

Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment

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It wouldn't be too lofty to describe the extensive debate in many related disciplines over the last few decades about the inherited ideas and ideologies of the Enlightenment as our intellectual efforts at self-understanding—in particular, our efforts to come to a more or less precise grip on the sense in which we belong to a period properly describable as our modernity.

These ongoing efforts on our part, however, gain an immediate interest when they surface in the context of a new form of cold war that has religious rather than communist ideals as its target. Since religion, at least on the surface, in some fairly obvious sense runs afoul of the demands of the Enlightenment, our modernity may seem to be much more at stake now than it was in the contestations of the original cold war, where the issues seemed to be more about an *internal* tension *within* the values of the Enlightenment.¹ But, in the passage of analysis in this essay, I hope to raise at least one angle of doubt about this seeming difference.

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1. It would, I suppose, be an atrocious crudeness and also thoroughly misleading to define the internal tension of the previous cold war as that between the Enlightenment values of liberty and equality. Certainly anti-Communist cold war warriors would not describe the tension along these lines and would insist on describing it as a tension between the values of liberty and authoritarianism. Even so, their own support of manifestly authoritarian regimes and of their governments' role in the overthrow of *democratically elected* regimes with egalitarian aspirations, such as in Iran in the fifties and Chile in the seventies (to name just two), shows that insistence to be mendacious. One can be wholly critical of the authoritarianism of Communist regimes and still point this out. On the other hand, there is a parallel mendacity, given how things turned out, in the Communist self-description of being committed to egalitarian values. But if the idea here is one of getting right some balance of rhetoric and motives in that cold war, then, from the point of view of the rhetoric, liberty and equality were certainly the values that were respectively stressed by

A recurring complaint among critics of the Enlightenment is about a *complacency* in the rough and cumulative consensus that has emerged in modern Western thought of the last two centuries and a half. The complaint is misplaced. There has, in fact, always been a detectably edgy and brittle quality in the prideful use of omnibus terms such as *modernity* and *the Enlightenment* to self-describe the West's claim to being something more than a geographical location. One sign of this nervousness is a quickness to find a germ of *irrationality* in any source of radical criticism of the consensus. From quite early on, the strategy has been to tarnish the opposition as being poised in a perpetual ambiguity between radicalism and irrationalism (including sometimes an irrationalism that encourages a fascist, or incipiently fascist, authoritarianism). Nietzsche was one of the first to sense the theoretical tyranny in this and often responded with an edginess of his own by flamboyantly refusing to be made self-conscious and defensive by the strategy and by explicitly embracing the ambiguity. More recently Foucault, among others, responded by preempting the strategy and declaring that the irrational was, in any case, the only defence for those who suffered under the comprehensive cognitive grip of the discursive power unleashed by modernity in the name of rationality.²

I want to pursue some of the underlying issues of this confusing dialectic in such disputation regarding the modern. There is a great urgency to get some clarity on these issues. The stakes are high, and they span a wide range of themes on the borderline of politics and culture. In fact, eventually, nothing short of the democratic ideal is at stake, though that particular theme is too far afield to be pursued in any detail in this essay.³

A familiar element in a cold war is that the warring sides are joined by

each side; and, moreover, there can be little doubt that no matter what their rhetoric explicitly said about being opposed to authoritarianism, anti-Communism was really primarily motivated by an opposition to the egalitarian ideals that might, if pursued and if they gained a wider allegiance than they did behind the Iron Curtain (where they were getting no serious allegiance at all), undermine the corporate interests of Western nations.

2. Foucault's specific response is a much more politically focused and historically diagnostic and, it has to be said, stylistically charmless variation on a response first formulated in the surrealist aesthetic, whose targets were presented in slightly different, though by no means unrelated, rhetoric; instead of the Enlightenment, the target was termed bourgeois modernity, with its legitimizing representational and narrative modes and verisimilitudes.

3. This paper is one of a pair. Its sequel "Democracy and Disenchantment" focuses on the more purely local manifestations in the West of the themes of this paper.

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academics and other writers, shaping attitudes and rationalizing or domesticating the actions of states and the interests that drive them in conceptual terms for a broader intellectual public.⁴ Some of this conceptual work is brazen and crass and is often reckoned to be so by the more alert among the broad public. But other writing is more sophisticated and has a superior tone, making passing acknowledgements of the faults on the side to whom it gives intellectual support, and such work is often lionized by intellectual elites as fair-minded and objective, and, despite these marginal criticisms of the state in question, it is tolerated by the broad consensus of those in power. Ever since Samuel Huntington wrote his influential article “The Clash of Civilizations?”⁵ there was a danger that a new cold war would emerge, one between the West and Islam, to use the vast, generalizing terms of Huntington’s own portentous claims. Sure enough since that time, and especially with two or three hot wars thrown in to spur the pundits on, an increasing number of books with the more sophisticated aspiration have emerged to consolidate what Huntington had started.

To elaborate this essay’s concerns, I will proceed a little obliquely by initially focusing closely and at some length on one such book and briefly invoking another as its foil and, then, situating the concerns in a larger historical and conceptual framework. The focus is worth its while since the conclusions of the book I have primarily chosen, as well as the attitudes it expresses, are representative of a great deal of both lay and academic thinking on these themes.

The subtitle of Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s *Occidentalism* elaborates its striking title: *The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*.⁶ The book’s aim is to provide an account of a certain *conception* of the West, which is named in their title and which they find today in hostile Islamist reactions to the West, a conception that they claim is just as unfair to and dehumanizing of the West as “Orientalism” was said to be of the Orient, in Edward Said’s well-known book bearing that name.⁷

4. If one is to be scrupulous, one should register a caveat. The concept of a cold war, though it has had its early versions ever since 1917, really only came to be conventionally deployed in the way we are now used to after World War II. And in this period most of the academic and “independent” writers and journalists that I refer to were on the side of the West, for obvious reasons. In the Soviet Union, defenders of their governments’ actions could not be accurately described as independent writers or academics. And in the West, though there were some who took the Soviet side, they were, except in France, rather peripheral in their weight and influence. In the current cold war, too, a similar caveat holds, and that is why I will speak only about the writing on one side of the cold war.

5. See Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Summer 1993): 22–49.

6. See Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York, 2004).

7. See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, rev. ed. (New York, 1995).

The book is slight and haphazard in argument, and my interest in it is not so much intrinsic as it is instrumental. That is, it furnishes—in its way—some of the fundamental theoretical notions needed to present this paper's analysis. Given their various, somewhat unsystematic, claims in the book, the authors are a little obscure, and perhaps even a little arbitrary, when they speak of the West and therefore what they have in mind when they use the term *Occidentalism*. At times they write as if *the West* is to be defined by two basic *ideals or principles*, which had their origins in seventeenth-century Europe and settled into what we have come to call the Enlightenment, the two principles of scientific rationality and the formal aspects of democracy, including the commitment to basic liberal individual rights. The enemies of the West are said to be opposed to these principles.

But, for the most part, the book identifies the targets of the enemies' opposition as *much broader cultural phenomena* than these principles, phenomena such as a permissive and sinful metropolitan life in the West that has abandoned the organic links that individuals have to nature and community; commercial rather than heroic ideals; a mechanistic and materialistic outlook that stresses instrumental rationality and utilitarian values rather than the values of the various romantic and nationalistic and indigenist traditions; and, finally, a stress on secular and humanistic values that entirely exclude religion from the public realm and therefore invite the wrath of God whose domain must be unrestricted.

It is never made clear what exactly the relation is between the defining principles of the West mentioned earlier and these broader cultural phenomena. Both are targets of the Occidentalists, but what their relation is to one another as targets is never satisfactorily explained. The book's own response to the two targets is somewhat different. They have some sympathy for the opposition to some of the broader phenomena⁸ (as anyone might, however much they are committed to the goodness of the West), but the final message of the book comes through as a firm defence of scientific rationality and the political principles that the West is said to have ushered in as exemplary aspects of modernity and upon which it has defined itself. This differential response on the authors' part makes it particularly important to sort out the question of the relationship between the defining principles and the broader phenomena.

The response leads one to think that the argument of the book is roughly this. The defining essence of the West lies in democracy and scientific ra-

8. "And they were not entirely wrong," say the authors after a summary description of the condition of the world wrought by a corporate-driven Western society (Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, p. 112).

tionality, but in the eyes of its enemies there is a conflation of these principles with the wider cultural phenomena. Perhaps the conflation occurs via some sort of *illicit derivation* of these cultural phenomena from those principles. Thus, Occidentalism, in attacking the cultural phenomena, also attacks the West as defined by these principles. (The authors quite clearly suggest such an interpretation of their argument in frequent remarks describing Occidentalist attitudes towards the West: “It was an arrogant mistake to think that all men should be free, since our supposed freedoms led only to inhumanity and sterile materialism.”)⁹ The suspicion that anti-Western thought among Muslims is guilty of such an illicit derivation from partially justified critical observations regarding the West is quite widespread in Western writing and thinking on this subject, and their book has the merit of articulating it very explicitly.

