to be considered commensurate these resistances would have to be the result of a similar type of conscious reflection and political calculation. Rather, it is to suggest that these resistances also have to be thought about in different ways, ways that are attentive to their socio-cultural nuances. These we consider in greater detail shortly. It is also to point out that, arguably, it is necessary to examine the specifics of social movements' and interest groups' claims in order to determine whether or not they are oriented towards and/or likely to address conditions of inequality and oppression. That this should take place in a public setting in which citizens are forced to confront the particular claims to justice of all social groups and to defend in turn their own claims is Young's (1990) and, perhaps, 'ordinary' people's, point.

While not necessarily opposed to the causes defended by many lobby groups, Boorowa people do wish to have some say in how these causes are prioritised and dealt with by the political community as a whole. Despite their notion of the public sphere as being rightly concerned with questions related to the common good and formal equality, they are not in principle opposed to the political ideal of an open public realm, in which particular claims to justice are expressed:

> This is why, you know, green movements and whatever have done so well, because they've been, you know, very good at lobbying around. Now, I don't, you know what I mean, like, don't get me wrong, I'm not against the green movement, or anything like that. But they're a minority faction,

> again, aren't they, you know? We all care about the environment to some degree, but to what degree? I mean, you know, your decisions are being made by, you know, two thousand individuals who are very active, and the rest of us sitting back there are saying, "Oh, Jesus, that shouldn't be happening", but not in a position to do anything about it.

As this person's comment indicates, the feeling that the public realm is not open to the likes of them (or at least not between elections, and then in a limited sense) doubly frustrates Boorowa people. Not only do many decisions escape their purview and critical comment, but the political process is, in any case, they feel, "locked up [and] untouchable" to all but those who possess the "communication skills and other skills, professional skills as well, to interpret what they're really saying, or what they're really doing".[8] Describing his dissatisfaction at being unable to convey in his capacity as a local councilor to representatives of the RTA the gravity of the NSW government's proposal for the Boorowa community, Mark told me, "Like, I can't get up there and speak as good as any of those sort of people. But when I do say something, it's, it is from the heart and it is what I mean, what I believe, you know". Speeches from the heart do not typically cut much ice with rationalist discourses. They are also given short shrift by democratic elites, some of whom do not recognise or refuse to acknowledge themselves as such.

In his introduction to *Pauline Hanson, One Nation and Australian Politics*, Bligh Grant muses, after John Dryzek: "political science is a knowledge-based culture, but is it necessarily an *expert* culture?" (1997: 17, emphasis in original). Grant rejects emphatically the notion that this is so, and dismisses as "nonsense" the idea that the study of politics is the domain of a few. On the contrary, he argues that "the study of politics belongs to everybody", and that political science has not, unlike other social sciences, "gone the way of becoming instrumental criteria by which people are arranged, classified and told what to do and think" (1997: 17). But this is to miss the point made both by Boorowa people and those Grant chastises for failing to view government as their own (1997: 16). Clearly, political science is not *necessarily* an expert culture. One can, like Grant, "exercise [the] right to an education", learn how the political process works and engage in "serious political reflection" (1997: 17). At the

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[8] An example of this relates to the Regional Summit commissioned by the Hon. John Anderson MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in late 1999, and conducted throughout the year 2000. The Minister sought to identify "the critical success factors, particularly those relating to community capacity (human capital) that facilitate the economic/employment, social and environmental outcomes for communities experiencing change" (Regional Women's Advisory Council 2000: 5). Although submissions were invited from local government authorities and communities, the only representative allowed at the summit was the Australian Local Government Association. (This was despite much protestation from communities such as that of Boorowa.)

same time, however, one can still not have one's voice heard or understood, and enjoy little in the way of meaningful political participation. The *practice* of politics and exercise of political power, it is important to note, may in fact have very little to do with political science or "the study of politics".[9]

Boorowa people are concerned with all forms of invisible government and with decisions and activities that are not made known to citizens. They are, however, especially perturbed where those decisions made as a result of interest group activism are likely to have a more or less direct impact upon their lives, and perceived autonomy:

> It [the process of interest group pluralism] skews the legislative people to these minority groups, and instead of, like we end up with lots of little laws to satisfy, or to appease, the minority groups. Whereas, if they sat back, the laws that are there could possibly have worked without having them, without there having to be new legislation, new changes.

> It's only a few people around the place that are actually being seen and heard and saying you have to be somebody for our rules.

What really irks Boorowa people is that a substantial proportion of state legislation appears to be premised upon their own lives as problematic, and demands further intrusions into, and control of these as a result. Generally speaking, as benighted rural people they: have despoiled the land and continue to do so where they are not closely monitored and regulated; are racist, xenophobic and, in the case of males, sexist, and females, subservient; are poorly versed in their rights and responsibilities as citizens; possess guns that pose a threat both to themselves and others, among other things.[10] Many of the demands made of them are, they recognise, a result of the influence of big business and the state that they see as increasingly serving these corporations' interests. They are also, however, attributed to those oppositional movements whose liberatory intent is, they feel, founded upon the censure of various aspects of their lives. "We're not pawns", Shep told me. "We shouldn't be political pawns. People do wake up, and they know which is, you know, for the betterment of themselves for the future. But

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[9] Bligh Grant's assumption is one that is common to political scientists and, in particular, elite democratic theorists. It is a notion that is roundly criticised by Hal Colebatch in his 1992 analysis of the Civic Expert Group's diagnosis of a political knowledge deficit in Australia (see the Introduction to this thesis).

[10] Amid other examples, Boorowa people cite the dismantling of their local Hospital Board, and the institution of a compulsory (and, for them, costly) Koala Habitat Study and sewerage tank inspections in the district. This is notwithstanding the fact that, in the first instance, the Hospital Board was (according to them) operating very effectively; in the second, no Koalas or traces thereof had ever been espied in Boorowa Shire or surrounding environs; and, in the third, that the offending sewerage tank, whose leakage was responsible for the enforced inspection of all others, was located in a particularly environmentally sensitive, water catchment area, very unlike Boorowa Shire.

they've got to be given a bit of an opportunity, too, to determine that. Instead of being, sort of, just pushed on all the time". When Boorowa people talk about existing laws being made to function for minority groups, they are placing their faith in the capacity of ordinary people and civil society to accommodate a range of interests and enable the negotiation of acceptable compromises. Legislation and the demand for expert intervention, on the other hand, not only signals a mistrust of one's fellows but also entails the further rationalisation of social relations and reliance upon regimes of expertise.

Caution such as this on the part of ordinary people highlights an aspect of Young's theory of justice that is somewhat unconsidered and contradictory. As Thomas Dumm points out, Young "embraces Foucault's discussion of power in her critique of liberals", only to then "abandon ... it when it comes to her quasi-socialist program" (1992: 521). Thus, Young does not consider the degree to which her politics of difference demands the incursion of state power into people's lives in order to ameliorate conditions of oppression and disadvantage.[11] And given the potentially damaging unintended consequences of such interventions,[12] Dumm argues, these conditions might better be left alone. The realisation of moral autonomy rests on a complex socio-political equation. As such, it will not be finessed through such forceful means.

Material needs and moral autonomy

Boorowa people appear to be rather more conscious than Young (in her 'quasi-socialist', liberatory mode, at least) of potential threats posed by the state, under whatever auspices, to their moral autonomy. This consciousness, allied with their commitment to the community at large and their awareness of many of the constraints placed upon the state's actions, influences their limiting their demands to only those goods and services necessary to ensure the moral autonomy they so prize.[13] In their view, state intervention

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[11] This is evident in her expansive definitions of domination and oppression and allied conception of social justice. Young's (1990) notion of social justice is, in addition to issues of material welfare, concerned with the enablement and empowerment of all citizens. To be considered adequate and just, Young argues, a conception of social justice must address the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realisation of the general values of self development and self determination. Where these conditions are absent or constrained, injustice in the form of oppression and domination may be said to exist.

[12] Along with, one might add, the relatively trivial nature of some forms of symbolic domination. On the unintended consequences of governments' attempts to counter oppression and disadvantage through formal equality of treatment, see Phillip Howard (1994). On this point, see also de Swaan (1988). Swaan is, in his study of the welfare state, less concerned with the problem of financing collective institutions than with "the ever-increasing control of the central state and its conglomerate of bureaucracies over more and more intimate aspects of life" (1988: 11).

[13] Boorowa people do not, on the whole, feel subservient to, subjugated by, or antagonistic towards, the state in general. Neither could their relationship to the state be entirely accurately characterised as ambivalent. Instead, it is best thought of as a wary, businesslike one. (On Australians' *positive* relationship with the state, see Chesterman and Galligan 1999: 11 and Thompson 1994). Frustrated

in people's lives is only justifiable inasmuch as, and to the degree that, this is necessary to ensure people's capacity to participate meaningfully in the community:

> And, see, this might go against the philosophy of, you know, what I said before. You know, you should be left to your own, and whatever. But, I've never taken money from the government in all my time, you know. I've always worked, and whatever. And this is what I mean; if you look after yourself, the interference comes from a, you know, another way. But, if I was getting money from the government, it also should interfere and try to, you know, get me back into the workforce, or back into, a member of the community, like a working member of the community, or whatever function I have in the community.

