Introduction

Public philosophy and civic freedom: a guide to the two volumes

Public Philosophy in a New Key is a new approach to the study of politics. The role of a public philosophy is to address public affairs. This civic task can be done in many different ways. The type of public philosophy I practise carries on this task by trying to enter into the dialogues with citizens engaged in struggles against various forms of injustice and oppression. The aim is to establish pedagogical relationships of reciprocal elucidation between academic research and the civic activities of fellow citizens. The specific role of this public philosophy is to throw a critical light on the field of practices in which civic struggles take place and the practices of civic freedom available to change them. It does this by means of historical and critical studies of the field and the given theoretical forms of representation of it. Reciprocally, this critical ethos learns from citizens and the successes and failures of their civic activities how to improve the historical and critical studies and begin again.

In the studies that follow, I use the term 'citizen' to refer to a person who is subject to a relationship of governance (that is to say, governed) *and*, simultaneously and primarily, is an active agent in the field of a governance relationship. While this includes the official sense of 'citizen' as a recognised member of a state, it is obviously broader and deeper, and more appropriate and effective for that reason. By a 'relationship of governance', I refer not only to the official sense of the institutional governments of states, but to the broad sense of any relationship of knowledge, power and subjection that governs the conduct of those subject to it, from the local to the global. Governance relationships in this ordinary sense range from the complex ways individuals and groups are governed in their producing and consuming activities to the ways peoples and subalternised states are subject to global imperial relationships of inequality, dependency and exploitation. They comprise the relationships of normativity, power and subjectivity in which humans find themselves constrained to recognise themselves and

each other, coordinate interaction, distribute goods, act on the environment and relate to the spiritual realm. 'Practices of civic freedom' comprise the vast repertoire of ways of citizens acting together on the field of governance relationships and against the oppressive and unjust dimensions of them. These range from ways of 'acting otherwise' within the space of governance relationships to contesting, negotiating, confronting and seeking to transform them. The general aim of these diverse civic activities is to bring oppressive and unjust governance relationships under the on-going shared authority of the citizenry subject to them; namely, to civicise and democratise them from below.

What is distinctively 'democratic' about public philosophy in a new key is that it does not enter into dialogues with fellow citizens under the horizon of a political theory that frames the exchange and places the theorist above the *demos*. It rejects this traditional approach. Rather, it enters into the relationships of normativity and power in which academic researchers and civic citizens find themselves, and it works historically and critically on bringing them into the light of public scrutiny with the particular academic skills available to the researchers. Every reflective and engaged citizen is a public philosopher in this sense, and every academic public philosopher is a fellow citizen working within the same broad dialogue with his or her specific skills. Studies in public philosophy are thus specific toolkits offered to civic activist and civic-minded academics working on the pressing political problems of our times.

I first developed this approach in *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. By means of a series of historical studies, I argued that constitutional democracies could respond to contemporary struggles over recognition by reconceiving constitutions as open to continuing contestation and negotiation by those subject to them. This would be a transition from constitutional democracy (where the constitution is conceived as founding and standing behind democratic activity) to democratic constitutionalism (where the constitution and the democratic negotiation of it are conceived as equally basic). In the decade since it was published, I have come to see that this approach can be improved and applied to a broader range of contemporary struggles: over diverse forms of recognition, social justice, the environment and imperialism. These two volumes explore this complex landscape.

Volume I, Part 1 sets out this public philosophy, its employment of historical studies, its relation to contemporary political struggles and its orientation to the civic freedom of citizens. Chapter 1 is a sketch of my approach, the tradition from which it derives, the contemporary authors

from whom I have learned this approach, and a contrast with the dominant theory-building approach. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the groundwork of public philosophy through an interpretation and adaptation of the works of Wittgenstein, Foucault and the Cambridge school. These chapters provide the methods that are employed in the case studies that follow in both volumes.