Towards the end of the book, they lightly rehearse the by now well-known intellectual antecedents of the contemporary radical Islamist critique of the broader cultural phenomena in Wahabism as well as in the more recent writings of Maulana Maududi and Syed Qutb; but in earlier chapters there are much more intellectually ambitious efforts at finding prior locations for the critique (especially the aspect of the critique that stresses loss of romantic and nationalist and indigenist traditions for the pursuit of utilitarian values and a superficial cosmopolitanism) in certain intellectual traditions in Germany, Russia, and Japan, which then presumably would also count as being anti-West. The interests of these more ambitious diagnostic efforts are not pursued with any depth or rigor. By the end, one does not quite know what to make of these claims to antecedent enemies since no convincing case is even attempted for a causal and historical influence of these intellectual and cultural movements on radical Islam (though see footnote 10), nor—and this is much worse—is there any effort to sort out what is implied by this recurring critique of the West and the principles that define it. One is, at best, left with the impression of an interesting parallel.¹⁰

9. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

10. I am merely recording that they do not attempt to provide any evidence of causal influences, but, to be fair to them, causal influences are not required for the parallels they draw to be interesting. That there is only an interesting parallel and not a causal influence would not matter if the implications of the parallel were pursued in some depth, which they are not. This essay will try and draw a further parallel from an earlier period with a view to pursuing those deeper implications but with no particular claim to causal influence. Traditions of thought in politics and culture can emerge without causal links as long as the affinities in intellectual and political responses, even among responses in far-flung regions and times, reflect a deep, common understanding of what they are responding to. Thus, my claims in this essay will be something that Buruma and Margalit could also make for the parallels they cite: that the parallels are interesting, without causal influence, as long as one can see in them a pattern that speaks to a deeper historically recurring phenomenon that has common underlying sources. This essay is motivated by the need for an analysis of the underlying sources of the critique of the West that Buruma and

The sophistication of the book, therefore, lies not at all in deeply exploring the implications of its own ambitious efforts to connect politics with broader cultural issues. Its sophistication lies entirely in the kind of thing I had mentioned earlier, the fact that its cold war voice comes with a veneer of balance. There are parenthetical and somewhat mildly registered remarks about how Islamist groups also target the long history of colonial subjugation as the enemy, including the West's, especially America's, *continuing* imperial presence economically (and more recently politically) in various Muslim nations, as well as its extensive support of either corrupt, brutal, or expansionist regimes over the years in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Indonesia, and so on. But no one should go away with the impression that any of this is more than a veneer. The authors are clear that these do not constitute the main issue. The main issue is that the enemies of the West have first of all confused what is the essence of the West—as I said, scientific rationality and liberal democracy—with the broader cultural phenomena discussed in the four main chapters and, second, have again unfairly and *illicitly extended* their perhaps justified anger against Western conquest and colonization and corporate exploitation to a generalized opposition to the *West as defined by those principles*. The West is advised not to be made to feel so guilty by these illicit extensions and derivations that it gives up on its essential commitments to its defining principles. Whether one may conclude that it is also advised to stop its unending misadventures in foreign lands over the centuries is not so obvious from the text, since its focus is primarily on characterizing a confused and extrapolated state of mind called Occidentalism.

To now pursue something that this book leaves superficial and incomplete, it is useful to compare its argument with another recent book, Mahmud Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*,¹¹ because its emphasis is entirely elsewhere, and it in fact provides something of a foil to Buruma and Margalit's understanding of some of these issues. Those they call the Islamist enemies of the West are the bad Muslims of Mamdani's title. Those that support American interests in the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia (Chalabi, Karzai, Mubarak, and Musharaff, to name only leaders) are the (ironically phrased) good Muslims. And he is highly critical of this dichotomy, as being both self-serving and ideological on the part of the West.

Much more than Buruma and Margalit, he stresses the systematically

Margalit find in contemporary Islamism and in some European and Japanese traditions of thought; and its claim will be that the sources, in order to be properly identified, must go back to a certain metaphysical disputation in the early modern West itself.

11. See Mahmud Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York, 2004).

imperialist nature of the U.S. government's actions in these and other parts of the world. He gives a historical account, first, of its many covert operations (described by him as proxy wars) during the cold war period when primarily it invoked the threat of communism as a justification and, then, of its more overt campaigns in the waging of real wars since September 11 when the justification shifted to combating Islamic terror (though, of course, as Mamdani realizes, this justification did not have to wait till September 11; it was put into place immediately after the cold war ended, and the operations continued in covert form till the atrocities of September 11 gave the United States the excuse for the more overt action in Afghanistan and Iraq).¹²

His analysis is familiar from a lot of writing over the years that has been critical of the United States government, but there is a useful account of the covert operations in the African theater that is usually ignored in this critique, which has mostly tended to focus on the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia; and he is also courageous to put on center stage the question of Israeli occupation and expansion since 1967 and the successive American governments' support, as a central diagnosis of the legitimate source of anger against the West.

Apart from the sketches of America's corporate and geopolitically driven wrongdoings in different parts of the world, the book's intellectual burden is to repudiate those who are evasive about these wrongs by changing the subject to, as Mamdani puts it, cultural talk about civilizational conflicts or conflicts of broad principles. By his lights the main principles at issue are not those of scientific rationality or of democratic liberalism but rather the principles by which one does not occupy another's lands and brutalize the people there, the principles by which one does not support corrupt and authoritarian regimes, the principles by which one does not overthrow perfectly honorable leaders and governments, such as those in Iran in the 1950s and in Chile in the 1970s, and replace them with monstrous, tyrannical governments that serve one's economic and generally hegemonic political ends. Everything else is secondary and a distraction from this main issue. By his lights, then, Buruma and Margalit's book will certainly count as typical of such cultural talk. To the question I put earlier—Do Buruma and Margalit think that the West should be made to feel guilty over the litany of self-

12. To say that such justifications were put into place soon after the initial cold war ended is also inaccurate, actually. One heard these justifications as early as 1981 when the Reagan administration talked first of a war on terror. Libyans and Palestinians were particularly targeted, and disgraceful stereotyping generalizations and racial attitudes towards Arabs began to be expressed, even among academics and the metropolitan intelligentsia, who had for some years not dared to say similar things about African Americans and Jews.

interested destructive interventions that Mamdani expounds?—his own answer is bound to be that they not only do not think so but that they want to distract us from thinking so by putting into the air such trumped-up culturalist notions as Occidentalism.

If I am right in placing *Occidentalism* as a sophisticated cold war intervention, Mamdani would be quite right to have such suspicions of the book. But the issue of culture's relation to politics is a more general one, and this tendency on Mamdani's part and on the part of much of the traditional Left to dismiss the cultural surround of political issues is a theme that is essential to the argument of this essay. As I said, it is his view that talk of Occidentalism and other such notions should be seen as sleight of hand, a sly, though not necessarily always conscious, changing of the subject. What he fails to see is that the deepest analysis of what goes wrong in this sort of cold war writing will require not merely seeing the authors as changing the subject from politics to culture but also bringing to bear a critique of the *integrated* position that links their politics to their cultural and intellectual stances. This would require linking his own leftist political stances to an absolutely indispensable cultural and intellectual surround. Mamdani's failure to situate his subject in a larger set of intellectual and cultural issues reflects a shallowness in his own book, one that prevents a proper analysis of the claims of a full and substantial democracy in the mix of Enlightenment ideas that are associated with our modernity. The book's failing is the mirror image of the failings of *Occidentalism*. The latter understands that the politics of so-called anti-Western thought must be connected with broader cultural phenomena, but its superficial analysis of these connections leaves it as just one more contribution to the new cold war. The former's politics honorably refuses to play into the cold war understanding of Islam, but its understanding of its own worthy politics remains superficial in that it precisely fails to make its analysis connect with the deeper cultural issues.

In order to reach towards the kind of analysis that both books in their contrasting ways fail to make, one needs to first take a critical (rather than dismissive) look at the eponymous culturalist idea of Occidentalism and to see what relation it bears to its obvious alter-referent, Orientalism.

The argument of Said's celebrated book is now widely familiar, but it is still worth a brisk walk along its main causeway to compare it to Buruma and Margalit's inversion of it. To put it in very rudimentary and schematic terms, it has, among other things, five broad points to make about Western writing on the Orient that, as Said puts it, turned non-Western cultures in various parts of the world into the Other. (His attention was, of course,

chiefly on writing about countries and cultures of predominantly Arab and Muslim peoples, so in that limited sense his title is a suitable one for Buruma and Margalit to mimic.)