Those material needs, the goods and services provided by the state, are for Boorowa people more of a means to an end than an end in themselves. "We're not looking for handouts", Peter, and others insisted, "We're looking for essential services". The immediate 'end' is, in their current, local socio-political context, the survival and well-being of the Boorowa community and their selves, its members. For it is in this context that they feel they are best equipped to realise what they see as 'the good life'. Indeed, the Boorowa community not only enables but also to a large degree embodies the good life. The good life is not that which is incessantly promoted by advertisers. It does not involve constant competition for material goods, status or the exercise of power. Social life is not and should not, they feel, be subsumed by consumerism or politics. Instead, the good life is grounded in their ordinary, everyday folkways and community existence. It means looking after yourself and realising the general values of self development and self determination:

> I think there's that, less desire to be on top, you know what I mean? You go along and you make yourself, but the point is, there's not, you're not driven by the almighty dollar. It's lifestyle.

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though they may be in their interactions with various mediating institutions and, in particular, with these institutions' regimes of expertise, Boorowa people do not attribute these difficulties to 'the state' itself. They know that they exercise *some* control over the state. They are also reasonably confident that, when push comes to shove, based on historical experience, democratic values *can* win out. Boorowa people are conscious of a tradition of struggle against the state, where this institution was deemed too oppressive to the interests of labour. They celebrate at the Irish Woolfest, and remember in daily conversation, both the revolutionary pioneers of the town and the exploits of the bushranger Ben Hall and his gang in the area during the 1860s. They are, however, rather less confident of their capacities in relation to the state in the context of globalisation:

> I think as corporate Australia is becoming more powerful, I think individuals, and particularly the small individual, is suffering. But, yes, I think of my kids and the future, you know, corporate Australia into the world is really going to hamper people's rights - yes, impinge on people's rights, because people aren't capable enough to stop it. It's moving inexorably, I think.

> Raised expectations, you know, you're watching TV and that gives you a, or media, other media, the paper or whatever, everybody has an expectation that you're going to be successful and make it. But out here, that's not what life's all about. And so, our satisfaction, we're not grasping for the big end and not being happy with our little lot in life. And I don't see that as, I don't think that's bad to have those hopes or dreams. But you've got to be a realist, too, and say, "well, that doesn't come to us all".

Simultaneously, though, the good life involves supporting and helping to meet the needs of others, as well as contributing to the community as a whole. In short, central to their well-being and perhaps chief among their perceived needs, is the ability to exercise a meaningful, relational form of moral autonomy.

Moral autonomy and community

Boorowa people's sense of moral responsibility is for the most part grounded in the burdens of everyday life. They aspire to ordinary, common sense virtues that are accessible to anyone and developed out of historical experience rather than codes or rules. These virtues are small-scale and close to home, yet at the same time (as they see it) universal, characteristics that are reflected in their political action. Their commitment to others is thus comprehended and manifested in abstraction, extrapolated as it is from their immediate experience and perceived obligations. Perhaps the environmental slogan, 'Think global, act local' captures most accurately and succinctly this grass roots ethos of moral responsibility. Boorowa people concentrate primarily on what they can do as individuals and as a community in a practical respect to help others, remedy the wrongs of the past, and problems of the present. Moreover, they expect others to do likewise. Boorowa people pride themselves on their willingness to help others, regardless of who they are, and to accept the blame for their own actions (where these breach reasonable rules and conventions of conduct) and their consequences, and have little time for those who do not. They are not interested in what they see as endless hand-wringing over those issues over which they themselves feel they exercise little ultimate control. Postures such as these are, in their view, frequently motivated by ethical credentialism - a concern with how one is seen by one's peers - and all too often unaccompanied by demonstrable commitment and results:

> You certainly do notice that city people seem to, it's hard to be general, but I think that generally you can say that, my observation is that a lot of city people tend to get very worked up about a lot of things that country people might think aren't worth, sort of, getting too worried about. So, I guess they're, they're often more concerned about form and appearances and, you know, not only

> how they look, but how they appear to other people as human beings. So they're a bit more, and that might just be that, you know, they're in contact with a lot more people.

Instead, they demand that we at all times take stock, establish and prioritise what needs to and can realistically be achieved for the majority and for those most down-trodden, and then do something concrete and practical to address these problems.

Boorowa people's claims could hardly be said to be limited to demands for goods and services. Underlying these claims at all times are calls for a measure of moral autonomy and control that is, as they see it, increasingly threatened. The main source of threat in their current context is those policies and institutions that discourage and delegitimise collective action on behalf of their fellows, and lasting solidarities. They are, therefore, particularly attuned to and wary of forms of governance that attempt to construct them as self-serving client-consumers, rather than as 'stakeholders'; as subjects and not citizens.

Their resistance, though, stems not simply from the calculated threat posed to the survival of their community through such a conception of the individual. They are indeed aware that the 'individualist ethos' promoted by both big business and the state has the potential to threaten the viability of the many voluntary groups and associations that sustain the town and give it its life.[14] But this instrumental consideration was not the only significant spur to their resistance to the NSW government's proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services. Nor does it begin to explain the vehemence with which they reject the philosophy and assumptions underpinning such (competition) policies. They oppose the notion of themselves as individualised actors principally because this construct does not correspond with their perceived experiences and understandings of their selves, and of others. It describes and prioritises, as they see it, as a matter of ideological convenience but one aspect - and not the most important one at that - of their being.

Boorowa people perceive their experience, and are conscious, of their selves as relational. Being more or less thoroughly implicated in the community, they are not and

[14] But see Peter Saunders (1993) for a contrary perspective. Saunders defends a liberal concept of citizenship, arguing that a liberal social order of market capitalism can generate the conditions for full citizenship, and that the pursuit of egalitarianism and construction of socialist political institutions tend necessarily to undermine it. Saunders acknowledges the potential dangers associated with what Durkheim termed "excessive individualism". However, he goes on to argue that market relations do not necessarily preclude 'virtuous' behaviour or a sense of community membership, nor collectivised systems encourage them. Indeed, he maintains (once again after Durkheim) that belonging secured through enforced collectivism tends not to generate cohesion but fragmentation.

cannot be entirely self-interested and atomistic.[15] This is not to imply that they are selfless; nor is it to suggest that their community relationship is total. They recognise, of course, that they are, to a degree, autonomous individuals. As such, they do not object to being obliged to accept, at the end of the day, responsibility for many of their choices and actions. Nor do they shy away from defending their interests and moral autonomy, where they see this as necessary, in this milieu. But at the same time they are dependent and interdependent and therefore, as they see it, actors in the fullest sense of the word. Hence, they find such a crude and partial conception of their selves, along with its seemingly ubiquitous cohort, the consumer identity, insulting and demeaning. Worse still, they perceive in such forms of governance instrumental efforts to define their situation and their selves, thereby reducing them unwittingly, or, more likely, intentionally, to a state of 'thinghood'.

Boorowa people's perceived experience as complex relational selves and community members thus helps them to interpret and mediate their relations with these particular forms of expertise. A similar phenomenon and form of resistance is identified by Brian Wynne (1996) in his examination of the reflexive processes which take place amongst the 'grass-roots', or lay publics, in relationship with environmental expert systems. Wynne contests the notion that *unqualified* trust is, or ever has been, invested in experts. He argues that whilst a sense of dependency and lack of agency pervades the public experience of, and relations with, expert institutions, the public "informally but incessantly problematise their ... relationships with expertise of all kinds as part of their negotiation of their ... identities" (1996: 150). The public's reflexive process of relations with expert knowledges and interventions does not, Wynne maintains, resemble the purely rational-calculative model forwarded by Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991a; 1991b) in their respective works on 'risk society'. Instead, it is a more thoroughly cultural-hermeneutic one, in which prescriptive and alien models of the human and the social are resisted by lay people. Indeed, Wynne argues that the risk to

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[15] Robert Bellah *et al.* reveal in *Habits of the Heart* (1985) the uncommon difficulties experienced by middle class Americans in the absence of means with which to describe their interpersonal bonds and preparedness to sacrifice for others. The dominance of liberal-individualism and associated ideas of self-reliance in the development of American culture have, Bellah *et al.* argue, led to the notion of "pure, undetermined choice, free of tradition, obligation, or commitment, as the essence of the self" (1985: 152). Although Bellah *et al.*'s respondents felt extremely uncomfortable with this conception of an unencumbered self, they struggled in the face of modernity's tendency to fragmentation, disconnectedness and ahistoricism for a language with which to move beyond the isolated self and 'reconnect' with others. The language and practices of liberal individualism are so dominant, Bellah *et al.* argue, that "alternatives are difficult to understand" (1985: 155). Without a renewal of commitment and community, Bellah et. al. maintain, those most valuable aspects of individuals' separation and individuation, namely people's "sense of dignity and autonomy as persons" (1985: 286), cannot be sustained. Instead, they are likely to end in nihilism and/or a desire for authoritarianism. On Bellah *et al.*'s view, it is necessary to reappropriate the past - and, more specifically, some version of the civic republican and biblical traditions - in the light of the present, bearing in mind at all times the distortions that mar the past of every tradition (1985: 155).

identity produced by dependency on expert systems that typically operate with unreflexive abandon as to their own culturally problematic and inadequate models of the human is *the* fundamental sense of risk in 'risk society'. According to this understanding, common sense is always potentially in epistemological conflict with supposedly meaning-neutral expert knowledges about the underlying, assumed purposes of knowledge.

