

After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism, London: Verso, 1991.

16. See Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, 'National Self-determination', *Journal of Philosophy*, 87; 9, Sept. 1990, pp. 441–61.
17. See *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*, an essay by Charles Taylor, with commentary by Amy Gutmann, editor, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer and Susan Wolf, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, reprinted with further essays by Anthony Appiah and Jürgen Habermas in 1994.
18. See the entry on 'Fraternité' by Mona Ozouf, in Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, Paris: Flammarion, 1988, pp. 731–40.
19. See Stephen L. Carter, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, New York, Basic Books, 1991, and Will Kymlicka, 'Liberalism and the Politicization of Ethnicity', *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 4, 2, July 1991, pp. 239–56. Kymlicka makes an interesting distinction between two kinds of cultural pluralism: one associated with multination states, the other with polyethnic immigrant societies. See his book, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
20. See Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991.
21. The idea of the egalitarian plateau is Ronald Dworkin's. See his 'What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare; Part 2: Equality of Resources', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10, 3–4, 1981, pp. 185–246, 283–345, 'What is Equality? Part 3: the Place of Liberty', *Iowa Law Review*, 73, 1, 1987, pp. 1–54, 'What is Equality? Part 4: Political Equality', *University of San Francisco Law Review*, 22, 1, 1988, pp. 1–30 and *A Matter of Principle*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1985. See also the discussion in Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

The Last Word on the Third Way

We all know that the idea of the 'Third Way' is that we have to find a safe passage between the Scylla of failed market liberalism and the Charibdis of failed socialism – though there is not agreement about whether that includes social democracy as such, and no one has asked where we are actually heading. Can anything more precise be said? One answer to the question is that the 'Third Way' is just a floating honorific term that labels anyone's favourite nostrum. Another is that it should be defined as whatever New Labour does. A third, more interesting, is that it is a name for unforeseen policy and institutional innovations that result from trying to avoid or rectify the typical corruptions of market liberalism and social democracy respectively.

When new ideas arise in political life, it is always a good idea to return to their classic exponents and commentators for clarification. So I propose that we return to Stuart White's text of 1998 'Interpreting the "Third Way": Not One Way but Many'¹ in which he offered us a first attempt at defining what we seem to have been talking about. The Third Way, he suggests, is a 'terrain on which competing philosophical positions – meritocratic and egalitarian, liberal and communitarian – can find room'. At the normative level, the inhabitants of this terrain are united in 'a dual commitment to the values of real opportunity and civic responsibility (and, derivatively, to the value of community understood by reference to these two values)'. At the level of policy, they tend to agree on a view of the state as guarantor but not necessarily provider of opportunity goods, in being receptive to forms of 'mutualism', in favouring new thinking

out public finance and in supporting employment-centred social policy and skill-centred employment policy and, generally, enhancing people's productive endowments.

I want here to develop White's idea that the 'Third Way' actually defines a space within which there are 'divisions which correspond to essentially very different projects'. The space in question is rhetorically defined. It proclaims that there are two hopelessly failed outlooks with their accompanying policies and one alternative route that all forward-thinking persons will see to be the only one possible.

Just because this space is rhetorically defined, I think it important to attend to the language of its advocates. I suspect that their vocabulary rhetorically conceals at least three basic conflicts that characterize our political life – and, moreover, that that is the very point of Third Way rhetoric.

The first such conflict is between those who are committed to taking equality seriously and those who are not – in other words, between left and right. The newly popular language of 'inclusion' is ideally suited for obscuring this division. Including the previously excluded means pulling them in (immigrants, those without work or homes) over some boundary line but it leaves entirely unaddressed the question of the justice or otherwise of the society within which they are to be included. We can agree on the importance of inclusion while leaving such issues unaddressed.

The second conflict is that between so-called communitarians and liberals. Is the state to encourage, regulate and perhaps enforce certain patterns of behaving and ways of living in the name of civic responsibilities and even duties of citizens? Should the state be promoting a particular ideal of the family, say, or, indeed of the nation – or should it leave such matters as far as possible up to individual choices, within the framework of the law? Here the language of 'citizenship' plays a conveniently obscure role. It leaves entirely open the question of what makes for a good citizen and the further question of where in this domain the limits of state intervention lie.

The third conflict is that between elitism and democracy, between those inclined to concentrate power in the hands of the specially qualified, whether politically or managerially or technically, and those who favour its wide dispersion into the hands of the governed, enabling them to participate maximally in public deliberation and decision-making and to call their governments to account. Here there is no single unifying and unifying vocabulary but rather an eclectic mixture of languages –

technocratic and populist, arcane and vernacular, centralizing and local. On questions of how political life is to be organized and conducted, Third Way rhetoric is entirely ambiguous between elite control and deliberative democracy.

I suggest that the very point of the rhetoric of the Third Way is to fudge such distinctions, thereby enabling the political leaders who foster it to pursue their project while enlarging their constituency among the ideologically inclined. So the Third Way can unite Anthony Giddens (for whom it signifies the renewal of social democracy)² with John Gray (for whom social democracy belonged within a historical niche that is gone beyond hope of memory);³ high-minded pieties about family values and British pride with talk of flexible self-invention in a postmodern world; and media manipulation and Leninist party control with constitutional decentralization and support for citizens' juries.

I have heard it suggested that the propagators of the Third Way have invoked it in order to keep academics busy. But this seems unlikely, because, if I am right, the basic point of the Third Way is to abstain from drawing distinctions. But making distinctions is just what academics typically spend their time doing. If we start to analyse and question this rhetoric and start to differentiate different third ways, aren't we in danger of destroying the very object of our analysis? So, if the Third Way has anything to recommend it, would it not be altogether better for academics and intellectuals generally to stop discussing it? Perhaps in this case, we should recall Wittgenstein's dictum at the end of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'What we cannot speak about, we must consign to silence.'⁴

Notes

1. To be found at www.netnexus.org/libram/papers/white2/htm. See also Stuart White, 'Interpreting the Third Way: Not one Road but Many', *Renewal*, 6 (1), 1998, pp. 17–30.
2. See Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, Cambridge: Polity, 1998 and *The Third Way and its Critics*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000.
3. John Gray, *After Social Democracy*, London: Demos, 1996.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 151.

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