Volume I, Part 2 consists of three applications to the democratic struggles over the appropriate forms of recognition of diverse, multicultural and multinational citizens in contemporary societies. Chapter 4 locates the approach relative to trends in political philosophy over the last thirty years and sketches out the general field of relations of power and the freedom of citizens that is studied in detail in the following chapters. Chapter 5 is a study of ways to democratise various types of contemporary recognition struggles while generating appropriate civic bonds of solidarity among diverse citizens. Chapter 6 is a study of democratic forms of recognition in political associations that are not only multicultural but also multinational, based on the work of an international team of social scientists from the European Union and Canada. This is a comprehensive yet defeasible analysis of the actual legal and political practices of democratic constitutionalism for multinational associations.

Volume I, Part 3 consists of two studies of the struggles of Indigenous peoples for recognition in modern states and under international law. The first sets out a normative framework for the bi-civilisational negotiation of decolonisation and reconciliation of the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves in their own ways over their territories and the rights of states that have colonised them over the last half millennium. It is based on my work for the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991–5). Chapter 8 addresses the prevailing discursive and practical obstacles to the negotiation of reconciliation proposed in Chapter 7 and the practices of freedom available to Indigenous peoples and their supporters to overcome the obstacles and initiate negotiations.

Chapter 9 concludes *Volume I*, setting out this new approach to recognition and distribution struggles developed in the course of these studies and the ways in which contemporary societies are beginning to adopt this democratic approach in their legal and political institutions. I show how this approach represents a fundamental transformation of the manner in which struggles over recognition are standardly conceptualised today in the dominant schools of thought. It recommends a transition from the orientation to discrete and dyadic struggles for the just and definitive form of legal recognition in a state to multiple and interrelated negotiations over the

always-imperfect prevailing norms of mutual recognition of members of any form of association. This modest democratic approach has a much better chance of bringing peace to the deeply diverse world of the twenty-first century than the standard approaches.

Volume II applies public philosophy in a new key to global politics. It consists of historical and critical studies of global relationships of horrendous inequality, dependency, exploitation and environmental damage, and of the corresponding practices of civic freedom of global *and* local citizens to transform them into democratic relationships. The transition to *Volume II* does not only mark a broadening of the field of public philosophy to the global. More emphasis is also placed on specific locales of civic struggles, the diversity of governance relationships and the range of ways of acting otherwise in them, provincialising Eurocentric traditions and bringing in more non-Western voices and perspectives.

Volume II, Part 1 consists of studies of global relationships and practices of civic freedom available from the perspectives of the dominant schools of globalisation. Chapter 1 critically examines the tradition of international relations and global justice associated with Kant's theory of a world federation of identical nation-states. Chapter 2 examines the theories of globalisation, global governance and cosmopolitan democracy. Chapter 3 examines the activities of environmental movements from the perspective of civic freedom and advances a democratic ethic of ecological politics. Chapter 4 is the most comprehensive. It is an immanent critique of the dominant and agonistic approaches to global justice and international law. The critique leads step by step to the conclusion that only a more historical and contextual approach, related to the actual practices of freedom on the ground, can illuminate the unequal global relationships and the possibilities for their transformation. The conclusion I draw from these four studies is that these approaches, while illuminating and useful, are nevertheless limited and inadequate because they overlook the historically persisting imperial character of the global relationships they analyse. This provides the transition to Part 2.

Volume II, Part 2 consists in studies of global relationships under the description of them as a network of vastly unequal *imperial* relationships between the North and global South (the 120 former colonies that comprise the majority of the world's population). The three chapters show how different aspects of the contemporary global order continue to be structured by imperial relationships inherited from five hundred years of Western imperialism. These relationships survived decolonisation in the twentieth century in a new phase of imperialism, standardly called post-colonial or informal imperialism.

Chapter 5 sets out this argument in historical detail and shows how each of the major approaches to globalisation and international relations overlooks the imperial dimensions of the present in different ways and marginalises other approaches that study globalisation under the category of imperialism. Even some of the approaches that claim to take into account informal imperialism misrepresent the contemporary form of imperialism. With this disclosure of the field of globalisation as the continuation of Western imperialism by informal means and through institutions of global governance, Chapter 6 turns to the networkisation and communications revolution of the last twenty years. I show that this revolution, which is often portrayed as democratising globalisation, has been Janus-faced: helping global citizens to organise effectively at the local and global levels, yet also helping institutions of global governance, multinational corporations and the US military to network and govern informally the global relationships of inequality they inherited from the period of colonial imperialism. Chapter 7 shows how the imperial spread of the modular form of modern, Western-style constitutional nation-states and international law by colonisation, indirect rule and informal rule over the last three hundred years has not freed the non-West from imperialism. Quite the opposite: it has been and continues to be the political, legal and economic form in which relationships of inequality, dependency and exploitation have been extended and intensified around the world.