In their encounters with experts and policies that they see as promoting a conception of people as principally individualised, rational and calculating, and social life as competitive and political in every respect, Boorowa people resist. This conception of the human and social simply does not correspond with their perceived cultural-hermeneutic experience.[16] Whereas the empiricist, strictly rational utilitarian approach to policy making attempts to reduce this process largely to the consideration of economic facts - to collapse social and historical questions into technological concerns (Wynne 1982) - Boorowa people's evaluation of policy is at all times concerned with questions of control and autonomy. Their common sense informed assessment of policy insists that social and historical questions such as: How will this policy affect my autonomy and degree of estrangement now and in the future? and, Will this policy negate the exercise of my personal responsibility? are rational, and must be considered. In keeping with Wynne's critique of Beck and Giddens, then, Boorowa people's is not entirely, or primarily, a rational-calculative assessment. It poses questions that are difficult (if not impossible) to ask - much less answer - in the terms of a strictly rational-utilitarian policy debate. Moreover, it draws heavily on their perceived experience of community, for these questions are, as they see them, intimately linked to this collective and to its tradition of commitment and support of its members.

Thus, one cannot read from Boorowa people's politics an entirely uncritical common sense. They are, to some degree, critical of the distributive paradigm of justice - and for reasons similar to those outlined by Young. This paradigm, they recognise, confines policy debates mainly to the consideration of economic questions. Such a severely circumscribed framework does not and cannot account for the social and personal implications of decisions made on this basis for people's autonomy and control - now and in the future.

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[16] As noted earlier, it is also seen as co-extensive with their further marginalisation through the construction of people and relationships as things. Although some social and political theorists perceive emancipatory promise in contractualist forms of citizenship (see Chapter One), this form of governmentality is certainly not - in its radical form - seen by Boorowa people as enhancing their own autonomy.

Similarly, they are aware of the symbolic violence entailed in such processes. They know that in the course of their existences they are subjected to various impositions upon their selves, and are typically prepared to submit to many of these (either consciously or unconsciously) as functional requirements. They are not, however, willing to accept the wholesale construction of their selves as individualised, rationalistic client-consumers. To do so would be both to deny their valued, lived traditions - their reality - and submit to an alien form of socio-political order. For them, such forms of governmentality amount, in effect, to an ontological assault on their selves.

Boorowa people are also critical of a political economy that allows such decisions to be made, and in such a manner. How, they insist, can decisions with the potential for such social damage be reached on the basis of such minimal consultation with, and apparent consideration for, those individuals and communities directly affected? This disregard, when combined with the implicit demand that they speak with the 'right' voice and/or rely on the relevant experts and expertise to do so for them signalled for them a triumph of instrumental rationalism and their own marginality and lack of meaningful autonomy. Boorowa people are aware in a general sense of other limitations on their action and autonomy. Many spoke of their lack of education and the burden imposed by a history of political and cultural marginalisation. They know that they lack what Bourdieu (1984) terms 'distinction', and that it is this that determines to a large degree one's self-determination. But from where they stand, the political emphasis is and must be placed upon the satisfaction of material needs, for these are, in their set of circumstances, so closely allied with the realisation of other forms of autonomy as to be indistinguishable. Their critique is, in this respect, more limited than, but at the same time a partial evaluation of, Young's. It is restricted by their consciousness of the need to defend their autonomy against encroachments stemming from a number of perceived sources.

Boorowa people's critique thus takes a cultural-hermeneutic form. It is grounded in their common sense understanding of their everyday community life and cultural traditions. Moreover, it seeks vigorously to defend this life and these traditions as a basis for the expression of community members' moral autonomy. Herein lies what is perhaps, for critical theory, the most alarming feature of political action such as Boorowa people's: that is, the community-based form that it took and its implications. For it is this aspect that is seen as compromising in a fundamental way these people's moral autonomy and possibility of true freedom. I dwell on this issue in some detail here, due both to the centrality of their community to Boorowa people's existence and perceived moral autonomy, and for the questionable assumptions inherent to the critical theory

perspective it helps to expose. Once again, I refer to Zygmunt Bauman as an exemplar of contemporary critical theory.

The problem of community

Throughout his most recent writings, Bauman is highly critical of the (re)turn to the community, and of its portrayal by social theorists on the left and the right as the necessary condition for the development of humanity and releasing of human potential. As he sees it, this representation flies in the face of Enlightenment reason and the goals of modernity, which had it that in order for people to realise their full potential, the ties of community (and artificial social order in general) should be broken, and individuals "set free from the circumstances of their birth" (Bauman 2000: 74).[17] Moreover, such a depiction, Bauman argues, also "reverses the true order of things" (2000: 75), through its denial of the social constructedness of the 'natural' community. It is individuals, he emphasises, that make of postulated community a 'reality' by acceding to its demands for undivided and primordial loyalty, by acting as if it were real.[18] And because community is entirely dependent upon individual loyalty for its existence, its promise of "the warmth of togetherness, mutual understanding, and love ... relief from the cold, harsh, and lonely life of competition and continuous uncertainty" (Bauman 2000: 76), is belied by a reality of paranoia and the oppression of its members and others. Indeed, in Bauman's view, the inducement of tranquility and freedom from fear is bought at the highest possible price. Seduced and bound by "the siren song" of community, the individual's moral responsibility is effectively expropriated. Rather than confronting "the torments of moral responsibility" (Bauman 2000: 77),[19] and with it the possibility of true freedom, community members instead submit to the certainty of the moral dictates of community and its discipline. Like all other institutions tried and found wanting, community does not cultivate moral, but disciplined, selves, which can be, and are, "deployed ... in the service of the cruel, mindless inhumanity of the endless (and hopeless) intercommunal wars of attrition and boundary skirmishes" (Bauman 2000: 77).[20] The development of truly moral selves, Bauman argues, demands as an

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[17] For a fuller exposition of Bauman's argument, see Bauman, Z. 2001a. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity.

[18] On this view, the processes of governmentality associated with competition policies do not so much entail the 'construction' of Boorowa people as their 'deconstruction'. Their ontological disquiet thus stems largely from their being forced to confront the 'reality' of an individualised society.

[19] Bauman talks in *Postmodern Ethics* of a "postmodern moral crisis" (1993: 21), in which a profound power to influence the life and actions of others is complemented by a lack of moral knowledge and skills, and mistrust and uncertainty about those that are available and/or offered.

[20] In his critique of community, Bauman posits a particularly restrictive ideal type. And despite the more 'grounded' nature of her critique of the ideal and expression of community, Young does likewise. Although she recognises the "value and specificity of ... face-to-face relations" (1990: 223), and the humanly valuable qualities of warmth and sharing that characterise communities of mutual regard (1990: 223), Young insists that this form of relations and the community ideal should not be privileged as a

alternative the acceptance and defense of uncertainty as a "permanent condition of life" (2000: 78). Only in an open environment of uncoerced choice and "no indubitable and universally agreed upon codes and rules" (Bauman 2000: 78) may people exercise genuine moral responsibility and, without such "autonomous, morally self-sustained, and self-governed (often therefore unwieldy and awkward) citizens [the possibility of] a fully-fledged, self-reflective, and self-correcting political community" (Bauman 2000: 78) is inconceivable.

The ideal of the autonomous, self-directing subject

For Bauman, then, true freedom entails an ability and willingness on the part of individuals to call into question *all* aspects of present socio-political arrangements - including the socially-conditioned reality of (consumer) freedom itself - and to exercise uncoerced choice in decision-making processes over how these arrangements *should* be organised. In order to be emancipated, individuals must (transcend their common sense knowledge to) question the iron laws of social reality that structure their interests, restrict freedom to negotiated meanings and remove the public from an immediate relation with themselves (Bauman 1988). Only in a radically open political community composed of such morally autonomous citizens, moreover, is *true* belonging, free of oppression and domination through forced consensus, possible. As Bauman sees it, the two are preconditions for the other, they "can only come together; neither is thinkable

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model for the institutional relations of a whole society. Not only is the ideal of community impossible to achieve, she argues, because of subjects' inability to make themselves transparent to one another (Young 1990: 232), but also politically undesirable. In all of its guises (whether it represents a desire for mutual understanding and shared subjectivity or relations of complementary reciprocity) this ideal "seeks to dissolve social inexhaustibility into the comfort of a self-enclosed whole" (Young 1990: 230). Through its demands that people should suppress their differences in favour of common experience and values, and the solid identity and security these impart, the ideal of community oppresses or excludes those experienced as different (Young 1990: 234). Young proposes as an alternative to the ideal of community, "city life", which she describes as "the being together of strangers" (1990: 237). This form of social relations is based upon "an openness to unassimilated otherness" (Young 1990: 237); the overlapping, intermingling and flourishing of social group difference and a unity in otherness, rather than sameness. Politics informed by such an ideal would, she maintains, be one that "attends to rather than represses difference" (Young 1990: 7). Although it is true that community necessarily entails inclusion and exclusion, it is important to note that some communities are more open than others, and that this feature can work for rather than against difference. The minimal requirement for community appears to be that of shared commitment. But this commitment need not inevitably be to the preservation of sameness and exclusion of difference, or to principles that have this as their result. As Peter Stromberg argues, "people may share commitments without sharing beliefs; it follows that they may constitute a community without that community being based in consensus" (1986: 13). Successful communities may be based on minimal commitments that do not attempt to collapse difference into sameness. Neither are such communities without precedent. James Tully (1995) has identified a number of community associations that are loosely based on the principles of mutual recognition, consent and the continuity of cultural traditions. These associations, he argues, strive for inclusive diversity and against exclusive conformity as a result. Corrupted though it may be, community is a valuable means of expressing interpersonal bonds and preparedness to sacrifice for others. It would be unwise to sacrifice this caché through what may be, as Tully describes it, an unduly pessimistic view of the possibility of understanding among culturally diverse human beings (1995: 133).

without the other" (2000: 79). In effect, this statement amounts to an acknowledgement (explicitly articulated elsewhere (Bauman 1988)) on Bauman's part that freedom, or moral autonomy, only exists as a social relation. In other words, freedom entails constraint. However, these socially and politically imposed constraints and their nature must, for Bauman, be the subject of individual choice and negotiation. It is at this point that Bauman's argument runs into conceptual and ontological difficulties, founded as it is upon an unproblematised notion of 'the individual' and 'rationality'. Notwithstanding his radical critical stance, aspects of Bauman's argument are either assumed or glossed.