First, and most obviously, the material inequalities generated by colonization gave rise to attitudes of civilizational condescension, and the societies and peoples of the Orient were as a result presented as being inferior and undeveloped. *Second*, a related but quite different point, colonization stereotyped them and reduced their variety to monolithic caricatures. *Third*, even when it did not do either of the first two, even when it made the effort to find the Orient's civilizational glories, its attitude was that of wondrous awe, and so it once again reduced the power and living reality of those civilizations, only this time it reduced them to an exotic rather than an inferior or monolithic object. And, *fourth*, he argued, all three of these features owed their influence in more and less subtle ways to the proximity of such writing on the Orient to metropolitan sites of political and economic power. This fourth point is absolutely central to the critique and the tremendous interest it has generated. The effectiveness of the critique lay precisely in refusing to see literary and scholarly productions about the Orient as self-standing; Said linked seemingly learned and aesthetic efforts (at their worst) to mandarin-like self-interest and (at their best) to a blindness regarding their locational privilege. A scholar who can write a book on modern Turkey with just a few tentatively and grudgingly formulated sentences about the treatment of Armenians and pass himself off as a man of integrity and learning in metropolitan intellectual circles of the West is a good and well-known example of the worst, and Said is devastating about such shabby work. But he is in fact at his literary-critical best when he half-admiringly takes on more subtle Orientalist writing, such as Kipling's, where nothing so shameless is going on. A *fifth* point that pervaded a great deal of Said's writing on the subject was that all of these four features held true not just of the ideas and works of fringe or extremist intellectuals and writers but rather of the most canonical and mainstream tradition. The fifth and fourth points are closely connected. It is not surprising that *canonical* works should have the first three features if those features flowed from the deep links that writing has to *power*. The canon, after all, is often constructed by the powerful, in some broad sense of that term.

It is hard to find anything like the same interest in Buruma and Margalit's claims for Occidental ideas. The first feature is not to be expected because, as they themselves say, Occidental ideas and hostility emerge in Muslim populations out of a sense of material inferiority and humiliation rather than out of a sense of economic superiority. The second feature is plausibly

present.¹³ The third feature, which is one of the more interesting in Said's critique, is altogether absent and they themselves don't make any claims to it. The subtitle of their book, as I said, is *The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*. Said's subtitle, for good reason, is the more general *Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Indeed, Said's ideas could be faithfully summed up in the subtitle "The Orient in the Eyes of Its Enemies and Its Friends."¹⁴ Then again, by the nature of the case, the fourth and absolutely pivotal feature in Said's critique is not present. That is, the enemies of the West who are presented in this book, far from being close to power, are motivated by their powerlessness and helplessness against Western power and domination. Buruma and Margalit themselves point this out repeatedly. Finally, the fifth feature is also completely absent because it is the extremist, fundamentalist Islamic groups and their ideologues who are the enemies of the West, invoking the wrath of God, and they are far removed from the great and canonical works

13. However, in my own view, this second feature lacks the interest or the conviction of the rest because it is not obvious that its presence *is* always a sign of reducing one's subject of study to the Other. There is a real question whether one can make any interesting claims or generalizations about a subject without abstracting, and sometimes abstracting considerably, from the diversity and detail of the subject. A great deal of explanation depends on such abstraction. We do after all ignore the diversity of the West when we talk of its colonizing mentality or its corporate-driven policies, and it would be absurd to stop talking in this way out of fear that one is abstracting away from other aspects of the West that stood in opposition to this mentality and these policies. And if it would be absurd to stop talking in these broadly truthful ways about the West, consistency demands that we should not always react critically or defensively to generalizations made about Islam, despite the fact of diverse elements in nations with Islamic populations. See my "Rushdie and the Reform of Islam," *Grand Street* 8 (Summer 1989): 170–84, "What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 821–42, and "Fifteen Years of Controversy," in *Encounters with Salman Rushdie: History, Literature, Homeland*, ed. Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2005) for more on these themes.

14. This third feature, though commonly found in much writing, should be deployed more restrictively than Said did. Not to do so would be to miss the remarkable modesty of outlook in some of the most interesting aspects of romanticism, especially German romantic interest in the Orient, which was not by any means guilty of always merely exoticizing its subjects. Some of the interest was motivated by the view that the West did not know it all and that one might, in one's absorption in the Orient, even *lose* one's identity and, with luck, acquire new knowledges and identities. In the sequel to this paper, "Democracy and Disenchantment," I will look at the romantics' (both German and British) understanding of nature and show how it was very much and very deliberately a piece with the seventeenth-century dissenters' anti-Newtonian conception of matter that is discussed below. (Blake, for instance, was as explicit and clear-headed and passionate about these philosophical and historical connections as anyone could be.) Through such an understanding, they explicitly raised the whole metaphysical and political aspect of the notion of enchantment (as Weber would later describe it), which I refer to briefly at the end of this paper and of which Said himself did not have much awareness because of his keenness to convict them of "othering" their subject. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971) is more knowing and insightful on this aspect of romanticism, though there too the focus is more purely on the metaphysical themes, and the political issues at stake are not explored in the detail they deserve.

of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and other writing, some of which (Iqbal, for instance) Buruma and Margalit mention in order to exclude from their critique.

So, such interest as there is in their argument and conclusions criticizing so-called Occidentalism lies not in anything that parallels these five points and the rich integrating relations between them that constitute the critique of Orientalism but rather in a line of argument that goes something like this: Among a colonized and powerless Muslim population, where there is a long-standing feeling of humiliation and helplessness, a fringe of religious extremists has emerged, who out of a deep sense of resentment against the colonizers are blinded to the diversity of the West, to the great achievements of the Enlightenment—the temper and ideals of scientific rationality and democratic pluralism—and so by distorted appeals to their religion they have instead focused on the worst aspects of Western life—rampant materialism, shallow commercialism, alienating loss of values and morals—elevating these latter to a picture of a realm of hellish sinfulness (*jahiliya*) to be combated by the wrath of God. Perhaps readers will out of sheer topical interest be drawn to this analysis, but it seems to me to altogether lack the texture and depth and power of the critique of Orientalism.

This absence points in the end to a far more principled weakness in its own position, which needs to be exposed in some detail because it raises issues of a kind that go well beyond the interest in this particular book.

As I said, some interest certainly does lie in the book's comparisons and analogies with elements of what the authors call Occidentalism or anti-Western thought in other intellectual movements, such as the German romantic tradition and the Slavophile and Japanese intellectual traditions. To take the first of these, Buruma and Margalit contrast the ideal of a certain kind of cultural *unity* that went deep in some of the German romantics and that led to *nationalist* casts of thought with the ideal of political *pluralism* in Enlightenment thought. There is truth in this contrast, but even here the contrast actually integrates more ideas than they notice. Even in an early work of Nietzsche's such as *The Birth of Tragedy*, the romantic ideal of a mystical unity of experience is traced by him to the undifferentiated quality of the effect of the chorus on the audience in Attic tragedy, and the Dionysian possibilities of this in music and dance are invoked with a view to providing a critique of the Apollonian ideal as it is found in the representational and intellectualizing arts of the late classical tradition. This is then deployed to assert the special status of a *nonrepresentational* form such as music among the arts, and then German culture is singled out in Europe as the one culture to which music is absolutely central, and from this a broad philosophical argument emerges for a more public and modern revival of

such a Dionysian unity in a single German nation, undiluted by the civilities and diversities owing to the shallow cosmopolitanism and pluralism of the French Enlightenment. These heady connections make for fascinating intellectual history, though of course one should “handle with care” when such seemingly diverse regions of human thought and culture and politics are being brought together in an argument.

Buruma and Margalit make the less complex, less philosophical, and more routine point that ideas of *racial* purity in Nazism grew out of quasi-metaphysical arguments for nationalism of this kind, and there is very likely scope for such further intellectual integration of racialist attitudes and metaphysics. But it is equally true that Hitler himself invoked with great admiration the system and efficiency of the extermination of the American Indians by the colonists, and historians such as Richard Drinnon have convincingly elaborated the remarkable metaphysics underlying the racial hatred in that particular holocaust as well.¹⁵

It might be said that it is not quite keeping faith with their argument to invoke the case of these colonists in the West because it is a *pre*-Enlightenment example of “ethnic cleansing” and racial purity, and the authors are defining the West in *post*-Enlightenment terms. In fact, of course, the “cleansing” went on well into the high Enlightenment period and after, but still they may excuse themselves from a consideration of it on grounds that it was relatively distant from the prime location of the high European Enlightenment, which is their subject.

Even if we do allow them to excuse themselves from considering it, and even if we allow the focus to be exclusively on the period of high European Enlightenment, there are very obvious signs of how uncritical they are of their own basic notions. There is a bounty of extremely familiar evidence of European colonial racism based on similar philosophical rationales in the heyday of the Enlightenment. It is hard to believe that the authors of *Occidentalism* are not aware of it. Why, then, do they ignore it? Presumably because to invoke it would be to depart from their focus, which is on *anti*-Enlightenment ideas. That is why the example they cite of the German romantic roots of German nationalism and eventually racism depends on an antirationalist critique of the Enlightenment, whereas colonial racism, they would claim, grew (at least partly) out of a desire to actually *spread* rationality to non-Western lands. This is fair enough; writers can focus on whichever theme they wish.¹⁶ But there are theoretical consequences of such a

15. See Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis, 1980).

16. I assume that the authors will admit that, just as with European colonialism, which they don't write of, the Nazis, imperial Japan, and Stalin, who were the statist inheritors of the early Occidentalist conceptions they do write of, also gave lofty rationales for their racial attitudes. Even

claim that are destructive of their own book's main argument. Let me explain.