Volume II concludes by asking the crucial question: what can citizens who are subject to these imperial relationships (in both the North and global South) do to transform them into non-imperial, democratic relationships by bringing them under their shared authority? The general answer is the exercise of civic freedom by citizens in the North and global South and the exercise of academic research in networks of reciprocal learning with these global/local citizen movements: namely, a new public philosophy for a de-imperialising age. Chapter 8 takes the citizenry of the European Union as an example. I argue that European citizens are already taking the lead in improvising new forms of democratising civic activities with respect to immigration, alternative economics and relationships with the global South.

Chapter 9 is the conclusion to *Public Philosophy in a New Key*. It draws together the strands of argument throughout the two volumes and weaves them into a sketch of a new kind of local *and* global citizenship I call 'glocal' citizenship. This mode of citizenship has the capacity to overcome the imperialism of the present age and bring a democratic world into being from the local to the global. Since it is the conclusion to the two volumes,

I will provide a brief synopsis at the outset to give a preliminary indication of where the chapters lead.

The first part of the chapter summarises the imperial character of the present global order and the dominant modular form of citizenship (*modern* citizenship) that has been spread by Western expansion. Far from offering a challenge to imperialism, it actually serves in a number of ways to extend it, in both its national (civil) and its global (cosmopolitan) forms. The second part argues that there is another mode of citizenship (*diverse* citizenship) that also developed historically in both the West and non-West. It provides the democratic means to challenge and transform imperial relationships in both its local (civic) and local/global (glocal) forms. I set out the main features of the traditions of diverse civic citizenship historically and conceptually, and then apply it to global struggles of de-imperialisation and democratisation. It is a form of citizenship that is grounded in local civic practices yet extended globally by democratic networks. The chapter thus brings together the three themes of the two volumes: public philosophy, practices of civic freedom and the countless ways they work together to negotiate and transform oppressive relationships. This is not only possible but what millions of citizens, non-governmental organisations, networks and social movements are doing today. The chapter ends with a view of Gandhi's life as a civic citizen contra imperialism; it stands as an exemplar of civic citizenship and engaged public philosophy.

There are many public philosophers from whom I have drawn inspiration. John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Goldmann, Antonio Gramsci, Sojourner Truth, Paulo Friere, Bertrand Russell, Maude Barlow, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Vandana Shiva, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Iris Marion Young and Gandhi are exemplary. And, as I mentioned, every engaged and reflective citizen is an inspirational public philosopher in this democratic sense. But I have always questioned why more political philosophers and political theorists are not also *public philosophers*. What stops many of them from seeing their work as a discussion with their fellow citizens as equals? I think the answer is that many tend to enter into a relationship with citizens under the horizon of a political theory that sets them above the situated civic discourses of the societies in which they live. This presumptive elevation is standardly based on four types of assumption.

The first assumption is that there are causal processes of historical development (globalisation) that act behind the backs of citizens and determine their field of activity. It is the role of the theorist of modernisation to study these conditions of possibility of civic activity. The second is

that there are universal normative principles that determine how citizens ought to act. It is the role of the theorist of global justice to study these unchanging principles that prescribe the limits of democracy. The third is that there are background norms and goods implicit within democratic practices that constrain and enable the field of democratic activity of citizens in the foreground. It is the role of the interpretative and phenomenological theorists to make these background conditions explicit. The fourth is that there are canonical institutional preconditions that provide the foundations of democratic activity, and it is the role of political scientists to study these legal and political institutions.