Despite his claim that freedom exists only as a social relation, that to be *genuine* this must be a relation between morally autonomous individuals in a radically open democratic political community and, that the elements of this relation must develop dialectically, Bauman implicitly requires either the prior existence of institutions compatible with the development of morally autonomous individuals, that is, radically open democratic, or a type of individual and standard of rationality (or form of consciousness) whose very possibility and political desirability are dubious, and more or less unconsidered throughout his corpus. Logically, of course, like many liberal philosophers before him (including Marx), he demands, and assumes the feasibility of, the latter.

In her 1993 essay, 'Illusions of Rationality: false premisses of the liberal tradition', Alexandra Ouroussoff censures social anthropologists' contrasting of non-Cartesian peoples with their Western counterparts based on the premise that the former's choices and actions are conditioned by tradition, whereas the rational thought of 'We in the West' "has given us the unique ability consciously to separate ourselves from the socio-historical conditions of our existence" (1993: 281). This "myth of liberalism" was, she argues, conceived by liberal philosophers based on little or no empirical inquiry - a lacunae assiduously preserved so as to sustain the illusory ideal and doctrine of absolute freedom. Whilst at first glance Ouroussoff's argument appears to gain little purchase on Bauman's, her point that philosophical liberalism cannot accommodate a truly social conception of the Western person, for fear of unsettling the idea at its heart is, upon further inspection, telling.

Unlike many of the social anthropologists who incur Ouroussoff's ire, Bauman (after Marx) certainly agrees that the choices and actions of We in the West are conditioned by tradition (which, he argues, is itself defended by common sense - see Chapter Two) - no matter how we might choose to otherwise represent and deceive ourselves. Indeed, he sees tradition as constituting one of the major constraints of the present. Likewise (on

the face of it, at least), Bauman would readily concur with Ouroussoff's rejection of the idea that there can be such a thing as freedom without constraint. Purportedly, his argument is (as noted above) simply that a critical form of consciousness would better permit people to choose their constraints and the nature of these. Neither is Bauman likely to be unduly disconcerted by Ouroussoff's ethnographic evidence, which demonstrates that despite our best efforts to sustain the image of Western society as being composed of individuals, or of people who imagine themselves to be individuals (and along with it, the ideals of freedom and rationality), this is an illusion. He would merely argue in riposte that this finding does no damage to the *ideal* of the individual (or at least the one that he promotes). However, when Bauman's argument is subjected to closer scrutiny, the type of individual and form of rationality he defends betrays a tacit commitment to the ideal of absolute freedom, thus rendering him susceptible to Ouroussoff's fundamental criticism of liberal philosophers and abstract liberal philosophy.[21] Bauman's morally autonomous and innovative individual is not conceptualised in the process of being related; moreover, in the terms of his political ideal he or she *cannot* be truly engaged in social process, unless this conforms to certain formal rules and procedures. In short, Bauman's individual is not a real human being in this, or any other alternative, foreseeable, reality.

In the absence of an *agora* and institutions necessary for the free expression and negotiation of socio-political views and ideas - such as the ideal-speech situation outlined by Habermas (1971; 1972), and endorsed in earlier works (1976) by Bauman - the individual is unable to sustain her or his moral identity against possible crisis, and thus subject to the condition of anomie[22] and potential for nihilism associated with this.

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[21] At the same time - a little ironically, perhaps - it reveals Bauman's essential reliance upon common sense. According to Bauman's own taxonomy of common sense knowledge, at the core of his thesis lies what is, in Pierre Bourdieu's view, a fundamentally problematic commonsensical perception. Bauman's argument is, I maintain, driven by the ideal of philosophical liberalism, and suffers from methodological monism as a result. In spite of his ostensible defence of a dialectical conception of society, to preserve the liberal ideal, Bauman cannot avoid reducing societal relations to an essential opposition between the atomised individual and the collective. Neither, of course, can he fail to accord ontological priority to the former. As Bourdieu sees it, all such dualisms "reflect a commonsensensical perception of social reality of which sociology must rid itself" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 15). Hence, Bauman may be subjected to the very criticism he levels at scientific sociologists. He himself cannot avoid a reliance upon common sense. In his work, this has merely been suppressed. Throughout this thesis, I have challenged the clear-cut distinction drawn between common sense and critical thought by many social theorists. In doing so, I have demonstrated that, by implication, Bourdieu is himself not immune to the terms of his own critique - his representation of common sense might itself be seen as a commonsensical dualism. Nevertheless, my general point still stands. If Bauman's own thesis is not, and cannot be, immune to the contaminating influence of common sense - as he himself defines it - and, conversely, common sense contains critical elements, then this undercuts the clear dichotomy he draws between common sense and critical thought. His argument is exposed as an essentialist one, along with all that this entails.

[22] Rendering the (moral) background expectancies of everyday life inoperative, Garfinkel found, induced in subjects "behaviours directed to such a senseless environment of bewilderment, uncertainty, internal

People *need* to be able to understand and affirm to themselves and others the justification of their actions and institutions; they require a moral identity. Yet, for Bauman this requirement merely amounts to a desire for external authority, a power greater than the self to dictate the limits of free will and moral responsibility. This is, in his view, a fundamental human weakness that needs to be overcome - *by the individual* - in her or his quest for absolute freedom and true belonging (see Chapter Two). Confronting anomie and the "torments of moral responsibility" (Bauman 2000: 77), facing the world as it *really* is - a Hobbesian natural state of competition and continuous uncertainty - is the price to be paid for open choices, free will and the possibility of freedom.

The form of rationality this stance entails when read in tandem with Bauman's earlier works, and the freedom it supposedly enables, is, in Ouroussoff's opinion, an intellectual conceit.[23] Nor is she alone in this assessment. Although the detached rationality required to de-reify experience in the course of everyday life is achievable through the Cartesian method of philosophical doubt, or Schutz's "phenomenological epoche", Burke Thomason (1982) insists that this is a largely intellectual/philosophical option, and not a capacity that may become the property of, and exercised by, all, as Bauman demands. To some extent, the denial of the social constructedness of reality is, he feels, essential. One cannot, Thomason argues, "live meaningfully, consciously, in a world of pure becoming. The flux must be ordered and the uniqueness and diversity of life must be suppressed" (1982: 94; see also Gouldner 1975). We need objective, tangible things that we can react against. Questions of feasibility aside, the detached rationality espoused by Bauman is also politically undesirable.

Unlike Habermas, Bauman seems relatively unconcerned about the unchecked, even fundamentalist, claims that radical self-choice raises free from 'appropriate' public fora. These claims and the reactions to them are simply the price paid, and necessary condition for, true freedom and moral beings. "Moral conduct", he maintains (in both a

conflict, psycho-social isolation, acute and nameless anxiety along with various symptoms of acute depersonalisation" (1967: 54-5).

[23] Critical theory's ideal of rationality is also, Young argues, oppressive of difference. Young's insistence on the situatedness of social critique and the importance of social group difference leads her to contest what she sees as critical theory's detached stance. Critical theory, she argues, tends to privilege the qualities of individualism and rationality, thus aligning itself with liberalism and its 'virtues'. As Young sees it, these ideals buttress current, oppressive conceptions of the political subject and public sphere. Whilst, in the first instance, the ideal of rationality contains a male and Western bias, in the second, the ideal of individualism tends to "suppress difference by conceiving the polity as universal and unified" (Young 1990: 10). The prizing of unitariness, abstraction and standards of "pure" rationality and intellect are predicated upon the exclusion of difference - the marginalisation and dependency of those who cannot achieve the required standards of detachment. Rather than challenging these conceptions, Young holds that through its tendency towards philosophical abstraction, critical theory perpetuates these ideals (albeit in another form).

literal and normative sense), "cannot be guaranteed" (Bauman 1993: 10). Bauman insists upon "unwieldy and awkward citizens" (2000: 79), individuals who are at all times critical of cultural tradition, and who seek constantly to render shared interpretations of this tradition problematic. His ideal citizen actively cultivates a sense of irony towards her or his social and cultural context and institutions so as to expose and maintain their contingency, as well as revealing instances and systemic patterns of symbolic violence. Nothing is sacred to Bauman's ideal political subject but the principle - indeed, the *reality* - of openness and choice, combined with the anticipated attendant desire to be a more moral being.