If one accepts this understanding of colonialism as being (at least partly) motivated by the desire to make the rest of the world more rational, it has to then be granted that that claim, in turn, presupposes a moral-psychological picture in which there is a notion of rationality that colonial peoples did not possess, a sort of basic moral and mental lack. If so, a distinction of profound analytical significance in the very idea of rationality is generated by this. By the nature of the case, the lack cannot, therefore, be of a *thin* notion of rationality, one that is uncontroversially possessed by *all* (undamaged, adult) human minds; rather, it would have to be the lack of a *thick* notion of rationality, a notion that owes to specific historical developments in outlook around the time of the rise of science and its implications for how to think (rationally) about culture and politics and society. But this has the effect of logically undermining the central argument of the book because there is now a real question as to whether there is not a much tighter and perfectly *licit* derivational connection between such a commitment to rationality that the authors admire and the harms that Western colonial rule perpetrated in its name, which the Occidentalists with some justification (even according to the authors) resents. Yet this is exactly the derivational connection that, as I pointed out in the exposition of their argument, they find to be *illicit* and a fallacy. The book's own implicit assumptions are, therefore, devastating to its main line of thought.

It is really hereabouts that we can find the more obvious sources for a critique of the Enlightenment that no cold war sensibility such as theirs could possibly acknowledge. I say it is obvious but the exact structure of the critique and its long-standing historical underpinnings are not always made explicit. Let me begin with a locus of this critique at some distance from the West and then present very early antecedents to it in the dissenting traditions of the West itself.

The anti-Western figure who comes closest to the form of intellectual

so, I am accepting some of these grounds they might give for focusing on the latter and not the former. After all the author of *Orientalism* had his own focus, so why shouldn't they? But still it would have been good to hear just a little bit more from the authors of *Occidentalism* about their views of the racial attitudes shown *since* European colonialism. For example, even Israeli historians acknowledge their governments' acts of "ethnic purification," "redeeming the land," and so on. Are the attitudes expressed towards the Palestinians in these actions continuous with the German, Japanese, and Slavophile antecedents of the contemporary Occidentalists, of which they write, or are they more akin to the colonial forms of racialism? Has anyone ever rationalized this Israeli action in terms of spreading "rationality"? Or does it owe much more to the romantic German or Slavophile argument they discuss, invoking notions of land and ancient religious roots as the basis of its nationalism? If it does, should the Israelis be counted among the Occidentalists?

critique that Buruma and Margalit label Occidentalism is Gandhi. He wrote and spoke with passion against the sinful city that took us away from organic village communities; he was a bitter opponent of the desacralizing of nature by science and the scientific outlook; he urged the Indian freedom fighters not to inherit from the British the political apparatus of formal democracy and liberal institutions because it was a cognitive enslavement to Western ideas unsuited for indigenous political life in India; and he did all this in the name of traditional religious purity that would be corrupted by modern ideals of the Enlightenment. And to add to all this there is one last particularly illuminating fit between Gandhi and Occidentalism. If the authors were looking for someone who took the view that the shallow and harmful cultural aspects of modernity derived more or less strictly from the ideals of Enlightenment rationality and political liberal institutions (a derivation that, as I said, they are bound to describe as illicit and a fallacy), it is in Gandhi, rather than Muslim intellectuals and writers, where they will most clearly find it. It is he (much more than the German, Slavophile, and Japanese traditions that they invoke) who echoes in detail the Islamic Occidentalists' critique of the broader cultural phenomena that Buruma and Margalit expound; and (much more explicitly than they can be said to) he would absolutely resist the charge that it is a conflation or illicit extrapolation to link the ideals of scientific rationality and modern forms of democratic politics with those broader cultural phenomena—of materialism, uncontrolled technology, the alienating, sinful city, and so on. He insisted and argued at length that the notion of rationality, which was first formulated in the name of science in the seventeenth century and developed and modified to practical and public domains with the philosophers of the Enlightenment, had within it the *predisposition* to give rise to the horrors of modern industrial life, to destructive technological frames of mind, to rank commercialism, to the surrender of spiritual casts of mind, and to the destruction of the *genuine pluralism* of traditional life before modernity visited its many tribulations upon India. As he often claimed, it is precisely because this more authentic pluralism was destroyed by modernity that modernity had to impose a quite unsatisfactory form of secularist pluralism in a world that it had itself disenchanted, to use the Weberian rhetoric. Before this disenchantment, which for Gandhi has its origins in the very scientific rationality that Buruma and Margalit applaud, there was no need for such artificial forms of secularized pluralism in Indian society. The pluralism was native, unself-conscious, and rooted.

Even those who do not agree with every detail of Gandhi's criticisms (and there are details that I would certainly resist)¹⁷ could not help but notice

17. See my "Gandhi's Integrity," *Raritan* 21 (Fall 2001): 48–67.

that, given this almost perfect fit with the subject their title announces, Gandhi is not so much as mentioned in this book. No doubt this is because Gandhi was the great spokesman of *nonviolence*, and one of the book's recurring objections is to the dehumanizing violence of the *jihadi* Occidentalists. (Their German, Japanese, and Slavophile intellectual antecedents also are described as having laid seed for, eventually, well-known violent descendants.) But if their ideas and arguments overlap so closely with Gandhi's¹⁸ and it is only the objectionable commitment to violence and the dehumanization of those whom one opposes violently that makes the Occidentalists they are most interested in different from Gandhi, then those ideas and arguments are only *contingently* related to what is objectionable about Occidentalism. There is therefore no interesting integrity in the doctrine, something one cannot say of the deep, integrating links among power, violence, literature, and learning claimed for the doctrine of Orientalism, which I briefly tried to convey earlier.

The primary aim of *Occidentalism* (to quote my own words when I first introduced the book in this essay) is to "provide an account of a certain *conception* of the West, which is named in their title and which they find today in hostile Islamist reactions to the West, a *conception* that they claim is just as unfair to and dehumanizing of the West as Orientalism was said to be of the Orient." I am stressing the term *conception* in my own words quite deliberately. It is essential to how the book's aim is formulated. So, if I am right and the book's characterization of the Occidentalist conception of the West is echoed almost perfectly in Gandhi's critique of the West, and if the crucial mark of difference is that the Islamists have brought to this critique's conception a contingent element of violence, which Gandhi would deplore, then it is not the *conception* that they have established to be dehumanizing. The parallel with Gandhi shows, therefore, that they have not met their aim at all.

The subject is deepened and complicated if we notice that Gandhi's criticisms have antecedents in a tradition of thought that goes all the way back to the seventeenth century in England and elsewhere in Europe, *simultaneous* with the great scientific achievements of that time. It goes back, that is, to just the time and the place when and where the outlook of scientific rationality that Buruma and Margalit place at the defining center of what

18. If anyone is skeptical of this link I am drawing between the Islamic Occidentalists' conception of the West and what Gandhi has to say about the Enlightenment, all they have to do is compare the four central chapters of *Occidentalism* where that conception is described with M. K. Gandhi, "*Hind Swaraj*" and *Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge, 1997) to notice the remarkable overlap of responses and opinions to Western culture and imperial attitudes. I have only summarized Buruma and Margalit's description of Occidentalism and Gandhi's views at two different points in this essay. The details of the overlap far outrun my brief summaries.

they call the West was being formed, and it is that very outlook with its threatening cultural and political consequences that is the target of the critique.

It should be emphasized right at the outset that the achievements of the new science of the seventeenth century were neither denied nor opposed by the critique I have in mind, and so the critique cannot be dismissed as a Luddite reaction.¹⁹ What it opposed was a development in *outlook* that emerged in the *philosophical surround* of the scientific achievements. In other words, what it opposed was just the notion of thick rationality that Buruma and Margalit describe in glowing terms as scientific rationality.

To put a range of complex, interweaving themes in the crudest summary, the dispute was about the very nature of nature and matter and, relatedly therefore, about the role of the deity and of the broad cultural and political implications of the different views on these metaphysical and religious concerns. The metaphysical picture that was promoted by Newton (the official Newton of the Royal Society, not the neo-Platonist of his private study) and Boyle, among others, viewed matter and nature as *brute and inert*. On this view, since the material universe was brute, God was *externally* conceived as the familiar metaphoric clock winder, giving the universe a push from the *outside* to get it in motion. In the dissenting tradition—which was a *scientific* tradition, for there was in fact no disagreement between it and Newton and Boyle on any serious detail of the scientific laws, and all the fundamental notions such as gravity, for instance, were perfectly in place, though given a somewhat different metaphysical interpretation—matter was *not* brute and inert but rather was shot through with an *inner* source of dynamism that was itself divine. God and nature were not separable as in the official metaphysical picture that was growing around the new science, and John Toland, for instance, to take just one example among the active dissenting voices, openly wrote in terms he proclaimed to be pantheistic.²⁰

19. As Gandhi's critique is bound to seem, coming centuries later, when the science is no longer new and its effects on our lives, which the earlier critique was warning against, seem like a *fait accompli*.