In each of these four cases, the theorist is elevated above the *demos* by the assumption that there are background conditions of possibility of democracy that are separate from democratic activity and it is his or her role to study them, not what takes places within them. In the course of the studies in the two volumes, each pillar of elite political theory falls to the ground. Each of the four conditions of possibility is shown to be internally related to and reciprocally shaped by the everyday activities of democratic citizens, not separate from and determinative of their field of freedom. It is this revolutionary discovery that brings political philosophy 'down' into the world of the *demos* and renders it a situated public philosophy in conversation with fellow citizens. Equally important, it enables us to see that we are much freer and our problems more tractable than the grand theories of the four pillars make it seem. For while we are still *entangled* in conditions that constrain and enable, and are difficult to change, we are no longer *entrapped* in background conditions that determine the limits of our foreground activities, for none is permanently off limits. I associate this revolutionary insight with the late Richard Rorty (*Volume I*, Chapter 4). Others will associate it with other writers and their own experiences of human freedom and agency where they were told it was impossible.

I would like to say a few words about the phrase 'in a new key'. Just as a jazz musician plays a composition in a new key relative to the classic performances of it, so too a specific public philosopher plays the role in his or her own new *style* in relation to the classic public philosophers in his or her field. The *style* of these studies is a new key in that it combines historical studies and a reciprocal civic relationship in what I hope is a distinctive way. Jazz musicians play in a new key in the course of improvising with other musicians and in dialogue with classic performances and present audiences. Analogously, public philosophers improvise in dialogues with contemporary theorists, the classics, engaged citizens and in response to the political problems that confront and move them. This is the situated

freedom of a public philosopher. I see the studies in these volumes as improvisations in this sense.[1]

Finally, I would like to respond to a common objection to this style of public philosophy. Radical critics often say, given the radical character of your particular public philosophy, why do you engage in the 'mainstream' academic debates and use the conservative language of citizenship, public philosophy, governance, democracy and civic freedom? Your work will be co-opted by the mainstream you disagree with and alienated from the civic activists you hope to reach. You should write in a language of radical politics.

I acknowledge that my views are somewhat radical relative to much of the literature I discuss. However, there are three reasons for the approach I take. Firstly, the alternative language of radical politics often involves a kind of self-marginalisation and an attitude of self-righteousness that I find incompatible with a democratic ethos. Moreover, there are already many excellent public philosophers, such as Chomsky, who write directly to civic activists and bypass the theoretical debates, and they too write in the same plain and simple language of citizens, public goods and freedom. Secondly, the economic, political and military elites and their ideologists have inherited not only much of the earth and its resources but also many of its languages, including the manipulable language of citizenship, democracy, civic goods and freedom. Yet, it is precisely this ordinary language that the oppressed and exploited of the world have always used to express their outrage at the injustices of the present and their hopes and dreams of another world. Like Edward Said, I refuse to surrender it to our adversaries without a fight and abandon the repository of the history of struggles from which we derive.[2] Moreover, the fall of the four pillars of the *ancien régime* also brings down the fiction of an alternative, pure language of freedom (radical or otherwise) that stands above the fray of politics and is impervious to unpredictable redescription by one's fellow adversaries. Thirdly, I have deep respect for the elaborate Western and non-Western traditions of critical political reflection, the great yet partial insights they can bring, and the people who carry them on today in this public language. While I disagree with the dominant theories that legitimate the status quo in these terms, engagement with them forces dissenters like myself constantly to test our own views against them and, in so doing, to try to move the academic debate in another direction. As we

[1] For this analogy, see Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[2] Edward W. Said, 'The Public Role of Intellectuals and Writers', in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

will see, I am far from the first or only one to take this agonistic stance. Furthermore, is it not presumptuous to assume that these debates are alien and of no interest to citizens? The following chapters were written in conversations with engaged citizens. Academic debates are not as far from and unrelated to the public debates as they are often portrayed from the perspectives of the four pillars. They are a historically integral part of the complex field of practical discourses on which public philosophy is inescapably thrown and in which it can find its voice and make a distinctive difference.

Except for the concluding chapter of *Volume II*, all chapters are based on works published previously over the last eight years and then rewritten to bring them together in the sustained argument of these two volumes. The concluding chapter of *Volume II* was written for the two volumes and to bring their themes together in a portrait of global/local civic freedom and public philosophy contra imperialism.