Effectively, Bauman aims to subject to constant critical attention those very traditions and institutions that his argument assumes, and upon which it relies, namely our "individual conscience and sentiment of responsibility", along with our "resources of moral sense and fellow feeling" (2000: 78).[24] Without appropriate institutions and public fora - ones that afford some measure of protection to people's civic traditions and commitments - though, the adoption of an ironic attitude towards these, no matter how well-intentioned, is likely to result in a destructive form of nihilism. As John O'Neill argues, "life-worlds cannot be subjected to remorseless parody or to an unremitting gaze of alienation without this impulse turning against itself and poisoning its original desire to show how things and relations between people might have been" (1995: 195). There is nothing wrong with Bauman's argument in principle, in this respect. We must lean on institutions in order to change them. However, the way in which we go about this is all-important.

Without non-self-interested people or institutions structured so as to ensure that the rationality required for individual moral autonomy is made a shared resource, lay-

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[24] This is assuming, of course, that he has not departed from his insistently social-constructivist stance to attribute to these qualities a natural, biological status. However, this is precisely - and somewhat perplexingly - what he appears to have done. Bauman has ascribed to the moral impulse, or conscience, an innate standing, arguing that

> [i]f solitude marks the beginning of the moral act, togetherness and communion emerge as its end - as the togetherness of the 'moral party', the achievement of lonely moral persons reaching beyond their solitude in the act of self-sacrifice which is both the hub and the expression of 'being for'. We are not moral thanks to society; we live in society, we are society, thanks to being moral. At the heart of sociality is the loneliness of the moral person. Before society, its lawmakers and its philosophers come down to spelling out its ethical principles, there are beings who have been moral without the constraint of codified goodness. (1993: 61)

Without engaging in a potentially circular nature/nurture debate, it seems to me that if one rejects Bauman's initial premise that the moral impulse is pre-social, then he may unwittingly have imparted substance to the argument that common sense is, through its intentional universality, actually the basis for morality.

people are vulnerable to the machinations of individuals and groups so endowed. It should be noted that an attitude of detachment and sense of irony is most easily adopted by those individuals who imagine themselves as being least attached to a given culture's traditions and institutions through choice, and able, as a result, to articulate and treat them as *concepts*. When a line is drawn between concepts and their experiential aspect (such as the experience of oppression and domination and common sense knowledge of these) by those in a position to 'define reality', a pre-requisite for 'understanding reality' then becomes either detachment from emotion and cultural commitment, or reliance upon experts and expertise. Lay-people unable or unwilling to do so are thus potentially further alienated from experiential reality (see Chapter Two). The freedom of philosophical abstraction is a luxury available to few. And, at present, it is largely those who possess the appropriate cultural capital[25] and necessary material resources (and whose interests are most likely to be served through increased intervention in and control over ordinary/lay people's lives) that exercise this faculty.

In his critique of community and his formulation of an emancipatory socio-political ideal, Bauman presupposes an unrealistic type of individual and rationality. He thus, by implication, sets up as unattainable his own desired forms of moral autonomy and freedom. This does not, as already noted, pose a problem in and of itself. Ideals are by definition aspirational.[26] They can *become* problematic due to their unintended consequences. "Hell", George Bernard Shaw (1903) notes in his 'Maxims for revolutionists', "is paved with good intentions, not with bad ones". Alternatively, they can be made dilemmatic as a result of their being usurped and exploited by dominant and oppressive interests. The point to be made here is that some ideals lend themselves to instrumental applications more so than do others. Those ideals that are characterised by essentialism, especially where this reveals a tacit desire to be free from social reality and the shared conditions that make us human, are particularly vulnerable to such abuse. It is against just such essentialisms and forms of abuse that common sense stands four-square and, in doing so, exposes yet another of its crucial critical features.

Common sense and irony

Bauman privileges an ironic sense of our own social and cultural context as being a key means to emancipatory reason and action. Using irony, he argues, the actor may shift between, analyse and critique different orders of reality. This is a notion that Bauman shares with postmodern theorists such as Richard Rorty (1989). Along with Rorty,

[25] That is, most attached (in a sense) to the culture's traditions and institutions.

[26] Bauman's thesis takes us into the territory of Kantian morality. Kantian ethics is based on the separation of fact and value, arguing that one cannot derive an ought from an is. The ultimate sanction of Kantian ethics, therefore, is the ideal: that which ought to exist but does not.

Bauman sees common sense as essentially opposed to irony. Whereas irony demands a recognition of the contingency of social reality and doubt in the validity of its rules and values, common sense is held to be oriented to controlling the unpredictable future through single possible solutions. Borrowing Jean-François Lyotard's (1984: xxiv) definition of the postmodern, we might describe postmodern irony as incredulity toward the metanarratives of modernity that are underpinned by neophobic common sense.

Earlier, I discussed John O'Neill's problems with postmodern theory's conception of irony.[27] In O'Neill's (1995) view, irony as a political method, such as that espoused by Bauman, undermines common sense values and a political commitment to their realisation by all. It 'liberates' middle class intellectuals and first world people whilst threatening to abandon, along with the modernist project, others to their fate. The liberty offered by postmodern irony is thus, as O'Neill sees it, a superficial, cynical and parasitical form; it is based upon the conceit and self-deception of theorists (and others) who imagine themselves capable of transcendence. Where postmodern theorists accuse modernism of being based upon the arrogance of universalism, O'Neill charges that these theorists are themselves arrogant in their assumption that they could exist as transcendent beings.

In his eagerness to critique postmodern social theory and adherents such as Rorty and Lyotard, though, O'Neill plays unwittingly into its hands. Concerned as he is by the considered threat posed to common sense values by 'postmodern' irony, O'Neill neglects to challenge the validity of postmodern theory's opposition between irony and common sense. In this manner, he also misses an opportunity to critique postmodern social thought's unqualified attribution of a critical status to the latter at the expense of the former. Rather than simply accede this argument, O'Neill might have considered alternative forms of irony and readings of its relationship with common sense.[28] If we refer, again, to James Scott's (1987) empirical data, we find that under certain circumstances at least, irony and common sense are certainly not opposed. On the contrary, the two are allies, existing in a symbiotic relationship. The attempts of Sedaka's elites to impose upon that region's poor their own image of a just and natural social order are experienced as contradictory and irrational. The common sense of Sedaka's poor not only tells them that this is so, but it also provides them with resources with which to contest and resist such impositions.

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[27] See also Habermas's critique of Lyotard in Rorty (1994).

[28] This omission reflects O'Neill's generally vague posture towards common sense. Although he argues vigorously that ordinary people's common sense is more critical than many social theorists appreciate (singling out Anthony Giddens for special attention), O'Neill makes little attempt to elaborate how critical, in what context(s), and in what respect(s).

And just as Sedaka's poor are able to recognise through their use of common sense the incongruity between the ideologies purveyed by the dominant social order and their perceived experienced social reality, so, too, the paradox of Boorowa people's situation does not escape them. Whereas competition policy and a range of other policies associated with new, contractualist forms of citizenship are supposed to benefit a majority through improved services, reduced prices, increased choice and, therefore, enhanced autonomy, few of these benefits appear to be realised by themselves. Many a wry comment was made to me (and to those infrequent advocates of a 'free market' who visited the town) in relation to such government policy and their perceived experience of it.

Hannah Arendt (1951) argues that totalitarian ideology is characterised by its stubborn devotion to the salvation value of stubborn devotion.[29] She sees as especially frightening totalitarian ideology's capacity to produce senselessness - to empty the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense. Totalitarian instruments, Arendt maintains, defy the logic of common sense through their rendering of *humans* (and I would add, the tradition of common sense virtues) as superfluous. Competition policy, where this is universally applied as a matter of course, and with little or no consideration of context, bears some resemblance to Arendt's description of totalitarian ideology. However, according to Arendt's reading of common sense as being driven by utilitarian motives, it should have little trouble (or at least no fundamental trouble) with such an approach to the development of policy. Despite competition policy's being resented for its unequal distribution of benefits, it should at least 'make sense'. But this is not the case for Boorowa people (see Chapter Four). Their common sense *does* have a problem with competition policy where the maximisation of the total benefit for all is evaluated in predominantly or solely economic terms. This, according to their reasoning, amounts to a disregard and active contempt for specific varying factors; that is, for social reality and factuality. Where common sense is tied to perceived practical reality and not prescriptive belief, such as Boorowa people's in this instance, it is thus profoundly anti-hegemonic. And given that totalitarian ideology displays a contempt for reality that, Arendt argues, distinguishes it radically from revolutionary theories and attitudes (1951), Boorowa people's common sense is clearly critical in this respect. It carries the mark of a reflective - if not 'rational' or theoretical - consciousness.

[29] It is the antithesis of critical common sense in that it fails, or refuses for ideological reasons, to learn from and adapt according to perceived experience.

Although Boorowa people's common sense critique is specifically directed at economic rationalism, its associated philosophy and regimes of expertise, this analysis holds equally for all forms of essentialism. Wherever social reality as perceived to be experienced is discerned to be held in disdain, and common sense is critical in the above sense, it resists. Similarly, where critical common sense is confronted with ideologies that masquerade as or attempt to freeze in place 'the truth' (such as Bauman's 'reality' of individualised society),[30] it rejects these. Common sense entails at the same time a review of the rationality by means of which such power relations - in which some people are able to 'define' social reality and make these definitions count - are made possible. In this manner, Boorowa people's common sense comprises a tacit critique of theories such as Bauman's. I have argued that Bauman's thesis treats freedom and moral autonomy as absolutes, rather than as *truly* processual, and to be weighed and developed in considerations of socio-political action. It is one thing to make use of critical theory's denial that social theory must accede to the given, but it is quite another to defend an ideal type that shows contempt for *human* history and traditions, and that seeks to escape its own ideological roots.