20. In a series of works, starting with *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696, more explicitly pantheistic in statement in the discussion of Spinoza in *Letters to Serena* (1704), and then in the late work *Pantheisticon* (1724). These writings are extensively discussed in Margaret Jacob's extremely useful treatment of the subject mentioned below in footnote 23. She also discusses a vast range of other figures among the dissenting voices of that period, not just in England but in the Netherlands, France, and elsewhere in Europe. Two important points should be added here. First, though the dissenting response I am invoking that explicitly addressed the new science appeared late in the seventeenth century, the basic metaphysical picture of matter and nature that it was presenting (in more explicitly scientific terms) and the social, egalitarian attitudes it was claiming to link with this metaphysical picture were already firmly being asserted by the politically radical groups of the English Revolution five decades earlier. These are the radical sectaries whose views

The link between Gandhi and the dissenters is vivid and explicit. One absolutely central claim of the freethinkers of this period in the seventeenth century was about the political and cultural significance of their disagreements with the fast developing metaphysical orthodoxy of the “Newtonians.” Just as Gandhi did, they argued that it is only because one takes matter to be brute and stupid, to use Newton’s own terms, that one would find it appropriate to conquer it with the most destructive of technologies with nothing but profit and material wealth as ends and thereby destroy it both as a natural and a humanitarian environment for one’s habitation. In today’s terms, one might think that this point was a seventeenth-century predecessor to our ecological concerns, but, though there certainly was an early instinct of that kind, it was embedded in a much more general point (as it was with Gandhi, too), a point really about how nature in an ancient and spiritually flourishing sense was being threatened. Today, the most thoroughly and self-consciously secular sensibilities may recoil from the term *spiritually*, though I must confess to finding myself feeling no such self-consciousness despite being a secularist, indeed, an atheist. The real point has nothing to do with these rhetorical niceties. If one had no use for the word, if one insisted on having the point made with words that we today can summon with confidence and accept without qualm, it would do no great violence to the core of one’s thinking to say this: the dissenters thought of the *world* not as brute but as *suffused with value*. That they happened to think the source of such value was divine ought not to be the deepest point of interest for us. The point rather is that if it were laden with *value*, it would make *normative* (ethical and social) demands on one, whether one was re-

and writings were memorably traversed by Christopher Hill in his extraordinary book, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London, 1972). Gerrard Winstanley, to pick only the most well known of the revolutionary figures of the time, put it in terms that quite explicitly anticipated Toland and others: “God is still in motion” and the “truth is hid in every body” (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 293). What makes the dissenting scientific position of some decades later so poignant and so richly interesting because much more than merely scientific and metaphysical is precisely the fact that it was a despairing response to what it perceived to be a betrayal in the name of scientific rationality of the egalitarian ideals that held promise during the earlier revolutionary period.

The second point that should be stressed is that this metaphysical and scientific debate about the nature of matter and nature should not be confused with another debate of that time, perhaps a more widely discussed one, regarding the general concourse, which had to do with whether or not the deity was needed after the first formation of the universe to keep it from falling apart. In that debate, Boyle, in fact, wrote against the Deists, arguing in favor of the general concourse of a continually active God. But *both* sides of that dispute take God to be external to a brute nature, which was mechanically conceived, unlike Toland and his “Socratic Brotherhood” and the dissenting tradition I am focusing on, who denied it was brute and denied that God stood apart from nature, making only external interventions. The dispute about general concourse was only about whether the interventions from the outside by an *externally* conceived God were or were not needed after the original creative intervention.

ligious or not, normative demands therefore that did not come merely from our own instrumentalities and subjective utilities. And it is this sense of forming commitments by taking in, in our perceptions, an evaluatively enchanted world, which—being enchanted in this way—therefore *moved* us to normatively constrained *engagement* with it, that the dissenters contrasted with the outlook that was being offered by the ideologues of the new science.²¹ A brute and disenchanting world could not move us to any such engagement since any perception of it, given the sort of thing it was, would necessarily be a *detached* form of observation; and if one ever came out of this detachment, if there was ever any engagement with a world so distantly conceived, so external to our own sensibility, it could only take the form of mastery and control of something alien, with a view to satisfying the only source of value allowed by this outlook—our own utilities and gain.

We are much used to the lament that we have long been living in a world governed by overwhelmingly commercial motives. What I have been trying to do is to trace this to its deepest *conceptual* sources, and that is why the seventeenth century is so central to a proper understanding of this world. Familiarly drawn connections, like “Religion and the Rise of Capitalism,” are only the beginning of such a tracing. In his probing book *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke says that “the experience of an *impersonal* outlook was empirically intensified in proportion as the rationale of the monetary motive gained greater authority.”²² This gives us a glimpse of the sources. As he says, one had to have an impersonal angle on the world to see it as the source of profit and gain, and vice versa. But I have claimed that the sources go deeper. It is only when we see the world as Boyle and Newton did, as against the freethinkers and dissenters, that we understand further why there was no option but this impersonality in our angle on the world. A desacralized world, to put it in the dissenting terms of that period, left us no angle but the impersonal from which to view it. There could be no normative constraint coming upon us from a world that was brute. It could not move us to engagement with it on *its* terms. All the term making came from us. We could bring whatever terms we wished to such a world; and, since we could only regard it impersonally, the terms we brought in our actions upon it were just the terms that Burke describes as accompanying

21. I have written at greater length about this conception of the world as providing normative constraints upon us and the essential links that such a conception of the world has with our capacities for free agency and self-knowledge, thereby making both freedom and self-knowledge thoroughly normative notions, in my book *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Cambridge, Mass., forthcoming), chaps. 4 and 5. For the idea that values are perceptible external qualities, see John McDowell’s pioneering essay “Values and Secondary Qualities,” in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (London, 1985), pp. 110–29.

22. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 113.

such impersonality, the terms of the monetary motives for our actions. Thus it is that the metaphysical issues regarding the world and nature, as they were debated around the new science, provide the deepest conceptual sources. It is not without reason, then, that Buruma and Margalit speak of a scientific rationality as defining the West.

The conceptual sources that we have traced are various, but they were *not* miscellaneous. Religion, capital, nature, metaphysics, rationality, and science are diverse conceptual elements, but they were *tied together* in a highly deliberate accretion, that is to say in deliberately accruing worldly *alliances*. Newton's and Boyle's metaphysical view of the new science won out over the freethinkers' view and became official only because it was sold not only to the Anglican establishment but, in an alliance with that establishment, to the powerful mercantile and incipient industrial interests of the period in precisely these terms, terms that stressed a future of endlessly profitable consequences that would result if one embraced this particular conception of the new science and built, in the name of a notion of rationality around it, the oligarchic institutions of an increasingly centralized state to help promote these interests. These were the very terms that the freethinkers found alarming for politics and culture, alarming for the local and egalitarian ways of life, which the radical elements in the English Revolution such as the Levellers, Diggers, and Quakers had articulated and fought for.

It is a travesty of the historical complexity built into the thick notion of scientific rationality we are discussing to think—as is so often done—that it emerged triumphant in the face of centuries of *clerical* reaction only. That is the sort of simplification of intellectual history that leads one to oppose such scientific rationality with religion (the Occident and its enemies) without any regard to the highly significant historical fact that it was the *Anglican* establishment that lined up with this notion of rationality in an alliance with commercial interests, and it was the *dissenting, egalitarian radicals* who opposed such rationality. It was this scientific rationality, seized upon by just these established religious and economic alliances, that was central to the colonizing mentality that later justified the rapacious conquest of distant lands. It may seem that it is a conceptual leap to go from the seventeenth-century conceptions of scientific rationality to the liberal justifications of colonial conquest. But if one accepts the initial *conceptual* connection between views of nature, God, and commerce that were instantiated in these *social and political* alliances between specific groups and interests of the earlier period, there can be no reason to withhold acceptance from the perfectly plausible hypothesis (indeed, merely an extension of the connections that have been accepted) that colonized lands, too, were viewed as brute nature to be conquered and controlled. This hypothesis is wholly plausible *as long*

as one was able to portray the inhabitants of the colonized lands in infantilized terms, as a people who were as yet unprepared—by precisely a *mental lack* of such a notion of *scientific rationality*—to have the right attitudes towards nature and commerce and the statecraft that allows nature to be pursued for commercial gain. And such a historically infantilizing portrayal of the inhabitants was explicit in the writings of John Stuart Mill and even Marx.

There is a fair amount of historical literature by now on this last point about the intellectual rationalizations of colonialism, but I have introduced the salient points of an *earlier precolonial* period's critique here in order to point out that Gandhi's and apparently the Occidentalists' social and political attack on scientific rationality has had a very long and recognizable tradition going back to the seventeenth century *in the heart of the West*, and it is this tradition of dissent that seems to keep resurfacing in different forms. Buruma and Margalit, as I said, cite later Slavophile, Japanese, and German romantic and nationalist writing as being critical of this notion of rationality, but my point is that it is the writing and thought at the very site and the very time of the scientific discoveries themselves that anticipate in detail and with thoroughly honorable intent those later developments.

