

A New Preface (2017)

Twelve years after A Thermodynamic Interpretation of History

Although the idea of a thermodynamic interpretation of history first came to me in a London hostel on New Year, 1998, and the early versions of some chapters were composed in 1998 and 1999, I wrote the bulk of what you see of this work today in 2004 and 2005. I then added a few more pages in early 2007. It has, in other words, been more or less twelve years for all the important parts of this work. Since 2012, I have been seriously philosophizing about some sort of sustainable civilization program on the basis of this thermodynamic interpretation of history. All this is included in my *Secret History of the International Court of Justice* and a few political and sociological essays which I have written afterwards.¹ By now, I can confidently characterize my philosophizing in *A Thermodynamic Interpretation of History* and its sequels as a “philosophy of sustainable civilization”. My *Thermodynamic Interpretation of History*, then, can be seen, rather than as a prelude to the project of “scientific enlightenment”, as my first attempt at sketching out the problem of unsustainability of human civilization.

The central theme of my *Thermodynamic Interpretation of History* is that the so-called liberation movement – only feminism is examined there: my critique “the Feminist Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism” – is in fact part and parcel, a continuous development, of the “system” it sets itself against rather than an opposing force; that feminism is specifically a natural development from, rather than a resistance movement against, the nation-state structure in the 1800s and then the global free-market system after the 1960s; and that the second-wave American feminism is more or less Protestant Ethic redux. The failure on the part of feminists and other leftist activists to understand this is, according to my theory, what has prompted their liberation ideology to become such a deadly poison to human civilization – what has made their enterprise an essential part of the problem of its unsustainability.

Although few people have ever taken notice of my *Thermodynamic Interpretation of History*, things turned ugly since 7 years ago. Since 2007 I was placed on Homeland Security's watchlist as a dangerous schizophrenic and then, from 2011 onward, I became the target of a massive vigilantism enterprise organized by the Department's clandestine service. The group of women extremists whom

1 These include: “The meaning of female evolution as increasing neoteny” (2015), “American Suffering Woman” (2015), “How to develop Russia's soft-power” (2015), “Why we support Marine Le Pen” (2015), “Can Russian-supported far right movements in Europe become the bastion against postmodernism?” (2015), “How Russia may develop its soft-power: Addenda” (2016), “Political Correctness as Culture Industry and Revolt of the Masses” (2016); “Further reflections on the Hillary Doctrine” (2016), and “The causal connection between rationalization, McDonaldization, and increasing stupidity of human beings” (2017).

the Department has hand-picked to run this enterprise were charged with the mission of persuading other national and international agencies to accept as valid and correct the Department's profile of me, which, among other things, designated me as a plagiarizer and a misogynist. The women, in part offended by the various formulations of the above-mentioned central theme (“The purpose of the liberation of women is to increase production and consumption” or “The second-wave American feminism is an Asian capitalist conspiracy”), decided that these were indeed evidences of my “misogynist ideology” and constituted “online violence against women” that should perhaps be eliminated from the public domain. The enterprise recruited by this time more than 35,000 people and, when they couldn't convince law enforcement officers or other relevant authorities that such was indeed enormous “hate speech” against womankind, they proceeded to falsely accuse me of plagiarism (in accordance with the other designation by the Department's clandestine service). In total, they have made more than 30,000 complaints about my theory (along with my Scientific Enlightenment) to several dozen law enforcement agencies, Internet companies, district attorneys, foreign and domestic government agencies, and intelligence agencies. (Approximately 25,000 of these complaints were to falsely accuse me of plagiarism.) Thanks to their effort, my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History has broken Guinness World Records as the “most complained about publication in the history of humankind”. Luckily, my critique of American feminism has survived.

After this affair, the question which stands in need of an answer is thus: how “misogynist” really is this “Thermodynamic Interpretation of History” or “Feminist Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism”? I have always thought that I was merely describing something as obvious as the blue color of the sky (when it is all sunny, of course) and that it is due to people's deteriorating brain power and growing desire to deceive themselves (for the sake of their self-aggrandizement) under the postmodern condition that nobody has made the same sort of “hate speech” as I have. Why can't people admit that the real purpose of women's emancipation is to develop the nation-state and grow the free-market economy when women activists often use this very rationale to persuade developing nations to do something about the poor conditions of their women? Why can't the feminists admit this? Is it because, if they admit this obvious fact, they might have to admit the other obvious fact – to which they will then no longer be able to shut their eyes – that women's “emancipation” is therefore, in contradistinction to the common feminist wisdom, a *curse* on our earthly environment?