In much of his more recent work, Bauman's line of argument reveals a suppressed desire to escape social reality.[31] Boorowa people do not appear to harbour such aspirations. Theirs is an altogether different conception of freedom and of moral autonomy. Frustrated though they may be with aspects of their situation, Boorowa people in my associations with them display no signs of metaphysical longing. Typically, they do not go beyond mundane, ordinary social life in their attempts to exercise moral autonomy and freedom. Instead, they practice and develop in their everyday activities ordinary moral virtues, and concern themselves politically with those issues more or less directly related to the survival and general well-being of themselves and others, now and in the future. It is this confinement to practical reality that poses problems in terms of the critical capacity of their common sense. The danger is, of course, that ideological practical reality (along with its embedded assumptions) can itself become prescriptive belief - that is, be reified.

Boorowa people's common sense is clearly critical in several respects. It displays a counter-hegemonic intent that enables them (among other things) to resist being "imposed upon by gross contradictions, palpable inconsistencies, and unmask'd impostures" (Geertz 1975: 26). However, to the degree that it derives its critical force from its grounding in their perceived practical reality, without questioning its

[30] See Bauman, Z. 2001b. *The Individualized Society*. Malden, MA.: Polity.

[31] Paradoxically, he thus succumbs to the "intellectualist bias" of which Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 43) and he accuse sociology as a whole.

authenticity, it cannot, for critical theory, be said to be truly critical. We are thus returned to Bauman's essential accusation of and problem with common sense; that is, that it takes the objective nature of social reality for granted and thereby both acts towards its recreation and defends this false reality by rejecting on the grounds of evidence alternative realities. In the following section, I show that Boorowa people's common sense leads them to alternate, in this context, between an understanding of social reality as objective, natural and ahistorical, and as historically contingent and thus subject to their choice, intervention and change.

Common sense and the problem of reification

Earlier, I argued that Bauman's refusal to concede that typification is an indispensible feature of human existence is driven by his commitment to an essentialist ideal of freedom and of rationality. A certain measure of reification is not only inevitable but also crucial if people are to be able to adequately function and stave off anomie (see Gouldner 1975; Thomason 1982). Having said this, however, it is important to acknowledge that there does exist a link between reification and people's passive submission to thing-like externalities. A productive approach to the problem of reification thus dispenses with the notion of this phenomenon as an "immature denial of the realities" (Bourdieu 1990b). It does so in favour of a view such as that of György Lukács (1971), which has it that reification is problematic only where alienating. Beyond the negotiation of this position (see Chapter Two), the problem of reification itself need concern us no further. What is of interest to us here is the notion that common sense reifies, and that this is especially so under the conditions of modernity.

Central to Boorowa people's experience of reality and sense of difference is their community and its traditions. The immediate question, then, is: Do they recognise this institution as a social construction? Where Bauman talks about the reification of community, he attributes this practice largely to those social theorists who have in recent years begun to promote community as a socio-political ideal. He is quite correct to do so, because for those people whose perceived experience it is, such as Boorowa people, community is certainly not, on the whole, reified.[32] Boorowa people know that it is they who have made and continue to make of their community a reality. For them, it has no objective reality independent of its members and their actions (see Chapter Five). And although community ideology may compel them to participate in this body,

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[32] Boorowa people, I have noted, experience great difficulty in conceptualising and articulating the 'fabric of the community'. Their knowledge of the cultural schemas enacted by themselves is at some point, for them, inscrutable. An inability to understand the detail and workings of institutions does not, though, necessarily entail, and should not be confused with, their reification.

and along certain lines, they know that without their input and ongoing commitment, the community has no life or existence. Thus, for them, community ideology is just that.

That common sense should refrain from the reification of social reality where confined to the local, personal setting - such as a small community - finds a theoretical precedent in Schutz's analyses. Schutz argues that it is types lying *outside* the realm of consociates and immediate cognitive interest and relevance, and especially complex types or institutions such as the state, people, economy and class, that are most likely to be reified. The public sphere is thus held to enter the commonsensical experience of the individual as a "nature-like superior reality in so far as it has been removed from an immediate relation with the individual" (Bauman 1976: 84). This is, to a degree, the case for Boorowa people. There is a certain amount of reification evident in their common sense thought. They take for granted many aspects of social order and interpretational categories associated with this order. And coupled with this restricted apprehension of certain structures outside their perceived everyday experience, such as regimes of expertise and the state, is a degree of determinism.

Unlike Sedaka's poor, Boorowa people cannot locate so easily the main causes of their distress close to home. But this is not, as a number of theorists and researchers would have it, due to the dominance of a rural ideology that blinds them to class and other interests (see Chapter Five). They are aware of the plurality of interests in their town, and of the general workings of the wider political economy and social reality. However, whilst it is true that the state government's and big businessess' decisions to withdraw services from the town affect some community members more than others, these policies do nevertheless hold repercussions for them all. Boorowa people can thus be said to share a more obvious and immediate collective fate - in this respect at least - than do Sedaka's wealthy and poor. The state government's proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services can 'objectively' be considered a collective community issue, without of course denying the importance of class. Because their main problems derive from sources external to the town, Boorowa people do not, therefore, have to the same degree as Sedaka's poor the 'option' of using the 'personal' view as a means for avoiding reification.[33] They are nevertheless able to augment this means by drawing on resources that serve a similar purpose.

Nature, common sense and reification

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[33] They may personalise the perceived sources of their discontent - through reference to the 'bean counters' that dominate the state and political decision making that should rightly be composed of citizens - but only in a general, typified sense.

As I noted earlier (see Chapter Five), Boorowa people believe that, generally speaking, life in the country is closer to nature. They cherish this aspect of their existence and frequently emphasise in general conversation the importance of the perceived experience of nature to their way of life and sense of well-being. In this respect, they are no doubt similar to many rural people the world over. But it is not simply the perceived experience of nature that is important to them. Of equal significance is the *idea* (or, ideas) of nature that they employ liberally in making sense of their perceived social experience.

It is just this use of ideas of nature in some Western people's everyday lives that Bell (1994) sought to understand through research he conducted in a country village in southern England. He found that this village's residents (Childerleyans, he calls them) use nature not only as a source of identity, but also of moral understanding. Childerleyans draw on the idea of nature as a realm free of human intrigue (and especially class interests) to develop a 'natural conscience', as an interest-free alternative to the collective conscience. In doing so, these people run the risk of performing what Engels terms the 'conjurer's trick': transferring onto nature their own social experience, categories and orientations, only to then transfer these back into their experience, reinforced. Their hope for an independent realm for developing a natural conscience may thus, if this is indeed the case, be mistaken.

However, Bell argues that whilst Marx and Engel's "reflection theory" "accurately portrays much of the cultural landscape in Childerly", this theory is "too stark, too literal, too deterministic for what is a largely intuitive and casual mental process" (1994: 166). For example, although Childerleyans draw parallels between social and natural categories in their cultivation of natural consciences, these correspondences are never perfect. Neither, Bell suggests, would Childerleyans want them to be. These differences must be there in order to support the understanding they desire of a separation between the natural and collective conscience. I propose here that Bell possibly attributes too much intentionality to this aspect of Childerleyans' thought. It is perhaps not so much that they *want* this separation between the natural other and society, as the banal and commonsensical observation that nature and the social *are* distinct.

Boorowa people may very well prize their life in the country, close to nature, but rural life is not without its problems, nor nature exclusively paradisiacal, beneficent and benign. In reality, nature is capricious and, beyond a certain point, unknowable (see Chapter Five). Although they appreciate the fact that we share an indissoluble bond with nature, Boorowa people do not see humans entirely as a part of nature, in the sense that they are not subject in the same ways as are other animals or inanimate objects to

natural processes. It is this commonsensical idea of nature as separate from humans - as 'out there' - that some Boorowa people appealed to in their resistance to the competitive tendering proposal.

> I mean, I come from the land, mate, and I was raised on the land. I was bloody one of ten from a farming family. And one thing that struck me, you know, like, Mother Nature is a cruel boss. She really is. It's out of our hands, big time. You can't fight that, but we can fight this [the proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services]. This is something we can do something about. In real terms, there's got to be something that can be done about this. And the bean counters have to realise that bloody, what they're doing is, it's not just economic, it's so social. It's so fucking socialised.

Laden as it is with uncertain and complex meanings, the idea of nature furnishes a fecund source for thinking about the social (Williams 1972). Despite the size and scope of 'nature as ideological palette', though, critical social theorists tend to limit it in much the same way as they selectively interpret the political possibilities of common sense. Bauman, for example, emphasises the hegemonic function of nature, wherein all who would resile from true freedom invest certain social behaviours and relations, or, social reality as a whole, with the status of natural events. But whilst it is true that common sense notions of nature such as Boorowa people's - based as they are on the separation and objectification of humans and nature - can and do contribute to a degree of fatalism and determinism, they can also provoke their opposite number. Moreover, they can provide a key defence *against* fetishism. Witness, for example, this person's employment of nature as metaphor in talking about his community commitment:

> I basically believe that we're, to do the job and get it done right is going to be of benefit to the community. And, yes, I do. But not only that, it's basically, on the broad scale, life's the same. I'd like to think that I contribute to the well-being of the community here, as a whole, the country as a whole, and far-reaching to the world as a whole. That's what it, that's basically it. You're a small speck, I suppose, in the big desert. But the whole thing with it is, that's what makes a desert up, is the little grains just here. Then that's what it is. Now, what you do with it is, to a certain thing, you go as the wind blows you, or a certain thing. But if it's blowing on you, you resist as much as you can, to go the way you want to go. That's what it's all about. But if, in real terms, you are, it's like being in the surf or in the desert, you're carried along. And what you've got to do with it is, you've got to basically set - you're different to some water and the sand, is that you have got some control - so what you're going to do is steer yourself in that bigger picture to a path you're happy with. You don't try to get too concerned with things that you really can't change, you know. But you contribute where you can.