Once that point is brought onto center stage, a standard strategy of the orthodox Enlightenment against fundamental criticisms raised against it is exposed as defensive posturing. It would be quite wrong and anachronistic to dismiss this initial and early intellectual and perfectly *scientific* source of critique, from which later critiques of the Enlightenment derived, as being irrational, unless one is a cold warrior waiting to tarnish all criticism of the West along these lines. It is essential to the argument of this paper that far from being anti-West Gandhi's early antecedents in the West, going back to the seventeenth century and recurring in heterodox traditions in the West since then, constitute what is, and rightly has been, called the radical *Enlightenment*.²³ To dismiss its pantheistic tendencies, which I cited as being unscientific and in violation of norms of rationality, would be to run together in a blatant slippage the general and thin use of terms like *scientific* and *rationalist* with just this thick notion of scientific rationality that we had identified above, which had the kind of politically and culturally disastrous consequences that the early dissenters were so prescient and

23. See especially Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London, 1981), which traces some of the trajectory of the radical Enlightenment, starting from the dissenters in late seventeenth-century England that I have been discussing. She is good, too, on the alliances I have been discussing between the Newtonian ideologues and the Anglicans speaking towards the commercial interests of the time, especially the *conceptual basis* for these alliances as they were spelt out by the Newtonian ideologues who were carefully chosen to give the highly influential Boyle lectures when they were first set up; see especially chapter 3.

jittery about. Buruma and Margalit's appeal to scientific rationality as a defining feature of the West trades constantly on just such a slippage, subtly appealing to the hurrah element of the general and thin terms *rational* and *scientific* to tarnish the critics of the West, while actually having the work in their argument done by the thicker notion of scientific rationality, which the Occidental tradition and the enemies of the West oppose.

As far as the thin conception of *scientific* and *rationality* is concerned, the plain fact is that *nobody* in that period was, in any case, getting prizes for leaving God out of the worldview of science. That one should think of God as voluntaristically affecting nature from the outside (as the Newtonians did) rather than sacralizing it from within (as the freethinkers insisted) was not in any way to improve on the *science* involved. Both views were therefore just as "unscientific," just as much in violation of scientific rationality, in the thin sense of that term that we would now take for granted. What was in dispute had nothing to do with science or rationality in that attenuated sense at all. What the early dissenting tradition (and its many successors, whether in German, Japanese, or Slavophile traditions or in Gandhi) was the *metaphysical* orthodoxy that grew around Newtonian science and its implications for broader issues of *culture and politics*. This orthodoxy with all of its implications is what has now come to be called scientific rationality in the thick sense of that term, and, in the cold war intellectuals' cheer-leading about the West, it has been elevated into a defining ideal, dismissing all opposition as irrationalist, with the hope that accusations of irrationality, because of the *general* stigma that the term imparts in its thin usage, will disguise the very specific and thick sense of rationality and irrationality that are actually being deployed by them. Such (thick) irrationalism is precisely what the dissenters yearned for; and hindsight shows just how honorable a yearning it was.

The point here is so critical that I will risk taxing the reader's endurance and repeat it. Buruma and Margalit mention only the later Slavophile and German and other Occidental criticisms of such a notion of the West. But if I am right that all of these, including Gandhi's criticisms which they conveniently do not mention, are continuous with this much earlier critique in the very heart of the West and its scientific developments, then the terms in which Buruma and Margalit dismiss those criticisms must apply to the antecedent critique as well. It is precisely the point, however, that to say that these early dissenters were unleashing an irrationalist and unscientific critique of the West as they define the West is to confuse and conflate science and its ideals of rationality with a notion of rationality defined upon a very specific metaphysical outlook that started at a very specific historical moment and place and grew to be a presiding orthodoxy as a result of alliances

that were formed by the scientific and clerical and commercial establishment in England and then spread to other parts of Europe. It is this outlook and its large consequences for history and culture and political economy that made Gandhi and his many conceptual predecessors in the West anxious in a long tradition of dissenting thought. What this helps to reveal is that while one works with a thin notion of rationality and an innocuous notion of the West it is absurd to call these freethinkers either irrational or unscientific, or enemies of the West. But if one works openly and without disguise (in a way that Buruma and Margalit do not) with a thick notion of rationality, understood now as shaped by this very specific intellectual, political, and cultural history, it is quite right to call them irrationalist and enemies of the West. For those terms, so understood, reveal only the perfectly serious, legitimate, and, as I said, highly prescient anxieties of the dissenters. It is only when we make plain that these thick meanings are being passed off in disguise as the thin ones that we can expose the codes by which an edgy and defensive cold war intellectual rhetoric tries to tarnish an entire tradition of serious and fundamental dissent.

Sometimes this tradition has surfaced in violent activism, at other times in critiques that have stressed more pacifist, religious, and contemplative ways of life. Since colonialism and the West's reach into distant lands, after formal decolonization, persists in revised forms today, this very same dissenting tradition has quite naturally surfaced in those distant lands as well, again both in nonviolent forms such as Gandhi's and in the violent forms that Buruma and Margalit characterize as coming from the Occidentalists' enemies of the West among a fringe of Islamist extremists.

The unpardonable atrocities committed recently by some of the latter in acts of violent terror are in no way absolved by the analysis I am offering. All the analysis does is to show that when the cold warriors of the West try to elevate one's understanding of these atrocities as deriving from a politics that owes to a certain culturalist conception of the West that they call Occidentalism, they have it only partly right. A full understanding of that conception requires seeing Occidentalism as continuous with a long-standing dissenting tradition in the West itself. That tradition was clear-eyed about what was implied by the disenchantment of the world, to stay with the Weberian term. It is a tradition consisting not just of Gandhi and early seventeenth-century freethinkers, not just the Slavophile, Japanese, and German critics that are mentioned in their book, but a number of remarkable literary and philosophical voices in between that they don't discuss: Blake, Shelley, William Morris, Whitman, Thoreau, and countless anonymous voices of the nontraditional Left, the Left of the radical Enlightenment, from the freemasons of the early period down to the heterodox Left

in our own time, voices such as those of Noam Chomsky and Edward Thompson and the vast army of heroic but anonymous organizers of popular grassroots movements—in a word, the West as conceived by the radical Enlightenment that has refused to be complacent about the orthodox Enlightenment's legacy of the thick rationality that early seventeenth-century dissenters had warned against.²⁴ This is the tradition of Enlightenment that Buruma and Margalit show little understanding of, though Enlightenment is the avowed subject of their book. That should occasion no surprise at all since it is impossible to come to any deep understanding of their own subject while they succumb to the temptations that cold war intellectuals are prone to.

The freethinkers of the seventeenth century, even though they were remarkably prophetic about its consequences, could not, of course, foresee the *details* of the trajectory of the notion of scientific rationality, whose early signs they had dissented from, that is to say, the entire destructive colonial and corporate legacy of the alliance of concepts and institutions and material interests they were warning against. But their successors over the last three hundred or more years, some of whom I have named, have been articulating and responding to these details in their own times.

It goes without saying that not all of these responses are based on a clearly articulated sense of these conceptual, institutional, and material alliances that have developed over the centuries. They are often much more instinctive. And it is undeniable that there are sometimes monstrously violent manifestations in these responses among a terrorist fringe in, among others, Muslim populations (including the Muslim youth in the metropolitan West) who, as Buruma and Margalit acknowledge, feel a sense of powerlessness in the face of an imperial past (and present) in different parts of the world. That some of the political rhetoric of these terrorists appeals confusedly to distortions of their religion, much as talk of Armageddon in the heartland of America does, is also undeniable. But if Buruma and Margalit are right that the terrorists' religious politics and rhetoric are not separable from a cultural understanding of their past and of a certain cultural understanding of the West that has intruded into their past and their present and if I am right that that cultural understanding has deep affinities with a

24. There is, in the sense of the term that I have been presenting, a strikingly radical side to Edmund Burke, too. There are eloquent criticisms of something like the outlook that I have described as forming around the official ideology of the new science, which can be found in Burke's diagnosis of what he saw as the massive impertinence of British colonial actions in India. I have no scholarly sense of Burke's grasp of his intellectual antecedents, but there is much in his writing to suggest that he would be sympathetic to the political and cultural outlook of the earlier dissenting tradition I have been discussing, even perhaps to their metaphysics, though that is not obviously discernable in the texts.

dissenting *Western* tradition's understanding of the West and its own past, then we are required to take the words of terrorists seriously and of the many, many more ordinary Muslim people who will not always publicly oppose these terrorists despite the fact that they share no fundamentalist ideology with them and in fact detest them for the violent disruption of their lives that they have wrought. By "take the words of terrorists seriously" I mean take the words to be saying just what they are saying and not self-servingly view them as a fake political front for a runaway religious fanaticism.