In recent years I did discover one thinker who has come close to this admission – who has come very close to my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History in terms of orientation although lagging behind me in terms of sophistication, depth, detail, and implication. This is the eminent critical theorist and feminist Nancy Fraser. Thank God it's a feminist! If even a prominent feminist has decried American feminism's “becoming a handmaiden of neoliberal capitalism”, I can perhaps excuse myself for my “anti-women hate speech”. Fraser came to her insights when she tried to develop Karl Polanyi's “Double Movement” (in his 1944 classic *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*) into her own brand of “Triple Movement”.² Polanyi saw the free (i.e. self-

2 I'm relying here especially on her 2010 lecture at the University of Warwick as part of the Critical Governance Conference series (“Crisis of Capitalism, Crisis of Governance: Re-reading Karl Polanyi in the 21st Century”) and her 29 May 2013 lecture at the University of Helsinki (“Can society be commodities all the way down?”). The ideas in both lectures are also found in “Between Marketization and Social Protection: Resolving the Feminist Ambivalence”, collected in her *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, Verso Books: New York, 2011.

regulating, disembedded) market system as inherently unsustainable, that it will sooner or later destroy the very foundation on which it has grown, whether in nature or in society, and therefore generate society's resistance against it. He saw the foundation as three-fold: land, labor, and money, corresponding to nature, social reproduction, and finance, which for Fraser constitute the three domains in which neoliberal global capitalism has today created a crisis situation (the ecological crisis, the social reproduction crisis, and the financial crisis); and developed the concept of “fictitious commodity” to explain the destruction of this foundation. As the promoters of the free-market system or marketization (today, these are the neoliberals inspired by Milton Friedman) attempt to turn everything in the world into a commodity to be traded on the market, they commodify even those very presuppositions of commodification – the conditions of possibility which have rendered commodification possible in the first place: i.e. land, labor, and money, or nature with its resources from which to make commodities, human beings who provide the labor for commodification, and money which commodifies. This is “fictitious commodification”. The consequent destruction, due to excessive (or “fictitious”) commodification, of nature (the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of the biosphere), the human community (which reproduces labor through its network of human relationships), and the financial system (the financial crisis such as the Great Depression or the 2008 global financial crisis) then engenders an oppositional movement to protect nature, the human community, and the money system from market operations. For the purpose of seeing Fraser's relationship to my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History, we shall focus on the resistance movement to protect the human community. There has always been a battle raging on, under rampant capitalism (and even under today's neoliberalism), between the free-market promoters who want to come into the community and commodify everything which has hitherto belonged to the informally regulated *Lebenswelt* (labor, family relations, etc.) and therefore cause the disintegration of traditional communal life, and the social activists who want to protect their community with its customs and manners and communal life from destruction through commodification. A battle, that is, between marketization and social protection. Polanyi's point is that the history of Western civilization since nineteenth century is essentially characterized by this battle, this “Double Movement”, where neither side could completely triumph over the other side, but where the conflict eventually gave rise to fascism.

Fraser's distinctive contribution lies in discerning that this “Double Movement” is not the whole story and that, in order to comprehensively describe the battle that has been raging since modern time until today, one had better characterize it as a “Triple Movement”: the battle is a triangular one amongst marketization, social protection, and emancipation, rather than a dualistic one between marketization and social protection. Whereas Polanyi tends to idealize the battle for social protection as “good” – it's heroic to defend community life against the disintegrating effect of the capitalists' attempt to commodify it – and devalue marketization as “bad” – the greedy capitalists who want freedom from regulation in order to turn everything in the universe into marketable product – Fraser ingeniously discerns that social protection is not always good and marketization not always bad: the traditional community might be characterized by structure of domination (such as patriarchy) which it is desirable to allow the capitalists to destroy through their marketization process. Fraser has discerned that the activists fighting for emancipation (the third pole which Polanyi has failed to account for) have thus neither quite aligned with social protection – since the feminists, for instance, might want the commodification of women's labor (such as when women join the work force in the public sphere) in order to dismantle the hierarchical structure inherent in traditional community which has kept them

under their men's domination – nor with marketization – such as when the same feminists nevertheless demand that the government fix wages or offer safety nets or provide social services to prevent the same women who have joined the work force from complete exposure to the raw mechanism of the market (supply and demand). Fraser is indeed correct: our situation with social justice is really characterized by the battles between three parties whose interests partly overlap with one another: the promoters of the free-market (the neoliberals), the social protectionists (the paleoconservatives and the “Alt Right”), and the emancipation activists (the feminists, the “Antifa”, and so on).