We are recognised as a part of, but separate from, nature, in that we exercise as individuals and groups some control over social reality. Crudely put, social reality may be more or less nature-like, but it is never, for Boorowa people, and for critical (Western) common sense thinkers more generally, nature. Having said this, there are nevertheless aspects of social reality that one cannot change, simply because it *is* irrevocably social - or, more to the point perhaps, human. It is not that they are absolute or inevitable, but that they cannot *realistically* be changed, given the order of things *in their totality*.[34] This is a crucial distinction. Maybe this pragmatic calculus (which appears to be typically at work in the common sense thinker) does restrict the nature and scope of their socio-political action. However, it *cannot* be said to derive from the reification of social reality.

A common sense notion of nature, being based upon a subject-object form of knowledge, also enables the cognition of the flip-side of the above equation:

> Most of the time we pick up the paper and they're reporting about rural Australia, you know, and it's all about "The Bush", which sends the wrong message. Because they're talking about the trees and the rocks. You know, to me, you know, we've got sophisticated people.

Boorowa people are aware of and reject at base symbolic representations that would objectify them 'as nature', rendering them passive, to be managed and acted upon.[35] Thus, whilst a common sense idea of nature promotes an ideology of acceptance, or 'being philosophical' about one's condition and fate (what Gramsci refers to as 'folklore' (1971: 325), which serves to validate people's suffering whilst making it appear to be beyond their control), it also promotes resistance to this.

And, just as nature and natural processes must be abstracted by the common sense thinker, and thus, to some extent, objectified, to allow for human opposition and intervention, so too must institutions. It might be argued, as does Raymond Williams (1972), that a common sense understanding of nature - one that counterposes the great abstractions of nature and humans - is essentialist, given that each is so implicated in the

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[34] Nor would they necessarily want to change these, because they are a part of a more or less valued social tradition.

[35] As this person's comment indicates, they are at the same time conscious of attempts to associate them with the nationalist origin myth of the Bush Legend (see Ward 1966). In their view, these portrayals perform a similar objectifying function by representing them as relics of Australia's past (see Ching and Creed 1998; see also Richards 1996). This is not to say that they do not on occasion rhetorically exploit these myths, where this suits their purposes. However, it is then they who are the subjects, rather than objects, of action.

other. On this view, it is necessary to cultivate a relational perspective if we are to avoid simplistic, ideological understandings of, and solutions to, our collective environmental problem. Our problematic social-natural relationships, Williams argues, need to be confronted in their own right, as a whole, rather than in abstract or single ways. Williams may be right. But a *radical* relational concept of nature and humans can be sustained only at a philosophical or ideological level. It cannot form the basis of people's practical day-to-day engagement with their natural environment. And the same holds for an identical subject-object concept of the individual and society, such as that proposed by Bauman.[36] Despite their frequently being inaccessible to Boorowa people's perceived everyday lived experience, institutions are never wholly reified by them. This is, in part, because these institutions, along with criticism of them, are sedimented in their common sense and traditions (see Gramsci 1971). Inscrutable though aspects of it may be at times, social reality is always peopled and, therefore, historical.

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Boorowa people's common sense is critical in a cultural-hermeneutic sense. It draws upon their perceived experience of community, its valued cultural traditions and related conception of moral autonomy in order to assess and resist perceived hegemonic forces. In this respect, it is 'particular'. But, at the same time, their critique of aspects of their reality stems from common sense's dialogical character, and from its intentional universality. As a result, Boorowa people's assessment alternates and is frequently torn between the particular and the universal. From this relationship and tension between their perceived 'direct' experience and more general knowledge of socio-political reality and what it means to be human, Boorowa people's common sense derives much of its moral and critical force.

Their common sense does not employ a strict rational calculus, or rigorous and systematic scepticism and question asking. Instead, it insists upon censuring and balancing extremes in the exercise of power. It rejects attempts to ground policies and institutions in empiricist claims to know socio-political reality (whether these be tacit or explicit). It denounces more trenchantly still those attempts to govern people that do not account for or appear contemptuous of their lived realities and circumstances (and, indeed, of people as human).

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[36] It is not necessary to invoke Claude Levi-Strauss's theory that the opposition of nature and society is, along with binary classificatory systems more generally, an essential feature of the human mind in order to rebut such arguments. One need only acknowledge (as does Bauman himself in *Culture as Praxis*, 1973) that culture inevitably involves the process of structuring, along with its objectified results, and that one cannot exist "in a world of pure becoming" (Thomason 1983: 94).

But as I have shown, the inclination in their common sense critique towards 'balance' is in fact one towards universalism, which largely collapses the particular into the universal. This tends to limit the critical potential of Boorowa people's common sense, as well as weaken its anti-hegemonic faculty. Nevertheless, I have argued that this expression of common sense's intentional universality should not be read simply as unreflexive conformism or false consciousness. To interpret it as such is to neglect or exclude the pervasive problem of power. Alternatively, it is to assume or to place one's faith in the disinterest of certain individuals and groups, and/or the notion of *an* objective knowledge of people's best interests.

Where Boorowa people's common sense is itself biased, emphasising either the universal or the particular, it is also more prone to reification. It is through a consciousness of the duality rather than opposition of these two positions - a dialectical understanding something like that evidenced in their conception of needs - that Boorowa people are able to perceive the constructedness of their social reality. They thereby avoid to a degree 'the problem of reification'.

But the notion of reification, as I have indicated in this chapter, represents a problematic means for assessing common sense's critical efficacy. So, too, does the measure of whether or not people's common sense is grounded in their perceived practical experience. Neither of these criteria should be viewed in isolation, or as abstract forms of opposition rather than as dualisms, when evaluating the critical worth of common sense. Instead, I maintain, common sense's critical worth should be measured according to the extent that it *sustains a dialectic*. Where common sense challenges expressions of power that privilege one element of a duality, thereby emphasising the reciprocity, interaction and interpenetration of elements, it could be said to be 'open' and critical. As I have argued, common sense cannot be 'open' at all times; socio-political action demands to some degree an oppositional or 'closed' stance. However, where common sense is critical, this is a temporary stance and distance - a heuristic device or problematique to be overcome through dialectical means. Such a form of critical common sense would succumb to neither naive objectivism nor its opposite, radical critical relativism. Instead, it would reconcile, through political struggle where necessary, on an ongoing and always provisional basis the elements of any 'duality'. Social reality would always be, for critical common sense, *in principle* open to intervention and change.

CONCLUSION

Typically, common sense and, in particular, the common sense of ordinary people, is treated by social and political theorists and researchers in one of two related ways. In the first of these, it is simply an assumed quantity - a residual - and not a form of 'political' knowledge in its own right. In the second approach - and one that is characteristically informed by the first - ordinary people's common sense is treated as a socio-political problem. On this view, ordinary people's common sense seriously delimits these people's own moral autonomy and political action, as well as impinging on that of others through its influence on social and political institutions. As such, ordinary people's common sense is represented as a dilemma to be overcome in and by the social sciences. In this guise, common sense is treated as a struggle, but only in a limited, and limiting, sense.[1]

I have argued that these approaches are informed, to varying degrees, by problematic epistemological, methodological and ontological assumptions, and that these assumptions go, for the most part, unquestioned and unexamined. To the degree that this is indeed the case, the social sciences are, and are able to remain, relatively unreflexive. They can simply assume the socio-political ignorance and incompetence of ordinary actors whilst simultaneously excluding to a large degree from critical analysis themselves, their concepts and practices. The social sciences can thereby stake a claim to legitimate objectivist sovereignty by effectively abstracting themselves from the field of relationships of society. In doing so, they may - consciously or unwittingly - de-politicise ordinary people's common sense, paring it of its potential resistances and capacities as a socio-political resource as a part of the social scientific project. This, I have argued, is to close off a domain of possibilities for social scientific change, as well as for realistic forms of socio-political innovation, more generally.

In this thesis, I have been concerned to challenge, to a degree, the above readings of ordinary people's common sense by instead looking at ways in which we might privilege it. To this end, I have, at Gramsci's suggestion, examined ordinary people's common sense as a struggle. More specifically, I have focused upon the common sense

[1] In those infrequent instances in which theorists *do* treat as a struggle in a wider sense the common sense of ordinary people, the *telos* is invariably towards its development and rationalisation. This may, indeed, be necessary. However, in the process, insufficient attention has been paid to those potential more subtle qualities of ordinary people's common sense, those qualities that might assist them to negotiate the tensions inherent to socio-political life, whilst also defending their interests in moral autonomy.

of ordinary people as a *resource* in socio-political struggle. I have done so largely through a critique of its treatment in social and political theory and, secondarily, by means of an illustrative case study of Boorowa peoples' common sense understandings of, and responses to, the NSW government's recent proposal to put out to tender the state's road maintenance and development services. It was necessary to employ a situated study of ordinary people's common sense such as this, and qualitative research methods in the process, precisely to account for those aspects of common sense that make for it as a 'political' form of knowledge, namely, its 'particular' as well as 'universal' constitution, and, relatedly, its being more than simply the apprehension and assumption of reality.