We will have to take their words much more seriously than Buruma and Margalit do in their passing, lightly formulated acknowledgements of the wrongs committed by the West. The words have been spoken again and again. They are not just on the recordings of Osama Bin Laden's voice and image; they are constantly on the lips of ordinary Muslims on the street. And they are clear and perfectly precise about what they claim and want: that they are fighting back against centuries of colonial subjugation; that they want the military and the corporate presence of the West (primarily the United States), which continues that subjugation in new and more subtle forms, out of their lands; that they want a just solution for the colonized, brutalized Palestinian people; that they want an end to the cynical support by the West (primarily by America) of corrupt regimes in their midst to serve the West's (primarily America's) geopolitical and corporate interests; that they will retaliate (or not speak out against those who retaliate) with an endless cycle of violence unless there is an end to the endless state-terrorist actions both violent (in the bombings and in the bulldozing of their cities and their occupied lands, killing or displacing thousands of civilians) and nonviolent (the sanctions and embargoes that cause untold suffering to ordinary, innocent people).²⁵ To not take these words seriously and to

25. I don't want to give the impression that these political responses on the lips of Muslims is all that is on their lips. This is not the place to look at all the diverse and complex things that a fundamental commitment to Islam amounts to among Muslim populations in the Middle East and South Asia. I have written about that subject in a number of essays. See, for example, Bilgrami, "What Is a Muslim?" and "Secularism, Nationalism, and Modernity," in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Oxford, 1998), pp. 380–417. What I do want to stress in the context of a cold war climate today is that writers and intellectuals are prone to think that all the rest that is on their lips somehow discounts the importance of what I am calling attention to as being on their lips in this essay. (See the next footnote for a little more on this.) In my other essays, which I have just cited, I have been highly critical of Islamist attitudes, though since late 2001 I find it more and more natural and fruitful to save these criticisms for when I am visiting countries with large Muslim populations in South Asia and the Middle East rather than speak them constantly in a region of the world where they would only feed into cold war attitudes. There is another point regarding this that is worth making quickly. Though, as I have acknowledged, there are obviously other more *intrinsically Islamic* commitments that Muslims have over and above their *political* objections to Western governments' actions, it is very easy to overinterpret the effect and influence of the intrinsically Islamic voices when one is at a distance from them. There is no doubt, as I have

not see them as genuinely motivating for those who speak them is as morally cretinous as it is to absolve the terrorist actions that a fringe of those who speak these words commit.²⁶

The two books I have discussed, as I said, provide an interesting contrast on just this point. Mamdani, who rightly takes these words seriously but (unlike Buruma and Margalit) is suspicious of culture talk, quite fails to locate the words in the historical and conceptual framework of a cultural and political critique within the West itself of a very specific notion of rationality that we have been discussing; Buruma and Margalit, who rightly see the need to connect issues of politics with cultural critique, therefore correctly situate these words in the broader reaction to such a notion of rationality, yet nevertheless (unlike Mamdani) they fail to take the words seriously because they are wholly uncritical of the brutal and inegalitarian political and cultural implications of the notion of scientific rationality that the radical Enlightenment warned against.

But, having said this, it would be wrong of me to *rest* with the criticism that the two books are symmetrically unsatisfactory in this way. Since we are undoubtedly in a cold war, Mamdani's is the book that will be unpopular in the West, not only with those in power but also with the large class of

already said in this essay, that ordinary Muslims are not overtly critical of the absolutist voices in their midst. This gives the impression that those voices are in some sense a representative voice. But the reason for this lack of criticism on the part of ordinary Muslims has much more to do with a defensive psychology against the West, much more to do with the feeling that one would be letting the side down to be critical of one's people in the context of a colonial past and present than it does with any intrinsic commitment to Islamic absolutism. Just to give one example: anyone reading American newspapers is quite likely to think (as I have discovered in innumerable conversations) that the popularity of Hamas has to do with its Islamism, thus giving the impression that Islamism is widespread among the Palestinian people. But anybody who is at all close to the scene and is aware of the facts on the ground (which are seldom reported in American newspapers in the routine way that spectacular terrorist acts and flamboyantly fanatical-sounding sayings are reported) knows that the popularity of Hamas has much less to do with its Islamism than it does with the fact that it is one of the few groups who provide basic medical and other services and who keep alive the most basic functions of civil society among one of the most brutalized populations in the world.

26. "I don't accept they really care about these causes, the perpetrators of this ideology" (quoted in Geoffrey Wheatcroft, "Blair's Dubious Logic on Islamism and Ireland," *Financial Times*, 28 Aug. 2005, p. 15). So says Tony Blair in one of his many incoherent speeches about Islamism, and this quote is a gorgeously explicit example of the "not taking seriously" I am referring to. In his devastating analysis of this speech, Wheatcroft exposes the inconsistency in Blair's positions on the terror associated with the two issues mentioned in his title. The real difference between the two, of course, is that only one of them is a cold war target at the moment. That quite nicely accounts for the inconsistency. It is only to be expected, I suppose, that the leader of a government that has played so central a role in a war against terror based on a sustained deceit of its people, should proclaim such a thing as I have quoted. What shall we say of the intellectuals and journalists who proclaim it? Wheatcroft's excellent article would have been even more effective if he had exposed some of them, too.

intellectuals and writers and journalists who keep a cold war going and who, as I said at the outset, even when they are often critical of those in power, will not disturb a broad consensus within which those in power can get away with what they have done over the years. Buruma and Margalit's is the book that may, in some passing detail or other, not entirely please those in power, but it will on the whole be warmly received by this intellectual surround.²⁷ Even if it conveys something about the moral courage of the respective authors, there is nothing surprising in any of this. If you spend your time writing a book criticizing those in and around power and control, you will get a quite different reaction than if you spend your time writing a book criticizing those who are a fringe among the powerless.

The analysis so far has refused to treat the cultural critique of the West (whether accompanied by violence or not) as being wholly unconnected (or fallaciously and illicitly connected) to the dissent from the thick notion of scientific rationality that developed in the West and that mobilized itself into one underlying justificatory source of the West's colonizations. It has, on the contrary, tried to show the connecting threads between them in historical and conceptual terms. It has also acknowledged that sometimes the cultural critique comes with a layer of religious rhetoric and commitment of a conservative and fundamentalist or (a better term) absolutist variety. It is often true that those commitments and that rhetoric are the things to which an alienated and powerless people in previously (and presently) colonized lands will turn, and Buruma and Margalit don't particularly wish to deny this. Like most intellectual cold warriors, their focus is on the religious commitment and rhetoric of the immediate cold war target, Muslims who are the enemies of the West. However, if there really are conspicuous intellectual and critical affinities between the Occidentalists enemies of the West and Gandhi on the one hand and a long-standing and continuous dissenting tradition *within the West itself* on the other, then we ought to pay some attention to religiosity in the West, too, a religiosity that is often (especially in America) a response to the more local rather than imperial consequences of scientific rationality in the thick sense of that term.

Earlier I had followed Weber in describing the cultural consequences of the thick notion of scientific rationality as a disenchantment of the world. The term captures some of what the early dissenters had in mind, as well as what Gandhi feared when he saw the eagerness with which the elites of

27. I mean this to be a general but obviously not an exceptionless claim. No doubt some books that one would expect to be unpopular with mainstream opinion in a cold war climate might get some good notices from friends and carefully cultivated writers for the press, and other books that one would expect to be warmly received by conventional thinkers will occasionally be unmasked as cold war interventions.

the colonized lands embraced, for their formally decolonized nation, the models of liberal democracy with its deep links to a corporate and commercial culture of the West. When he famously quipped, "It would be a good idea" to the question, "What do you think of Western civilization?" he was not expressing something very distant in basic respects from what Buruma and Margalit describe with the Islamic notion of *jahiliya*.²⁸ But quite apart from the distant and outsider's perspective of Gandhi or of the absolutist Muslim in Arabian and colonized regions of the world, the *local* experience in the West of the disenchanting consequences of scientific rationality in the thick sense are bound to be very different from what is experienced by the colonized lands. The conquest and the extracting of surpluses from colonized regions of the world may have created feelings of powerlessness and humiliation there, but what scientific rationality (in the thick sense) created in the West's own midst was a quite different form of alienation. Moreover, it is a form of alienation that is not dismissable as *jahiliya* by its own inhabitants. That may be a perspective of the *outsider*, but in the local habitus of the West itself ordinary people have to *live in and cope with* the disenchantment of their world, seeking whatever forms of rechantment that are available to them.

In a certain social climate, with either a faded or nonexistent labor movement and with no serious tradition of social democracy, the rhetoric and offerings of a conservative religiosity may have just as much confused appeal in coping with such alienation from a disenchanted world as it does (in a quite different and sometimes more violent form) to people who are powerless and humiliated in the colonized lands. Nowhere is this more evident than in the mass of ordinary people living in what has come to be called red-state America.

It is sometimes said today, as if it is some sort of a peculiarity, that the *majorities* in the red states present themselves as having the mentality of victims. When one compares their condition to those in sub-Saharan Africa or even to the impoverished inner cities of America's metropolises, there is certainly something peculiarly ignorant and impervious about it. But, if it is analyzed as an almost unconscious grasp of the condition of living in a pervasive and long-standing disenchantment of their world, it is not peculiar at all.

The most sophisticated cold warriors, often voicing elite, Left, liberal opinion, who write and applaud books like *Occidentalism*, would no doubt be prepared to be consistent and despise the electorate of the red states as an anti-Enlightenment anomaly within the West itself. It too is Occiden-

28. See footnote 18 for my firm conviction in this similarity.

talist, they will admit. After all the large majority of the ordinary people of these conservative regions of the country have also explicitly repudiated scientific rationality. I heard the conservative Christian, Republican-voting electorate described as vile and stupid by liberal, Left opinion in the days immediately after the recent presidential elections, without a hint of awareness of the deeply antidemocratic nature of such a remark. The curiosity of this, coming as it does from those who uphold liberal democracy as one of the ideals that define the West, needs an elaborate diagnosis, but I will not be able to provide it in detail in this essay,²⁹ which I must now bring to a close. However, I will say just this to link it with what has already been said here.