In the process of coming to a better description of the social situation, Fraser thus acquires an (although still more or less vague) notion of the truth, that marketization (e.g. incorporating women and slaves as commodified, paid labor) has a kernel of emancipation within (especially when the process has dismantled the patterns of male domination and racist subjugation or exclusion that are inscribed within traditional communal life). The feminist need only be slightly pushed to become completely enlightened, that it is the power structure itself (in this case, free market capitalism and globalization rather than “patriarchy” per se) which has engendered feminism and liberated women and that, insofar as this power structure is destroying our environment and depleting our natural resources, feminism is an important instrument in this process of destruction and depletion – namely, the most important conclusion of the critique in my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History. Fraser comes very close to this realization when she deplores how “emancipation” has too often aligned with “marketization” while dismantling the domination structure inherent in the social tradition that is to be protected in the movement for social protection. Thus her complaint about “how feminism has become capitalism's handmaiden” and her persistent criticism of Cheryl Sandberg's idea of “Lean In” in her various lectures (“This kind of shallow feminism which consists in 'breaking through the glass ceiling' without addressing the issue of how to transform society into a more 'just' structure in all other aspects”). Breaking through the glass ceiling is essentially a complete coincidence between emancipation and marketization. My point is that, had Fraser's work on Karl Polanyi been further developed and its ultimate implication understood by her leftist colleagues, it could have become a corrective to the pernicious poison which the leftist ideology has injected into the social fabric of Western societies. And yet no leftists seem to have seriously pondered what Fraser's insight into Polanyi could mean.

Had Fraser done her work on Polanyi a decade earlier, I would certainly have incorporated her critique of women's liberation movement within my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History. I would certainly also have liked to incorporate the works of another heavy-weight feminist thinker, Judith Butler,³ insofar as a deconstruction of what seems to be the objective reality of femininity and masculinity might be relevant for an analysis of gender roles according to a historical materialist orientation – how femininity and masculinity are constructed, and transformed, to maximize the dominant mode of production and consumption current in a society and therefore contribute to the unsustainability of our civilization. This could blend neatly into my current work of implementing Chris Knight's dream of a new “sex strike” as New Feminism where women are encouraged to select as mates what Colin Wilson has termed the “Outsiders” in order to increase the proportion, within human population, of the imaginative, artistic, and philosophic against the conformists who want from life nothing more than consumption – thus dismantling the very human resources foundation of our consumerist culture in the long run. In addition, Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* itself would

3 E.g. her 1990 classic *Gender Trouble* and her 2004 collection of essays, *Undoing Gender*.

have been another important theoretical framework within which to develop the central themes of my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History. Consider how easily Polanyi's distinction between “embedded market” (the traditional economy, where the market is subject to regulation by forces outside itself, i.e. social norms and customs) and “disembedded market” (the contemporary neoliberal market free from all government regulations but operating entirely according to its own mechanism) could have been used to develop an analysis of how the further development of the free-market system in the United States since the 1980s has completely dismantled racism in the consciousness of ordinary Americans. This is a question I have never had the occasion to tackle within the incomplete thermodynamic interpretation. Back in the good old days of racism, when I walked into a white man-owned coffeehouse, the owner might refuse service to me because I was a “Chinaman”. This is “embedded market”: the market is subjected to norms and customs that are outside it but *in* the society itself (in this case, the social customs about segregation of races). Today, however, this can never happen in America – making my life easier – because the big capitalist has deemed such cruel practice antithetical to the principle of profit-accumulation – since my dollar is worth as much as a white man's – and therefore prohibited it. The big capitalist, in other words, has disembedded the market from society, so that the market is regulated entirely according to its internal mechanism which is color-blind (supply and demand). Such is marketization. Again, it's to Fraser's credit that she has discerned that the society which community activists want to protect from the disintegrating effects of marketization isn't always worth protecting,⁴ and that marketization can sometimes have emancipating effect. It's however her shortcoming that she should not have then discerned the awful conclusion following from this, namely that emancipation may be detrimental to our environment. On top of all this, it should also be seen that Polanyi's distinction between embedded and disembedded market blends neatly into Habermas' *Verdinglichungsthese* in that, when the market, after being disembedded from society, then attempts to commodify everything in society thus eroding away all non-market social customs and norms which society's members have hitherto held dear, this is precisely Habermas' thesis about the “colonization of the life-world”. This would have tremendous implication for my own version of the McDonaldization thesis which I have recently developed to complete my analysis of our unsustainable civilization.

The omissions in my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History certainly go beyond the names of Fraser, Butler, or Polanyi. I mention these here only in order to call to attention how strange it is that my theory should have become established as a classic instance of misogyny in the minds of so many people – granted that none of these people have ever quite really understood what I was writing about in any case. I have suffered the same problem which thinking women used to suffer in American society back in the 1970s: when a man says this, it's misogyny; but when a woman says the same thing, it's firmly within what Butler has called “the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs.” I shall proceed to quote the rest of Butler's explanation to justify the value of my “Feminist Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism” to American feminism: “There was and remains warrant for such a mode of criticism and to distinguish between self-criticism that promises a more democratic and inclusive life for the movement and criticism that seeks to undermine it altogether.”⁵

4 Again, the “community activists” are today represented in America especially by the “Alt Right”.

5 In the 1999 Preface to her *Gender Trouble*.

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⁶ The paragraph enclosed by red markings is edited on 12.02.2023 to avoid misunderstanding.