Through this study of Boorowa people's common sense in the context of this particular issue, I sketched the broad features of their common sense conceptions of their reality. I also showed how these understandings help to define the nature and scope of their conceptions of moral autonomy and related socio-political action. I thus used this case study to exemplify aspects of my argument, but also to demonstrate *how* some ordinary people's common sense might be considered both critical and as a socio-political resource in the widest possible sense.

In the course of the dispute over the NSW government's proposal to put out to competitive tender the state's road maintenance and development services, Boorowa people's common sense served as an important resource in a material sense. Through its drawing on their understandings of their shared experience, their common sense allowed them to interpret and evaluate the policy, and their situation in relation to it, in terms that were meaningful to them. Using their common sense, they were able to recognise the nature of the proposal and its underpinning logic. They were also well-equipped to gauge its likely effects. This, in turn, enabled a pragmatic and utilitarian form of practical politics that permitted them to make best use of those limited resources available to them. In a context of limited information and bounded rationality, they were able to understand quite clearly through reference to their perceived practical experience the proposal and its likely impacts. This understanding was sufficient to enable them to act without being overly reliant upon experts and expert discourses. They knew all that they really needed to know in order to contest the proposal. At the same time, Boorowa people's common sense pragmatism demanded of them a realistic assessment of their situation. They were unable to delude themselves with regard to the difficulty of their undertaking, and its import. Nor were they able to neglect the need for them to be prepared to compromise.

Their common sense could certainly be regarded as a socio-political resource in this respect. It enabled a realistic and practical form of political action, conducive to their immediate instrumental concerns and purposes. Boorowa people's political action was not only practical, but also rational in an instrumental sense, in that it was effective in terms of achieving its intended ends - that is, the retention of Boorowa road workers' jobs. Their political thought was not, however, rational according to the criteria for political competence demanded by Philip Converse and elite democratic theorists. It was not ideological or constrained, that is, consistent with reference to an abstract, coherent and stable political belief system. Instead, it drew upon Boorowa people's perceived practical experience, and considered important 'universal' common sense beliefs and values, as a basis for interpretation. This finding serves to vindicate, in some measure, Feldman's and Berelson *et al.*'s respective critiques of both Converse's and elite democratic theorists' positions. Boorowa people did, indeed, draw on beliefs and values relevant to their practical orientations in interpreting this particular policy, as well as their socio-political worlds more generally. Incompetent though their political thinking may have been in the view of orthodox political science, it was insistently moral and political.

On a straightforward phenomenological sociology reading, Boorowa people's common sense informed political thought and action was relatively unremarkable. Their common sense may indeed have served as a resource but, from this theoretical perspective, it did so only in a limited, 'baseline' sense. It simply ensured that Boorowa people's reading of, and political resistance to, the proposal was largely governed by the here and now motive and their local system of relevances. Their common sense, as phenomenological sociology would have it, merely provided them with bearings relevant to the purpose at hand - that is, their resistance to the NSW government's policy. Such a theoretical standpoint is clearly inadequate. It only tells half of the story - and the mundane and less important half, at that. When the complex and pervasive problem of power is restored to the analysis, Boorowa people's common sense takes on a new complexion, and an altogether different set of meanings and relevance.

Boorowa people's common sense informed understanding of the NSW government's proposal was not simply, nor even necessarily primarily, a rational-calculative, 'materialist' one. To read their conception exclusively in such a way would be to seriously, and erroneously, limit their political thought and action. Boorowa people's was simultaneously an 'idealist' conception and critique of the policy and its implications, along with its logic and associated structures and relations of power. It was not solely related and confined to a critique of 'the issue at hand', but also

concerned to some degree with socio-political questions of a wider, and more fundamental, nature. In particular, it was implicated in the definition and defence of their moral autonomy.

Where their common sense was 'critical' through its resolute reference to their perceptions of their shared experience, it enabled Boorowa people to define and to defend their moral autonomy. Boorowa people perceive their experience of their selves as relational - as individuals who act and are acted upon through their commitment to and embeddedness in their community - both real and imagined. This is what moral autonomy means to them - accommodating the demands of the collective whilst not compromising the integrity of the self. As a result, Boorowa people's common sense conception of moral autonomy made possible their identification of structures and processes of governmentality that attempt to construct them as a particular type of political subject - that is, as individualised client-consumers. Just as they acknowledge the need for some state intervention in peoples' lives in pursuit of the goal of individual moral autonomy, so, too, do Boorowa people not reject entirely such representations and forms of governmentality. To some extent, of course, they *are* individualised client-consumers. Indeed, they are also, in some measure, rational-calculators. However, to attempt to construct their selves as though this were all they are, and social life in commensurate terms as atomistic and competitive in every respect, amounts, for them, to a disempowering and debasing ontological assault on their selves - an act of symbolic violence. Such a conception and construct simply does not marry with their apprehensions of their practical experience - with their common sense understandings of their socio-political reality. Instead, it is largely perceived as serving the interests of the dominant culture of behaviour, capital and, in particular, big business. Where Boorowa people distinguish attempts to create them as knowable and predictable in such terms, they resist demands for their 'rational' participation in the economy and polity.

In relation to this issue, their common sense thus serves, to some degree, as a socio-political resource in a substantive - that is, critical - respect. It is concerned with questions of moral autonomy and control, for themselves and others, now and in the future. *Where critical*, their common sense is fiercely anti-hegemonic. It resists perceived instances of essentialism, such as the notion of individualised society, and attempts to impose these *as* reality. Boorowa people's common sense is critical in a cultural-hermeneutic and relational-contextual, rather than theoretical or rational-systematic, sense. This brings with it several attendant problems.

Based as it is in their particular cultural-hermeneutic tradition, Boorowa people's common sense is at all times *susceptible* to reification. This tradition also furnishes a modest (and, arguably, attenuated) common sense conception of moral autonomy. It potentially provides Boorowa people with limited incentive and resources for thinking about and acting upon the wider forces that influence their lives and those of others. Larger societal processes, change and structural bases for inequality that cannot be related to their understandings of their immediate lived experience remain, to them (to a greater or lesser degree) opaque. To the extent that they over emphasise individual moral responsibility at the expense of a wider, more reflexive understanding of socio-political reality, Boorowa people's conception of society and the individual will tend towards a dualistic, rather than dialectical one. Their capacity to perceive their own and others' social constructedness and, with it, the many other structural constraints upon their political vision and action - as well as emancipatory possibilities for their intervention - will remain restricted. Their ultimately individualised notion of moral responsibility and autonomy will conspire to solidify a view of liberation as 'freedom from' unwelcome outside influences and interventions (such as bureaucracy) rather than as 'freedom to' take charge of the public sphere that so influences their lives. In the context of a complex and fragmented modern society characterised by a reduction in the amount of shared perceptions of experience and knowledge, Boorowa people will struggle to conceptualise their own experience. However, they, and others like them, are hardly likely to be coaxed out of and beyond their largely defensive positions through detached, essentialist, and, I have argued, flawed, theoretical constructions such as Bauman's version of the dialectic.

In this thesis, I have exposed the essentialisms inherent in contemporary critical theory's conception of ordinary people's common sense. I have done so partly by revealing that the myth of liberalism - of absolute freedom and a form of rationality capable of realising this - informs this conception. However, I have mostly focused on undercutting the rigid dichotomy drawn by Bauman between critical consciousness and common sense. In doing so, I have demonstrated that this position elides or negates those anti-hegemonic possibilities within ordinary people's (such as Boorowa people's) common sense. It also fails to account for common sense's humanistic promise - where it insists upon a relational-contextual view of human functioning, rather than a rational-calculative, instrumental one. This approach, and its findings, illustrates the importance of not studying common sense from positions polarised around notions of pure liberation and pure domination - an insight that is integral to Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. It also shows the merit of studying common sense in context so as to gain an appreciation of its specific socio-political qualities and possibilities. Thus, I suggest that

this study both indicates a promising avenue for further research, and provides a sound methodological approach with which this might be undertaken.

Most importantly, though, the study points to an alternative, and potentially productive, means of conceptualising what is and is not critical thought and political competence. An approach suggested by this study of common sense may thus provide a strong basis for understanding the limits and possibilities of individual autonomy and social transformation.

Where it is indeed critical in a cultural-hermeneutic sense, people's common sense enables, to a degree, their moral autonomy. It does so through its capacity for reconciling, as well as generating and sustaining, contradictions, without resorting to extremes. I highlighted from the outset of this thesis the indissolubility of dichotomous conceptions of the citizen at the heart of the Western tradition of political thought. This points to the need for an ability to live with such contradictions, a need recognised by citizenship theorists and other political theorists in their demands for 'balanced' citizens. Common sense, where it is critical, and citizens, where they are 'politically competent', on this criterion, can achieve just such a balance. A critical common sense might thus allow for the ongoing criticism of institutions and traditions, without resorting to their essential undermining. It might facilitate the rebuilding of the metaphorical boat whilst at sea. At the same time, such a conception and measure of quality in critical thought, and of political competence, might help to free the social sciences from some of those ties that serve to bind the will and the imagination.

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