The diagnosis turns on the *integral relations* between the first of the defining ideals of the West that we have been primarily discussing, scientific rationality (which we have exposed as having a very specific culturally and politically thick sense), and the second defining ideal, that of a very specific notion of liberal democracy that Buruma and Margalit identify. A proper analysis of how the political, economic, and cultural consequences of the former ideal have *determined* and *circumscribed* the latter is essential to understanding the insufficiencies and the incompleteness of the liberal democratic ideal as the cold warriors have viewed it, creating Occidentalists in their own midst, whom they would consistently (as I said) dismiss as unworthy of the West's democratic ideals—a whole electorate unworthy of the high and hard-won commitments of the West, which it belongs to only in geographical terms, not by virtue of the values according to which it votes. The diagnosis would show just how incomplete this conception of democracy is, how little understanding it has of the yearnings of ordinary people for enchantment, for belonging, for the solidarities of community, for some control at a local level over the decisions by which their qualitative and material lives are shaped, in short, for the kind of substantial democracy that the seemingly irreversible consequences of scientific rationality (in the thick sense) have made impossible to fulfill. It would show too why in a scenario where these consequences are perceived as simply given and irreversible, these yearnings manifest themselves in muddled articulations of and affiliations to a conservative Christianity that is paradoxically in a masked alliance with the very agencies of the thicker scientific rationality to which these yearnings are a reaction.³⁰

29. It is the subject of the sequel essay mentioned in footnote 3.

30. Let me briefly give a more detailed indication of the sort of diagnosis and analysis that is needed here. When I say that the electorate in question is paradoxically avowing something that is in a masked alliance with the very thing that it more deeply opposes, I am frankly admitting that the voting citizens do avow commitments and values that seem to be at odds with some of their own deeper yearnings. And, so, there may seem to be a whiff of the idea of false consciousness in

It would be a mistake to ignore the fact on which I am putting so much weight—that it is a reaction to the cultural consequences of the thick notion of scientific rationality—and instead *rest* in one's diagnosis with the idea that the scenario to which these articulations are a response is merely the desolation brought about by a market society. To rest with that diagnosis and to fail to go on to subsume the point about market society in these broader and more long-standing cultural, political, and even philosophical alliances is part of the shallowness of the Left diagnosis I am protesting. It is beginning to be widely understood that the Republican party's success in the red states can be attributed to how it has changed the political agenda in the minds of ordinary people from issues in political economy to cultural issues surrounding religion. If my account is right, then no matter how repugnant one finds their political stances, one has to acknowledge that the

my description of the religiosity and the conservatism of the red-state electorate as being a *confused* manifestation and articulation of these yearnings. In the sequel to this paper, I explain the reasons why such a conviction in the moral strengths of ordinary people, essential to any belief in democracy no matter what the deliverance of their electoral choices, cannot be dismissed as depending on any implausible ideas of false consciousness. To establish this, one would have to look at evidence of *internal conflict* in the behavior and values of the electorate as it may be found not only in their behavior in *diversely framed contexts* but in their responses to polls in *diversely framed questions*. These conflicting responses and behavior would reflect both the religious articulations and the deeper yearnings that conflict with them, *but because they occur in different frames they are not acknowledged as conflicting*. This hypothesis—that at bottom there is a problem of framing (a central notion in psychology) that *hides* an internal conflict felt by political citizens *from themselves*—is absolutely vital to understanding why there is no need to attribute any dramatically implausible notion of false consciousness to the citizens. It is vital too in interpreting the electoral behavior itself as to a considerable extent issuing from an *epistemic* weakness engendered by a combination of media distortion and educational indoctrination rather than the *moral* weakness that the liberal Left contemptuously attributes to them. This diagnosis would allow us to see our way towards a solution as one of primarily allowing ordinary people to acquire the requisite epistemic strength by making the connections that distinct frames keep them from making and thereby to see the hitherto unacknowledged conflict in their own behavior and responses and to resolve these conflicts by internal deliberation. It is my own view that the sites where such a gaining of epistemic strength is possible and where such internal public deliberation might take place cannot any longer be in the arena of conventional political institutions; rather, it must take place within popular movements. All this analysis requires a very careful elaboration, as I said. But the point for now is that it is precisely this kind of analysis that is not undertaken by the callow dismissals of the elite, liberal opinion I am inveighing against. In fact instead of undertaking an analysis of this sort, the liberal Left has consistently defended itself against the charge that its attitudes towards the electorate are incompatible with a belief in democracy, with a whole repertory of sleazy intellectual maneuvers that run counter to any such analysis. These maneuvers invoke notions of autonomy that would justify the ideal of democracy even when the electorate's moral and political judgements are supposed to be unworthy of it; they cite the Churchillian cliché that despite unworthy electorates democracy is still better than other bad forms of government; and they refuse the partially exculpating explanation of electoral support of warmongering in terms of a supine press that fails to inform the electorate in detail of their government's actions abroad, saying (a numbing non sequitur) that people deserve the press they get. I respond in some detail to all these disreputable maneuvers in the sequel essay and try to provide the more demanding analysis.

Republicans have, in their perverse way, been less shallow than their opposition (at any rate, one kind of Left opposition), which *merely* registers, and then rests with, the idea that it is the consequences of the market that are responsible for the cultural and political desolation of the society in which these citizens find themselves. If my account is right, it shows why these conservative religious articulations of the electorate, which the Republicans have so cynically encouraged—even engineered—and tapped for some forty years are “the roots that clutch, [the] branches [that] grow/out of this stony rubbish,”³¹ out of this cumulative effect of something with a much wider and longer reach than market society, something that subsumes market society, that is, the phenomenon we have identified as the thick ideal of scientific rationality; and the account demands that we ask a large and pressing question, How might we think about alternative and more secular articulations?

T. S. Eliot, who is recognizable in the quoted words of my last sentence, of course, articulated thoroughly *nonsecular* alternatives. Indeed, by turning to Anglicanism as a means to reenchant one’s life, he revealed how little he understood of the early and absolutely central role of the Anglican establishment in the trajectory that led to the disenchantment he was lamenting.

Since Eliot, there have been proposals of other quite inadequate alternatives. Thoreau famously says in his section on “Economy” in *Walden*: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. . . . A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.”³² Writing as if these words were never written, American social scientists have offered many an *apolitical* vision of bowling alleys and the like, enchanting the lives of ordinary Americans.³³ Apart from failing to perceive what Thoreau did (suggesting as a cure for the malaise what he rightly saw was one of its symptoms), American social science misunderstands what is needed to *politically* withstand the cultural and political fallout today of the alliances formed in the late seventeenth century under the brave, new, thick, scientific rationality.

By this I don’t mean at all that the ideal of secular forms of reenchantment to cope with the “stony rubbish” of which Eliot writes has to be understood in terms of the replacement of religion by politics. Such talk of replacement is glib and silly, as unsatisfactory as the oft-heard aestheticist

31. T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (London, 1963), ll. 19–20, p. 53.

32. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, N.J., 1971), p. 8.

33. The particular suggestion of bowling alleys, of course, is credited to Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000).

mantra: Art and literature must have the function that religion once had. All I mean is that by merely proposing recreational forms of association as providing such alternative and secular forms of enchantment one misses out on the fact that it is *values* to live by that are being sought by the vast mass of ordinary people, even if sometimes confusedly in rigidly religious terms (a confusion, which I have been saying, is to some extent quite understandable in the context of the impoverished options they have been allowed); and, therefore, a great deal of *moral-psychological* resources will have to be summoned in the *public* realm so that people can get some sense that they are participating in the decisions that affect their material and spiritual lives. The aesthete who stresses art and literature does at least get something about these normative and evaluative necessities right, but proposes something that shares too much with the bowling alley paradigm, where the sites of participation could not possibly be host to the kind of public deliberation and organization that is needed to withstand the *political* culture of isolation and destruction of solidarities that the long era of scientific rationality (in the thick sense) has wrought and that Weber was bemoaning. It is not that politics must replace religiosity, but rather that an appreciation of the underlying political ground that prompts the religiosity requires that other more secular sources of enchantment than religion will have to emerge out of an alternative configuration of the underlying political ground. Dewey, who was temperamentally shy of the Weberian rhetoric of enchantment, which I have been wielding with such unblushing relish, and who preferred the more purely psychological vocabulary of consciousness, hints at the point that I have made more explicitly in his marvelously cryptic remark: "Psychology is the democratic movement come to consciousness."³⁴

Once we have acknowledged the great and primary claims of *global* justice, there remains no more urgent intellectual and political task in the West than to frame the possibilities of such alternative, less confused, and more secular forms of reenchantment that might make for a genuinely substantial notion of democracy, freed from the cold warrior's self-congratulatory ideals or, if not freed from them, connecting them to the lives and yearnings of ordinary people in the way that the Occidentalist dissenters *in the West* demanded no less than, indeed somewhat more than, three centuries ago.

34. John Dewey, *Early Essays*, vol. 5 of *The Early Works, 1882–1898*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston and Fredson Bowers (Carbondale, Ill., 1972), p. 23. Dewey was stressing "movement" as much as he was stressing "democracy" in this remark, and I believe popular movements alone can be the sites of the sort of public deliberation necessary for overcoming the epistemic weakness that I alluded to. *Democratic*, is, of course, a description, not a proper name. Heaven knows it is not the proper name of the party, whose learning curve has consistently proved to be flat and which has long lost the nerve and the will to be such a site or even to pay heed to the opinions that emerge from public deliberation carried out at the site of popular movements.